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THE MINDS OF MEN UNDER VICIOUS HABITS:  
INTELLECTUAL VICE AND TESTIMONY REJECTION IN  
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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by  
Timothy David Brogdon Ingram  
May 2022

**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE MINDS OF MEN UNDER VICIOUS HABITS:  
INTELLECTUAL VICE AND TESTIMONY REJECTION IN  
THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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For the One who alone grants light to blinded eyes

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## PREFACE

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Tim Ingram

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“The artifice of Satan, in turning the minds of men from the truth, is by bringing them under the power of corrupt and vicious habits, which expel that frame of spirit which is indispensably necessary unto them that would learn it.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **Virtue, Vice, and Two Kinds of Knowledge**

Numerous characters in the Gospel of John experience Jesus directly or indirectly through their senses. Some respond with belief, but many do not. What explains the disconnect between “seeing” and “hearing” Jesus at the level of sense perception, but not at the level of saving spiritual knowledge?<sup>2</sup> In 1908, Ernest Findlay Scott provided an answer, writing that in the Fourth Gospel,

Knowledge . . . though in itself an intellectual activity, is only possible on certain ethical conditions. . . . The mind is enlightened to discern the true nature of revelation in Christ by a habit of moral obedience. It is recognized . . . that the chief hindrance which prevented the Jews from responding to the message of Jesus was an ethical one.<sup>3</sup>

Many readers have likewise noted the interplay between one’s moral stance and the cognitive activity of belief.<sup>4</sup> But precisely how do ethics and epistemology mix? How

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, “Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God,” in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, *The Work of the Spirit*, ed. William H. Goold, 118–234 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 184.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelis Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 148 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2002), 124–27.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Purpose and Theology*, *The Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 275–76.

<sup>4</sup> J. G. van der Watt, “The Gospel of John’s Perception of Ethical Behaviour,” *In die Skriflig* 45, nos. 2–3 (June 2011): 431–447; Cornelis Bennema, “Virtue Ethics and the Johannine Writings,” in *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John*, ed. Sherri Brown and Christopher W. Skinner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 261–281; Miroslav Volf, “Johannine Dualism and Contemporary Pluralism,” *Modern Theology* 21, no. 2 (2005): 195–96; Andrew T. Glicksman, “Beyond Sophia: The Sapiential Portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel and Its Ethical Implications for the

does sin become manifest in the cognitive behavior of Johannine characters?

In this thesis, I will demonstrate that the emerging discipline of vice epistemology provides a model for explaining both the layered and moral qualities of knowledge in John's Gospel. Therefore, epistemic vice can be a promising concept for understanding the moral mechanisms of unbelief. According to the Fourth Gospel, belief in Jesus requires the engagement of ordinary epistemic faculties, such as hearing, seeing, induction, and receiving and weighing testimony.<sup>5</sup> But the internal regulation of these faculties is inescapably moral. The observer's will guides how she uses and draws conclusions from these faculties.<sup>6</sup> Many who see and hear with seemingly functional cognitive faculties nevertheless fail to draw appropriate conclusions about Jesus because they misstep at the level of volition. Intellectual vices that inhibit belief include intellectual arrogance, prejudice, closed-mindedness.

Virtue and vice epistemology offers a model that explains this interplay between the two levels of sense perception and true understanding. Scholars in this field have identified two different orders of epistemic capacities: "lower-level" cognitive faculties (such as eyesight) and "higher-level" managerial character traits (such as intellectual humility) that guide these faculties. Failure at either level can prevent

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Johannine Community," in *Rethinking the Ethics of John: "Implicit Ethics" in the Johannine Writings*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt and Ruben Zimmerman, *Contexts and Norms of New Testament Ethics 3* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 83–101.

<sup>5</sup> Sunny Kuan-Hui Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 435* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 128–30; Deborah Forger, "Jesus as God's Word(s): Aurality, Epistemology and Embodiment in the Gospel of John," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 42, no. 3 (March 2020): 275, 277, 284; Marianne Mey Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 101–43.

<sup>6</sup> Cornelis Bennema, "Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God: A Study in Johannine Epistemology," in *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God*, ed. Mary Healy and Robin A. Parry (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2007), 119–20; James Gaffney, "Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel," *Theological Studies* 26, no. 2 (June 1965): 233–35; Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 120* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 380.

knowledge.<sup>7</sup> This dichotomy between distinct but related levels of epistemic capacity mirrors John's dualistic and character-dependent epistemology. Both John and modern virtue epistemology recognize that the mechanistic level of knowledge, such as hearing good testimony, is necessary but insufficient for coming to true belief. The observer's faulty character can sabotage the process.

As many scholars have observed, John answers the "why" of unbelief by blaming man's spiritual hardness that has no solution but a birth from above (12:37–43).<sup>8</sup> This study takes a step further to address the "how" of unbelief. In the face of adequate testimonial evidence of Jesus's identity as the divine Logos, the Christ sent by the Father to save and judge the world, what does a hardened heart do to people's minds to inhibit true and saving knowledge of Jesus?

This literary study will focus on John's use of characters to convey his theological message about contrasting responses to Jesus. Interpreters of John have recognized that the author composed his Gospel not only to lay Jesus before his readers and tell them *that* they should believe in him, but also to teach *how to* believe in him.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the Fourth Gospel is filled with warnings about the tragic sin barriers that prevent this from happening. Moreover, the epistemic faculty of testimony bears special importance because the Gospel itself is a meta-testimony written to transfer eyewitness testimony about Jesus to the reader.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, to ask character-probing questions about

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<sup>7</sup> Heather Battaly, "Introduction: Virtue and Vice," *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 1/2 (January 2010): 4; Robert Campbell Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 9–11; Christopher Lepock, "Unifying the Intellectual Virtues," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 83, no. 1 (July 2011): 106.

<sup>8</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 149; Bennema, "Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God," 112; Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony*, 86.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Seglenieks, "'In Order That You Might Believe': Reshaping Devotion to the Gods for John's Graeco-Roman Readers" (PhD diss., Australian College of Theology, 2019), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 166–69; Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony*, 51; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 367;

testimony acceptance or rejection in the narrative has the secondary effect of probing the reader's own heart response to Jesus, which approaches the very center of the author's purpose for writing.<sup>11</sup>

### **Overview of the Chapters**

Chapter 2 lays foundations for epistemology in the Fourth Gospel, briefly examining key concepts: the object of Johannine knowledge, the relationship between knowing and believing, the use of testimony, the moral aspects of knowledge, and John's literary use of characters. The survey of this landscape will generate an important question: what epistemological structure allows people to hear the same testimony of the same truth and arrive at such divergent doxastic results? Chapter 3 will build toward an answer using resources found in modern virtue and vice epistemology. Chapter 4, the heart of the thesis, takes the conceptual tools from chapter 3 and sets them to work in explaining three instances of vice-driven testimony rejection in John. There I will examine how vices inhibit the proper function of testimony reception. In a small number of cases, John highlights explicitly theological vices, which require analysis using resources outside the secular frame of reference that characterizes modern academic virtue epistemology—namely, the biblical canon and Christian history. Finally, in chapter 5, I will conclude by discussing takeaway observations about Johannine knowledge and character that arise from the investigation of the key passages.

### **Relationship with Existing Research**

There are three notable ways that this thesis complements existing studies in Johannine epistemology and ethics. First is exploring the intersection between virtue and

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Jörg Frey, *Theology and History in the Fourth Gospel* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 201; Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*, Biblical Interpretation Series 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 215–16; Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 116.

<sup>11</sup> Cornelis Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 94–95.

cognition. In two recent journal articles, Cornelis Bennema has demonstrated that John manifests a virtue ethic entailing both moral and intellectual components.<sup>12</sup> Consistent with Aristotelean categories, his treatment addresses intellectual virtues as qualities that enable one to effectively attain truth. This criterion leads him to identify intellectual virtues that are not necessarily moral qualities, but faculties which in modern virtue-epistemic terms are called reliabilist virtues: perception/insight, knowledge/understanding, remembrance, and belief/faith.<sup>13</sup> The last of these is the most important, as believing is the “meta-virtue” that encapsulates all the rest.<sup>14</sup> Believing is central because it leads to eternal life, John’s telic equivalent to Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*, or the flourishing life produced by virtue (20:31).<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, belief is ethically freighted as “the proper moral response that people should render to God.”<sup>16</sup>

My thesis differs from Bennema’s articles, first by focusing on vice rather than virtue, and second, by taking a responsibilist approach to intellectual virtue, examining the epistemic qualities that are inherently moral (see chapter 3 for more on the reliabilist/responsibilist distinction in virtue epistemology). That is, while Bennema recognizes that believing is a morally significant epistemic activity, my thesis delves into the moral-epistemic ingredients that make up belief and unbelief.

The second interface with existing literature is the focus on the ethics of Jesus’s opponents. Within the little-discussed field of Johannine ethics, negative ethics

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<sup>12</sup> Bennema, “Virtue Ethics”; Cornelis Bennema, “Moral Transformation in the Johannine Writings,” *In die Skriflig* 51, no. 3 (July 2017): 1–7.

<sup>13</sup> Bennema, “Virtue Ethics,” 272–75. Even though the intellectual virtues he identifies are facultative rather than moral qualities, he nevertheless recognizes a vital and circular link between moral and intellectual virtue in John.

<sup>14</sup> Bennema, “Virtue Ethics,” 266.

<sup>15</sup> Bennema, “Virtue Ethics,” 264–65; Bennema, “Moral Transformation in the Johannine Writings,” 2.

<sup>16</sup> Bennema, “Virtue Ethics,” 266; Bennema, “Moral Transformation in the Johannine Writings,” 2.

have received even less attention than positive. A welcome exception is Jan G. van der Watt's 2011 essay, "Ethics of/and the Opponents of Jesus in John's Gospel," which focuses on both the behaviors and motivations of Jesus's opponents. Though vice is not his framework and many of his cited motivations do not qualify as stable character traits, van der Watt does identify several vices such as desire for power, bias, intellectual laziness, aggressive attitude, seeking their own honor, and failure to love God.<sup>17</sup> My thesis differs from van der Watt first by focusing on epistemology and the faculty of testimony, and second by delving deeper into the workings of vice using the lens of vice epistemology.

Finally, this thesis is not the first to identify both virtue and testimony as crucial aspects of Johannine knowledge. In his 2011 thesis, "The Knowledge of God: John's Gospel and Contemporary Epistemology," Murray Hogg presents a three-stranded epistemically "holistic" case that Johannine faith qualifies as justified true belief. Among the strands—virtue epistemology, testimony, and the Spirit—the present study's purview intersects with the first two.<sup>18</sup> While in substantial agreement with Hogg's presentation of virtue and testimony, my interest is to examine the respective roles of testimony and intellectual character faculties as they overlay on John's two layers of knowledge. Whereas Hogg treats the static issue of justification, I treat the dynamic issue of how vice prevents movement from hearing to believing.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus is both crucial to understand and easily misunderstood. Because he is a man and yet much more than a man (1:14), the epistemology of Jesus is not simple. Understanding the role of character and the layered nature of saving belief is both

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<sup>17</sup> Van der Watt, "The Gospel of John's Perception of Ethical Behaviour," 180–86.

<sup>18</sup> Murray Hogg, "The Knowledge of God: John's Gospel and Contemporary Epistemology" (ThM thesis, Melbourne School of Theology, 2011).

consistent with the Fourth Gospel's purpose and practically useful for readers.

CHAPTER 2  
EPISTEMOLOGY, TESTIMONY, AND CHARACTER  
IN JOHN’S GOSPEL

This thesis rests on several assumptions about the epistemology and literary architecture of John’s Gospel. In chapter 4, I will examine factors inhibiting knowledge. Prerequisite to this inquiry is a baseline understanding of John’s conceptual model of knowledge and its mechanisms. The present chapter establishes these assumptions while raising key questions about levels of knowledge that chapter 3 will answer.

Here I will show that testimony is a central epistemic channel intended by the author to yield knowing faith in Jesus Christ, and that responding to testimony with unbelief constitutes moral failure. Moreover, I will demonstrate that John uses characters as positive and negative examples who illustrate this theology in action, confronting readers with the key question of how they will respond to John’s own testimony of Jesus encapsulated in this Gospel account. This chapter begins with the basics of Johannine knowledge—its object and nature—before moving into specifics about testimony and the moral dimension of knowing. It closes with a consideration of John’s narrative use of characters as a basis for analysis of epistemic vices.

**The Object of Knowledge: Jesus as Christ**

Jesus Christ is the primary object of knowledge in John’s Gospel.<sup>1</sup> The stated purpose of the book is that the reader “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015), 438.



God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31).<sup>2</sup> Belief is the goal of the book, and Jesus’s identity *as the Christ and the Son of God* is the specific object of that belief (cf. 1:34).<sup>3</sup> Belief in Jesus’s identity entails belief in his origin as sent by the Father (11:42; 16:27, 30; 17:8, 21),<sup>4</sup> which implies his eternal pre-existence as the divine Logos (1:1–3, 14).<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Jesus’s identity implies not only his origin, but also his mission and destination.<sup>6</sup> John links all three together in his description of Jesus’s self-knowledge in 13:3.

### **The Relationship between Knowing and Believing**

The previous section made an implicit equivalency between two terms that should not be taken for granted: belief and knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Both are prominent concepts in

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

<sup>3</sup> Especially in view of Jesus’s identity as the revealer of the Father (1:18; 14:9), this christological belief has a theological corollary: to believe in God aright is to believe in him as revealed in his Son. See Jörg Frey, *Theology and History in the Fourth Gospel* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 198.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, “John 3: A Debate over Johannine Epistemology and Christology,” *Novum Testamentum* 23, no. 2 (April 1981): 116–17; James Gaffney, “Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel,” *Theological Studies* 26, no. 2 (June 1965): 226–30; J. G. van der Watt, “The Gospel of John’s Perception of Ethical Behaviour,” *In die Skriflig* 45, nos. 2–3 (June 2011): 136; James Montgomery Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 42; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 84; Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 120 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 366; Cornelis Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 148 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 2002), 126, 130.

<sup>5</sup> Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 472. Martha’s confession of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world” (11:27) anticipates John’s purpose statement but adds the “coming into the world” dynamic taught in the Prologue. Even further confirmation of the importance of Jesus’s origin appears in several places where Jesus’s opponents or skeptics entertain that very question (3:2; 7:27–29; 9:29–30). All seem to agree that where Jesus comes from is a relevant issue, even those who fail to arrive at the right conclusion.

<sup>6</sup> Neyrey, “John 3,” 116–17; Gaffney, “Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel,” 226–30; Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 438; Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 46; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 84; Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ*, 366.

<sup>7</sup> Though John limits usage of these terms to the verbal forms (“believe” and “know”) rather than the nominal (“belief” and “knowledge”), I will use the nominal form where it best serves clarity. However, the point stands that the action is more important than belief and knowledge as abstract entities. See Gaffney, “Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel,” 217–19; Cornelis Bennema, “Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God: A Study in Johannine Epistemology,” in *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God*, ed. Mary Healy and Robin A. Parry (Milton Keynes, UK:

John, and they appear nearly synonymous. A brief inductive approach further elucidates their precise relationship.

James Gaffney has made some intriguing observations about the usage of the two terms in John. For instance, Jesus is said to know, but never to believe (e.g., 7:29; 8:14). His disciples may believe (2:11) or not believe (6:64), and may know (6:69) or not know (4:32). Finally, his opponents are, at various times, said to believe (12:32), not believe (10:25), and not know (9:29).<sup>8</sup> This usage pattern suggests that knowledge and belief are related but not synonymous. Jesus's opponents and fair-weather followers demonstrate that "believe" can refer to something short of adequate, true, saving belief. "Know" coincides only with the latter, which is why the opponents may "believe" without "knowing" (2:23–25; 8:30–47; 12:42–43).<sup>9</sup>

But, as Cornelis Bennema has observed, the belief-knowledge dependence runs both ways. There is no believing, say, a testimony about Jesus, without first knowing the proposition being testified: "Believing involves some knowing."<sup>10</sup> He concludes that they are so closely tied and mutually reinforcing that they essentially constitute one epistemic concept of "knowing belief."<sup>11</sup>

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Paternoster, 2007), 209n6; Christopher Seglenieks, "In Order That You Might Believe': Reshaping Devotion to the Gods for John's Graeco-Roman Readers" (PhD diss., Australian College of Theology, 2019), 26n63. Seglenieks has pointed out that the typical narrow focus on belief as the ideal response to Jesus ignores a wide swath of related terms in John, including *ἀκολουθέω*, *ἔρχομαι*, *μένω*, *λαμβάνω*, *οἶδα*, *γινώσκω*, *προσκυνέω*, *ἀγαπάω*, *φιλέω*, and *τηρέω* (25). With respect to these complementary aspects that fill in color and dimensionality, strong statements such as 17:3 and 20:31 nevertheless indicate that believing/knowing are the primary components of the intended response.

<sup>8</sup> Gaffney, "Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel," 224–26.

<sup>9</sup> Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 181–82; Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 292.

<sup>10</sup> Bennema, "Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God," 122. Note the propositional nature of the Gospel's key confessions of Jesus's identity, such as 1:34; 4:42; 11:27; 20:28, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Bennema, "Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God," 130; see also Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom*, 132–33, where he claims that knowledge initiates the circular pattern because believing requires some knowledge content; and Hans Urs von Balthasar, who notes on the basis of their parallel usage in 6:69 that knowledge "never leaves faith behind" (*The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, vol. 1 [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983], 134–35).

Notwithstanding this circularity, knowledge is ultimate.<sup>12</sup> This is why Jesus is said to know but not to believe. The true epistemic goal is knowing (which equates to eternal life in 17:3), but believing is the necessary avenue for attaining this knowledge—hence the place of belief in the Gospel’s purpose (20:31). This relationship becomes clear in view of how both concepts relate to eternal life. John ties eternal life to knowing in 17:3 and to believing in 20:31, but the relationship is not symmetrical. In 20:31, πιστεύοντες is the means to the result of “life in his name.”<sup>13</sup> By contrast, in 17:3, the relationship between knowing God and eternal life is not one of means and end, but of equation between the two.<sup>14</sup> That is, knowing God does not lead to eternal life as believing does; it constitutes eternal life. Therefore, knowing is more ultimate in John than believing, which explains why Jesus knows but does not believe.<sup>15</sup>

In his own synthesis, Gaffney argues that knowing resides in the domain of

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<sup>12</sup> Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ*, 372–73; Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Purpose and Theology*, *The Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 277.

<sup>13</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Revised Edition, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 388.

<sup>14</sup> Both verses use ἵνα with a subjunctive verb, either γινώσκω (17:3) or πιστεύω (20:31). However, the former is an appositional ἵνα as evidenced by the demonstrative pronoun αὐτή. The ἵνα clause (ἵνα γινώσκωσιν σέ) supplies the antecedent of the pronoun and thus defines eternal life. This appositional use is “almost idiomatic of Johannine literature.” See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 475. By contrast, 20:31 features the much more common purpose ἵνα clause (472). Thus, one believes in order to have life (20:31), but having life is knowing God (17:3).

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Bultmann claims that γινώσκω and πιστεύω are essentially synonymous in John. Although faith usually precedes knowledge, the synonymous parallel (17:8) and the case of knowledge preceding faith (16:30; cf. 1 John 4:16) prove that “πιστ. and γιν. cannot be distinguished simply as beginning and end stages” See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 435; see also C. K. Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 306–7; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 303. Bultmann’s last statement is true insofar as knowledge “never leaves faith behind” (Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 134–35). However, his citations do not carry the weight that he wants them to. The parallel use of γινώσκω and πιστεύω in 17:8 proves nothing more than that the two belong together. As for 16:30, the knowledge that precedes the disciples’s faith is propositional, not personal: “Now we know *that* you know all things.” This makes the verse a good illustration of Bennema’s point above, that faith is built on knowledge content. Such propositional knowledge is certainly relevant to eternal life, but the knowledge that *is* eternal life (17:3) is personal rather than propositional.

intellect, whereas believing is volitional.<sup>16</sup> While this scheme is right to acknowledge the complementary roles of the mind and the will, its clean subdivision is artificial. James Boice comes closer to the mark when he posits that “spiritual perception . . . exceeds the normal and even the rational faculties of man. . . . Saving knowledge is a knowledge of faith.”<sup>17</sup>

### Dualistic Knowledge

The will’s participation in knowledge merits further examination. A proper understanding of the role of volition depends on how the Gospel’s implicit metaphysic maps onto epistemology.

### Climbing Jacob’s Ladder

Knowledge is two-tiered in John. The lower level represents ordinary intellectual faculties and the material realm, and the upper level represents true spiritual understanding. On the one hand, the two levels sometimes appear flattened by John’s figurative use of facultative language to represent higher-level knowledge. Jesus “sees” heavenly realities (3:11, 32) as his disciples “see” the Father in him (14:7; cf. 1:34; 12:44–46). As listeners hear his physical words, their response depends on whether they “hear” the devil or God (8:38, 47; cf. 6:45; 9:27).<sup>18</sup>

What allows this metaphorical double-usage is that faculties and belief stand in a dualistic or tiered relationship. Specifically, sense perception is a necessary channel toward genuine believing/knowing, which is another sort of perception standing on a

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<sup>16</sup> Gaffney, “Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel,” 239–40.

<sup>17</sup> Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 98.

<sup>18</sup> Gaffney, “Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel,” 219–21; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 406; Deborah Forger, “Jesus as God’s Word(s): Aurality, Epistemology and Embodiment in the Gospel of John,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 42, no. 3 (March 2020): 289; Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 138; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 244; Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ*, 370; Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom*, 124–25; Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 104.

higher spiritual plane. As Cornelis Bennema has written, “Sensory perception of Jesus and his teaching should be followed by cognitive perception of the spiritual significance of what has been observed at a sensory level, and result in an adequate belief-response in order to give life.”<sup>19</sup> In his flesh, Jesus mediates the invisible Father to people in a sense-perceptible way. By his incarnation, his activity, and his words, he makes spiritual reality tangible to the eyes and ears of his observers. This is how he “exegetes” the Father (1:18; cf. 14:9).<sup>20</sup>

However, the recognition of Jesus’s divine identity as the Father-sent Logos is not automatic to all who see and hear in the material sphere. Jesus’s observers display varying degrees of spiritual perception into his true nature.<sup>21</sup> For instance, his signs can yield belief in his disciples and the official whose son was ill (2:211; 4:53), but unbelief in “the Jews” (5:10–18).<sup>22</sup> Jesus tells the misguided crowd, “you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves” (6:26). Granted, in one sense they did “see” a sign: they ate the bread Jesus had miraculously multiplied. Jesus means that the superficial observation of the objective miraculous event has not penetrated to a kind of “seeing” that would constitute true knowledge.<sup>23</sup> They do not see

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<sup>19</sup> Bennema, “Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God,” 119; see also Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom*, 124–27; Sunny Kuan-Hui Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 435 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 188–89; Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 145–51; Neyrey, “John 3,” 119–20; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 199–200; Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ*, 367–74. The cases of “come and see” in 1:39, 46 play on the overlap between the literal and metaphorical uses of sight. Jesus and Philip are essentially saying, “Come and see with your eyes (a synecdoche for seeing and hearing), and this will lead to true, spiritual sight.”

<sup>20</sup> Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony*, 128–30; Forger, “Jesus as God’s Word(s),” 275, 277, 284; Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 101–43.

<sup>21</sup> Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony*, 149.

<sup>22</sup> Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony*, 167.

<sup>23</sup> Larsen refers to these two levels as “somatic” and “cognitive” seeing, respectively (*Recognizing the Stranger*, 160).

the *meaning* of the sign, its *import* relative to Jesus's identity.<sup>24</sup> As Boice puts it, "Faith represents a step beyond mere sight."<sup>25</sup>

This layered epistemology exists within a broader dualistic theme in John. Regarding the numerous contrasting pair motifs that appear—such as light/dark , above/below, and truth/lie—scholarly opinion varies on the origins and exact use of dualism in John, including whether "dualism" is even an appropriate label.<sup>26</sup> At any rate, these contrasts convey a dichotomy between planes of reality that have a bearing on knowledge. This dichotomy has cosmological, ethical, and eschatological implications for knowledge.

In the cosmological dimension, Jesus comes to the below world from above to give "from above" knowledge that is accessed through a "from above" birth.<sup>27</sup> As the enfleshed Logos, he has a foot in both planes of reality and thus bridges between heaven and earth like Jacob's ladder (1:51).<sup>28</sup> Ethically, Jesus comes as light into the world's darkness, giving it a passing opportunity to receive his light (12:35).<sup>29</sup> Eschatologically, John presents what Bultmann has called a "dualism of decision": Jesus comes to the

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<sup>24</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 189.

<sup>25</sup> Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 148.

<sup>26</sup> C. K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 98–115; Jörg Frey, "Dualism and the World in the Gospel and Letters of John," in *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, ed. Judith M. Lieu and Martinus C. de Boer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 274–91; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 223–36; John Painter, "Johannine Symbols: A Case Study in Epistemology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 27 (June 1979): 26–41; Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 278–79; Volf, "Johannine Dualism," 189–93; Richard Bauckham, "Dualism and Soteriology in Johannine Theology," in *Beyond Bultmann: Reckoning a New Testament Theology*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker and Mikeal C. Parsons (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 133–53.

<sup>27</sup> Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 223–25; Neyrey, "John 3," 123; Cornelis Bennema, "Moral Transformation in the Johannine Writings," *In die Skriflig* 51, no. 3 (July 2017): 3–4. For the language of "dimensions" in Johannine dualism, see Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 225

<sup>28</sup> Barrett, *Essays on John*, 109–110; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 169; Edward W. Klink, "Light of the World: Cosmology and the Johannine Literature," in *Cosmology and New Testament Theology*, ed. J. T. Pennington and S. M. McDonough, Library of New Testament Studies 355 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 76–77.

<sup>29</sup> Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 224; Barrett, *Essays on John*, 106; Gaffney, "Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel," 226.

world bringing judgment and a way, through faith, to pass from death to life.<sup>30</sup> True knowing constitutes a single shift in all three dimensions, leading one to have heavenly knowledge of God, to be in the light, and to have eternal life (5:24).<sup>31</sup>

The virtue-epistemological focus of this thesis rests on the distinction between moral and amoral dualistic pairs. Whereas light/dark contains one side that is bad and one that is good, flesh/spirit (3:6; 6:63; 8:15) and above/below (3:3, 7, 31; 8:23; 19:11) are not likewise ethically polarized.<sup>32</sup> The flesh is characterized not by evil, but by insufficiency to understand (1:13; 3:6; 6:63). While the flesh alone is unable to attain knowledge and salvation, it is still a necessary vehicle for the revelation of the Logos's immaterial and invisible glory. Indeed, it is only by virtue of the Logos's assumption of flesh that glory even begins to be epistemically accessible: "the Word became flesh . . . and we have seen his glory" (1:14).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 15–21; Painter, "Johannine Symbols," 34; Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ*, 371; Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 229–32.

<sup>31</sup> These three dimensions appear in Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 70. Scholars have proposed differing taxonomies of Johannine dualisms. Richard Bauckham takes John Gammie's ten types of dualism in apocalyptic literature and distills them into four major families in John: creator/creation, good/evil, provisional good/eschatological good, and other miscellaneous dualities. See Bauckham, "Dualism and Soteriology in Johannine Theology," 142–50. Ladd identifies four dimensions: above/below, light/darkness, flesh/spirit, and old age/new age. If flesh/spirit can be reduced to a corollary of above/below (see below), then Ladd's taxonomy matches the three dimensions identified here. See Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 223–25.

<sup>32</sup> According to Klink, "In many ways the flesh/spirit bipolarity corresponds to the orientational dualism of 'from above/from below.'" (Klink, "Light of the World: Cosmology and the Johannine Literature," 79); see also Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 224–26; Bauckham, "Dualism and Soteriology in Johannine Theology," 150; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 200. Contra Keener, who conflates heavenly/worldly (equivalent to fleshly) with light/dark epistemic dualisms in John (Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 182–85); Bultmann, who charges that the aspects of dualism are "synonymous" (*Theology of the New Testament* 2:19); and Hogg's claim that they are "interchangeable" (Murray Hogg, "The Knowledge of God: John's Gospel and Contemporary Epistemology" [ThM thesis, Melbourne School of Theology, 2011], 88–89, but see 27). These dualistic dimensions are coincident but not identical. For instance, the world is simultaneously below and resides in darkness and death. However, these three are not identical propositions. Jesus comes to the below realm from the above in his incarnation, but he does so as light. In the words of George Eldon Ladd, "What makes the *kosmos* evil is not something intrinsic to it, but the fact that it has turned away from its creator and become enslaved to evil powers" (*Theology of the New Testament*, 226).

<sup>33</sup> Forger, "Jesus as God's Word(s)," 275–76; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 200–201. Nevertheless, "according to the flesh" epistemology becomes morally vicious when Jesus's opponents pass judgment against him on its faulty basis (8:15). See Howard Clark Kee, "Knowing the Truth:

## Symbols as Epistemic Mediators

John frequently uses signs as symbols to mediate knowledge along these dualistic axes.<sup>34</sup> Symbols are events or objects in the material (below) plane that imply things about reality in the spiritual (above) plane, albeit with some ambiguity.<sup>35</sup> For instance, John unfolds the aftermath of the blind man's healing in 9:1–7 in a way that demonstrates the nature of spiritual blindness and sight (9:39–41). It is the ambiguity of sign–symbols that makes them effective mediators from the lower to the higher planes of knowledge, but in a way that filters out certain people from reaching true knowledge. Like a Rorschach test, a Johannine sign tests the viewer and reveals as much about him as it does about the spiritual reality it signifies.<sup>36</sup> In the case of that healing, the ensuing interaction between the blind man and the Pharisees in 9:13–34 confirms him in faith and them in unbelief. By the end of their encounter, the separation between their epistemic states is stark: the man confesses Jesus as God-sent, and the Pharisees condemn him of sin and cast him out of the temple.<sup>37</sup>

The frequent failure of observers to make this “leap” to the higher plane raises the question of how such a transfer must happen. Viewed from one angle, the Spirit who

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Epistemology and Community in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen*, ed. David E. Aune, Torrey Seland, and Jarl H. Ulrichsen, Supplements to *Novum Testamentum* 106 (Boston: Brill, 2002), 264.

<sup>34</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 4; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 201.

<sup>35</sup> Painter, “Johannine Symbols,” 33–36; Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 89–90; Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 157–58; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 182–83; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 4. In his exposition of the early church's Platonic-Christian synthesis, Hans Boersma distinguishes between symbol, which merely transfers meaning from the reality to the sign, and sacrament, in which the sign ontologically participates in the reality (*Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 21–26). Many interpreters have attributed sacramentalism to the Fourth Gospel (Painter, “Johannine Symbols”; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 197; Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 136–37), and it is possible that Johannine signs are more sacramental than symbolic in Boersma's scheme. However, since firm conclusions about ontological participation are beyond the scope of the present study, I use the more modest term “symbol.”

<sup>36</sup> This filtration sometimes occurs by the mechanism of misunderstanding (e.g., 8:31–39, 51–53, 56–58). See Painter, “Johannine Symbols”; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 199–201; Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 142–44.

<sup>37</sup> Painter, “Johannine Symbols,” 39.



brings birth-from-above is the decisive factor (3:1–13; 6:63b; 15:26–27; 16:13).<sup>38</sup> But in a mysterious concurrence with his work, the human capacity of the will regulates the transfer from lower-level to spiritual sense.<sup>39</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that the above/below dualism is not in itself ethically charged, an observer's moral and volitional stance does affect her ability to traffic between these planes of knowledge. In 12:37–43, John lays the blame on hardened hearts with his citation of Isaiah 6:10. Accordingly, the matter is largely volitional: one must not only see and hear Jesus, but *want* to spiritually “see” him as he is and live with the personal implications of his identity.<sup>40</sup>

### Testimony

The previous section demonstrated that an observer's moral and volitional function affects his or her knowledge of Jesus. How, then, how does this work in the case of testimony, a key epistemic pathway in John?

### The Role of Testimony

If believing Jesus's identity is of primary importance in John, then so are the means of coming to believe. Perhaps no epistemic channel is as prominent in John as testimony.<sup>41</sup> Not only does a great deal of testimony occur, but the book itself is a meta-testimony that passes along the original testimony of Jesus's eyewitnesses on to the

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<sup>38</sup> Gaffney, “Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel,” 235; Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 149; Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom*, 168–81; Bennema, “Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God,” 116–119; Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ*, 365–66. The spiritual aspect entails both the positive role of the Spirit and the negative role of the devil, as in 8:41–47.

<sup>39</sup> Bennema, “Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God,” 119–20; Gaffney, “Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel,” 233–35; see also Hamid-Khani, who speaks of an implicit willingness to pay the cost entailed in true faith (5:17–18) (*Revelation and Concealment of Christ*, 380).

<sup>40</sup> Bennema, “Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God,” 119–20.

<sup>41</sup> Gaffney, “Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel,” 235–36; Hogg, “The Knowledge of God,” 93.

readers of subsequent generations.<sup>42</sup> For instance, John the Baptist’s testimony is embedded in the Gospel narrative to stand as a permanent witness for the belief of later readers: “He came . . . to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him” (1:7).<sup>43</sup> The central function of testimony proceeds on the premise that certain people qualify to serve as trustworthy witnesses. This qualification depends on having firsthand privileged information about Jesus.<sup>44</sup> Witnesses in the Gospel include John the Baptist, the Beloved Disciple, the other disciples, Jesus, his works, the Scriptures, God the Father, the Samaritan woman, the crowd that watches Jesus raise Lazarus, and the Paraclete.<sup>45</sup>

### **Testimonial Trust**

In some situations, the ability to trust another’s testimony requires almost no knowledge of that individual. One will trust a fellow shopper’s answer to the question, “Is this the line to check out?” without a thought. But other situations require more personal relationship and even affection. Few would ask the same fellow shopper, “Should I change careers?” Callahan and O’Connor have suggested the terms “thin” and “thick” to describe these two sorts of trust, respectively.<sup>46</sup>

In John, testimonial trust begins thin. The narrative does not present John the Baptist, the Samaritan woman, or any other witness as qualified by his or her sterling

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<sup>42</sup> Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*, Biblical Interpretation Series 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 116. See also Jesus’s reference back to John’s enduring testimony in 5:32–35.

<sup>43</sup> Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 87.

<sup>44</sup> Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony*, 140–42; Neyrey, “John 3,” 118; Christopher W. Skinner, “Misunderstanding, Christology, and Johannine Characterization: Reading John’s Characters Through the Lens of the Prologue,” in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 115.

<sup>45</sup> Gaffney, “Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel,” 230–36; Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 387; Neyrey, “John 3,” 118; Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 26–27; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 163–64; Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John*, 106.

<sup>46</sup> Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O’Connor, “Well-Tuned Trust as an Intellectual Virtue,” in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O’Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 248–49, 254–55. Chapter 3 further discusses testimonial trust.

character. Even Jesus, whose character qualifies him imminently for trust, appeals to his first disciples with an unassuming “Come and you will see” (1:39). The witness in the Fourth Gospel is qualified simply because he was there. Richard Bauckham has shown that ancient audiences conferred trust on eyewitness reporting by involved participants, by virtue of the participants having taken part of the action. It is not the character of the testifier, but the objectivity testimony that should prove the point.<sup>47</sup>

The observer, once led to Jesus by way of testimony, should encounter him decisively in a way that transfers trust from the original testifier to him (1:40–42, 45–51; 4:39–42) and then latch onto him with a trust that thickens as he comes to know Jesus more deeply.<sup>48</sup> Thin trust can be modified and even nullified in the light of new evidence. But as positive evidence mounts, the trust evolves into a thick “proper trust” that is not under continual negotiation.<sup>49</sup>

Peter models this trust in 6:68–69, after Jesus has just driven away fair-weather crowds with his offensive teaching. Asked by Jesus whether they, too, will go, Peter answers for the Twelve: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” Peter has detected in Jesus the fullness of grace and truth that identifies him as the Holy One (1:14). Therefore, no matter how problematic and difficult Jesus’s sayings may be, withholding trust from him is not an option. Peter and the Twelve know who Jesus is, so they commit their personal loyalty to him.<sup>50</sup> John includes Peter’s statement as an exemplary pattern of committed, relationally thick trust in the person of Jesus, a trust that

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<sup>47</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 384–85; Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony*, 140–47; Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 123–24.

<sup>48</sup> Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 159–60.

<sup>49</sup> Callahan and O’Connor, “Well-Tuned Trust as an Intellectual Virtue,” 255.

<sup>50</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend, Eerdmans Classic Biblical Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 249; Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 213, 485.

precedes one's ability to accept and integrate each piece of information for its own sake. Indeed, this holistic trust is a prerequisite to truly understanding and accepting the pieces (8:43, 47).

In John, testimony functions with an epistemically derivative power. It is indispensable but not ultimate. It leads the hearer by the hand to take in Jesus's own words which reveal him directly as the terminus of faith (1:46; 4:39–42).<sup>51</sup> Observers use their senses to see and hear things in Jesus worth reporting to others, whether that seeing has transcended to spiritual understanding robust enough to confess his identity (e.g., Andrew in 1:41 and Philip in 1:45), or the witness is still fitting together the pieces (e.g., the Samaritan woman in 4:28–29).<sup>52</sup> The hearer of testimony must judge whether to receive it.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Normativity of Testimonial Knowledge**

Testimony is not merely a possible way of engendering faith in Jesus. Going further, John presents it as normative and sufficient. This point finds special relevance in the Gospel's composition as an eyewitness testimony that claims sufficient warrant to bring its reader to believe in Jesus. Bauckham argues that the Gospel's purpose statement (20:31) is the first bookend of an epilogue that spans 20:29–21:25 and commends the whole Gospel to the reader's trust as the Beloved Disciple's eyewitness testimony of Jesus. Accordingly, Jesus's blessing for those who see without believing (20:29) serves as the author's implicit assurance that the reader's faith engendered by this book will be as sound as that of the eyewitnesses themselves.<sup>54</sup> Both witnesses who bookend the Gospel,

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<sup>51</sup> Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 71–77; Forger, "Jesus as God's Word(s)," 283–88.

<sup>52</sup> Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 141; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 354–55.

<sup>54</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 365–67.

John the Baptist (1:7) and the Beloved Disciple (21:22–23), will live on as enduring witnesses through the vehicle of this Gospel until Jesus returns.<sup>55</sup> In John, testimony is a proper cognitive pathway to faith, as reliable as sense perception (1:7; 3:11–12).<sup>56</sup>

One who hears qualified testimony has sufficient evidence to approach Jesus with an initial faith that deepens with personal exposure to his words. This sufficiency forms the basis for the narrative’s implicit moral judgment on the failure to believe in Jesus via testimony. If testimony were a toss-up when it comes to epistemic warrant, the decision to reject it would not incur blame. But in fact, the trustworthiness of John’s witnesses makes it morally and epistemically deficient to hold out in unbelief.<sup>57</sup> The next section will further explore this dimension of moral judgment against unbelief.

### **Characters as Moral Examples**

One of the major plotlines in the Fourth Gospel is the epistemic experience of characters who, upon seeing and hearing Jesus, must grapple with the implications.<sup>58</sup> In his seminal treatment of Johannine characterization in *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, R. A. Culpepper argues that John uses characters and their encounters with Jesus as representative symbols of the reader’s variety of possible experiences: “The characters represent a continuum of responses to Jesus which exemplify misunderstandings the reader may share and responses one might make to the depiction of Jesus in the gospel.”<sup>59</sup> The disciples represent those who respond positively to Jesus,<sup>60</sup> the Pharisees and rulers

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<sup>55</sup> Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 392; Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 87.

<sup>56</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 242; Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 377.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, *Biblical Knowing*, 119; Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 432; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 244; Hogg, “The Knowledge of God,” 21–22.

<sup>58</sup> Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 40–42.

<sup>59</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 104; see also Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 214–16; Seglenieks, ““In Order That You Might Believe,”” 16.

<sup>60</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 115.

represent Judaism,<sup>61</sup> and so on. Culpepper's view reflects a latent tension between simplicity and complexity. On the one hand, the possible responses are diverse in a narrative and experiential way. On the other hand, the Gospel's dualistic lens reduces these responses to "two clear-cut alternatives": belief or unbelief.<sup>62</sup>

James Resseguie has made a modified proposal, since the fabric of a narrative such as John's Gospel carries an ideological point of view consisting of its "beliefs, norms, evaluations, and value system."<sup>63</sup> The narrator presents characters for evaluation according to the narrative world's native ethical orientation. In the case of John, the Prologue's revelation of Jesus as the Word become flesh (1:14) provides this evaluative standard, testing whether characters can see beyond the flesh to recognize glory.<sup>64</sup> The characters, then, represent not so much specific groups of people, as different points of view that contrast with the narrator's ideal point of view about Jesus.<sup>65</sup> Christopher Skinner agrees, arguing that Johannine characterization revolves around characters's misunderstanding of the information about Jesus that the author has already revealed to readers in the Gospel's Prologue. The Prologue, then, forms a sort of answer key that allows readers to evaluate characters's various misunderstandings of Jesus's origin, identity, and mission.<sup>66</sup>

Complementing Resseguie's and Skinner's refinement of Culpepper on the narrative fabric, Bennema has proposed a refinement on Culpepper's notion of characters

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<sup>61</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 125.

<sup>62</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 104; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 19.

<sup>63</sup> James L. Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel: Narrative Design and Point of View in John*, Biblical Interpretation Series 56 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 4; see also Cornelis Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 91; Kee, "Knowing the Truth: Epistemology and Community in the Fourth Gospel," 255.

<sup>64</sup> Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 4–5.

<sup>65</sup> Resseguie, *The Strange Gospel*, 109–68.

<sup>66</sup> Skinner, "Misunderstanding, Christology, and Johannine Characterization."

themselves. Namely, to say that characters are representative need not entail that they are flat, or mere types. Bennema offers a model of characterization based on a composite of three variables: the character's complexity, development, and inner life: "a typical or representative belief-response need not reduce the character to a type, and . . . while some characters are indeed types, many others are complex, developing, and round."<sup>67</sup> Like Culpepper, he recognizes both simplicity according to John's dualistic worldview (belief versus unbelief) and complexity according to the characters's diverse responses. This tension describes the difference between divine and human perspectives.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, most characters in the Gospel make only brief appearances. The narrator provides little direct characterization. Most of what the reader knows about the characters come through their words and actions.<sup>69</sup> How valid is it, then, to analyze virtues and vices in characters who appear in the narrative? The narrative world does not necessarily grant the reader enough exposure of the character's inner life or behavioral patterns for the sort of recurrence that usually defines a virtue or vice in real life. Therefore, Bennema argues that even single behaviors that appear important "within the theological framework of the narrative" can constitute a trait for the purpose of character representation.<sup>70</sup> This observation provides important rationale for applying a vice-epistemology analysis to character encounters with Jesus, since the concept of vice assumes a stable character trait. In a subsequent publication, Bennema draws out this connection between characters and virtue: "Characters are virtuous to the extent that their

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<sup>67</sup> Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 62; cf. 27–28, 91–105.

<sup>68</sup> Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 96.

<sup>69</sup> Skinner, "Misunderstanding, Christology, and Johannine Characterization," 118. There are exceptions, such as 12:42–43.

<sup>70</sup> Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 73–76. Uta Poplutz concurs: "In contrast to real people, the information about a literary character is not expandable. As a result, any information may serve as an important character indicator" ("The Pharisees: A House Divided," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmerman, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 314 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013], 117).

thinking and behaviour corresponds to the beliefs, values, and norms of God's world."<sup>71</sup>

Armed with narrator-supplied authoritative knowledge about Jesus's origin, identity, and mission, readers are invited to evaluate character interactions with Jesus as models of their own possible reactions. Though responses and degrees of understanding vary, the one main issue, consistent with the book's central purpose (20:31), is whether the character responds with saving faith in Jesus. Further, characters's moral and intellectual traits provide either positive models or warnings about the sorts of epistemic behaviors that do and do not lead to this faith response.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that in John, knowledge of Jesus as the God-sent, eternal, divine Logos is the central truth to be known, and that testimony is an important epistemic channel toward engendering belief and arriving at this knowledge. One's response to this testimony is volitionally determined, and thus morally significant. Tragically, vice prevents observers from seeing and hearing beyond Jesus's physical manifestations to the spiritual realities they represent. Moral darkness maintains epistemic darkness. John demonstrates these dynamics of knowledge using the examples of characters and their varying responses to Jesus.

It is curious that among many people seeing and hearing the same things, one's character would shape one's degree of knowledge. Precisely how does sin keep observers "in the dark" when it comes to properly recognizing Jesus? The next chapter will introduce concepts from the modern study of virtue epistemology that can help answer this question regarding Johannine testimony.

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<sup>71</sup> Bennema, "Moral Transformation in the Johannine Writings," 7.



## CHAPTER 3

### TESTIMONY WITHIN VIRTUE AND VICE EPISTEMOLOGY

The preceding chapter presented a two-tiered structure of Johannine knowledge that begins with sense perception and should end in something greater: spiritual knowledge of Jesus, the Logos sent by God. The need of a movement from lower to higher knowledge raises the issue of what sort of character it requires. Testimony in John provides a test case, because receiving testimony requires an act of moral judgment to trust the witness. This requirement brings the hearer's will to the forefront. Anyone with good ears can hear the testifier, but some sort of volitional capacity takes over from there, whether to accept or to reject the testimony.

This chapter presents a model for how the will regulates traffic between lower and higher levels of knowledge. The model comes from the discipline of virtue epistemology, an intersection between epistemology and virtue ethics. After introducing the ancient concept of virtue and its appropriation in modern virtue epistemology, I will describe the division between different ways of defining intellectual virtue, the related concept of epistemic vice, and some virtue-related features of the faculty of testimony. I conclude with a summary of how, in chapter 4, I will apply the questions and categories raised in this discussion to examine testimony rejection in John.

#### **Introduction to Aristotelian Virtue Theory**

Virtue epistemology is a subset of virtue ethics, an approach that examines agents rather than individual acts.<sup>1</sup> Instead of asking, "What is the right thing to do here?"

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, ed. David Copp

it asks, “What would a virtuous person do here?”<sup>2</sup> First articulated by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, virtue ethics has seen a resurgence since the mid-twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

A virtue is a moral orientation, “a disposition of a person . . . to act *for reasons*” which is “exercised through the agent’s practical reasoning.”<sup>4</sup> Virtue requires not only right action, but that underlain by right motives and affections, and carried out in the right manner.<sup>5</sup> Man’s inborn capacity for virtue must be actuated through habitual activity. Consequently, virtues are stable and durable.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle located virtue as the mean between two opposite vicious extremes, namely, excess and deficiency of a given quality. For instance, the virtue of gentleness lies between a short-tempered excess of anger and an apathetic deficiency of it.<sup>7</sup> The virtuous life points toward the resulting state Aristotle calls *eudaimonia*, which might be translated as “flourishing,” “a good life,” or “well-being.”<sup>8</sup> *Eudaimonia* is a final end, not a means toward anything more ultimate.<sup>9</sup> It is a way of being that does not merely result from virtues, but consists of them.<sup>10</sup> A virtuous life is a flourishing life.

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 533; Heather Battaly, “Introduction: Virtue and Vice,” *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 1/2 (January 2010): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald, Library of Liberal Arts 75 (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 2.4 1105a–b; Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” 525.

<sup>3</sup> Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” 515; Guy Axtell, “Agency Ascriptions in Ethics and Epistemology: Or, Navigating Intersections, Narrow and Broad,” *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 1/2 (January 2010): 81.

<sup>4</sup> Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” 516.

<sup>5</sup> Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” 516; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.3 1104a–1105a.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.10 1100b, 2.1 1103a–b.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.6 1106a–2.7 1108a.

<sup>8</sup> Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” 520; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.8 1098b.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.7 1097a–b; Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” 521.

<sup>10</sup> Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” 530.

## Virtue Epistemology

Virtue epistemology bears some resemblances with virtue ethics, but also some differences. Virtue epistemology is an agent-based inquiry into knowledge, asking what qualities characterize an excellent thinker.<sup>11</sup> Just as virtue ethics contrasts with act-based systems, so virtue epistemology contrasts with belief-based systems that are primarily concerned with the justification of knowledge. In other words, rather than asking, “What constitutes a justified true belief?” the virtue epistemologist asks, “What makes an excellent knower?”<sup>12</sup>

Thanks to this agent-based perspective, virtue epistemology marks a departure from the project that has largely enveloped analytic epistemology since the mid-twentieth century: searching for byzantine, skeptic-proof definitions of knowledge.<sup>13</sup> While some epistemologists have employed virtue in that endeavor, others contend that its useful domain is more regulative and prescriptive, pointing the way to the right sorts of intellectual habits or capacities that do not attempt to exhaust the definition of knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

Despite its similarity to Aristotelian virtue ethics, modern virtue epistemology differs from Aristotle’s own discussion of intellectual virtues in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle is mostly interested in defining different types of knowledge, how they interact

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<sup>11</sup> Battaly, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>12</sup> Battaly, “Introduction,” 2; see also Roger Crisp, “Virtue Ethics and Virtue Epistemology,” *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 1/2 (January 2010): 35.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Campbell Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 5–6.

<sup>14</sup> Ernest Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected Essays in Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); John Greco, “Two Kinds of Intellectual Virtue,” *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 60, no. 1 (January 2000): 179; John Greco, “Virtues in Epistemology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. Paul K. Moser, Oxford Handbooks in Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 287–315; Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jason Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 88; Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 6–22; Christopher Lepock, “Unifying the Intellectual Virtues,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 83, no. 1 (July 2011): 108.

with desire and action, and how they contribute to *eudaimonia*.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, modern virtue epistemology concerns itself with what qualities make for good thinking and knowing. It is not Aristotle's view of the intellect, but an epistemic application of his view on ethics.<sup>16</sup> The following section details a division between two varieties of virtue epistemology that vary in their similarity to classical virtue ethics.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Great Divide: Faculties versus Character**

Having sketched the broad features of virtue theory and its modern epistemic cousin, the next important matter is to understand what constitutes an intellectual virtue. Two major approaches have emerged among scholars. First, *reliabilism* focuses on *cognitive faculties*—"mechanisms or processes of belief acquisition that reliably deliver true beliefs."<sup>18</sup> Reliabilism is a sort of consequentialism because it ascribes virtues not by their intrinsic value or excellence, but by their ability to produce the right ends, namely knowing truth.<sup>19</sup> In this case, virtues are not moral but functional.<sup>20</sup> Suggested reliabilist virtues include induction, introspection, memory, sense perception, and testimony.<sup>21</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.13 1103a, 6.2 1139a–b. Belief in Jesus qualifies as what Aristotle calls practical wisdom: "The capacity of deliberating well about what is good and advantageous for oneself . . . what sort of thing contributes to the good life in general" (6.5 1140a). Practical wisdom is characterized by excellence in deliberation (6.9 1142b–6.10 1143a). It is equated with "right reason in moral matters" (6.13 1144b); "a man of practical wisdom is *ipso facto* a man of good character" (7.10 1152a).

<sup>16</sup> Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 138–39.

<sup>17</sup> I am not concerned here with modern virtue ethics, since virtue epistemology is less an offshoot of that than of Aristotle's ethics.

<sup>18</sup> Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology*, Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 87.

<sup>19</sup> Battaly, "Introduction," 3; Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology*, 87–88; Greco, "Two Kinds of Intellectual Virtue," 181–84; Greco, "Virtues in Epistemology," 287.

<sup>20</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 85.

<sup>21</sup> List gleaned from Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, 215–21; Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 86; Eleonore Stump, "Faith, Wisdom, and the Transmission of Knowledge through Testimony," in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 225.

contrasting approach, *responsibilism*, focuses on stable *character traits* that make for “excellent epistemic functioning.”<sup>22</sup> Responsibilists have suggested an inventory of virtues including autonomy, courage,<sup>23</sup> humility,<sup>24</sup> open-mindedness,<sup>25</sup> and tenacity.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to their definitions of virtue, reliabilists and responsibilists also differ in their notions of intellectual *eudaimonia*, or the state of well-being associated with knowledge. Consistent with its consequentialist nature, reliabilism defines *eudaimonia* as the end to which virtuous knowing leads. Properly working faculties are merely the road to the destination of intellectual *eudaimonia*. By contrast, to the responsibilist, *eudaimonia* encompasses virtuous inquiry itself.<sup>27</sup> This again reflects the affinity of responsibilism with virtue ethics, which holds virtue to be constitutive of *eudaimonia* and not merely a means to it.

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<sup>22</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 85; These virtues are “dispositions to regulate belief-formation.” Lepock, “Unifying the Intellectual Virtues,” 109.

<sup>23</sup> Jason Baehr defines this as “a disposition to persist in or with a state or course of action aimed at an epistemically good end despite the fact that doing so involves an apparent threat to one’s own well-being” (*The Inquiring Mind*, 177).

<sup>24</sup> This is “an unusually low dispositional concern for the kind of status that accrues to persons who are viewed by their intellectual communities as intellectually talented, accomplished, and skilled, especially where such concern is muted or sidelined by intrinsic intellectual concerns. . . . It is also a very low concern for intellectual domination in the form of leaving the stamp of one’s mind on disciples, one’s field, and future intellectual generations.” Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, “Humility and Epistemic Goods,” in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, ed. Michael Raymond DePaul and Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 271.

<sup>25</sup> Jason Baehr defines this as a willingness and ability “to transcend a default cognitive standpoint in order to take up or take seriously the merits of a distinct cognitive standpoint . . . where doing so makes a significant demand on the person’s agency” (*The Inquiring Mind*, 152–54). Christopher Lepock defines it as “a capacity to control belief-formation so as to assign due weight to alternative positions or beliefs, or unexpected or questions” (“Unifying the Intellectual Virtues,” 43).

<sup>26</sup> This vice is “being reluctant to revise the beliefs we hold at a given time,” especially in contexts such as flashy new evidence threatening to overturn a stable and well-established evidence base to the contrary. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O’Connor, “Well-Tuned Trust as an Intellectual Virtue,” in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O’Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 258–59. This list is gleaned from Battaly, “Introduction,” 4–6; Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 152; Crisp, “Virtue Ethics and Virtue Epistemology,” 31; Jason Baehr, “Epistemic Malevolence,” *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 1/2 (January 2010): 209; Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 21. To be precise, many of these virtues should have the adjective “intellectual” to distinguish them from non-epistemic analogues, e.g., courage. But these appear in shortened form to avoid needless repetition.

<sup>27</sup> Jason Baehr, “Virtue Epistemology,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School, 2013), 3.

## Accounting for the Relationship between Faculties and Character

Both reliabilists and responsibilists have put a finger on a key requirement for good inquiry. Somehow, faculties and character each have a role to play.<sup>28</sup> What remains is to determine the relationship between them, an important task because this thesis focuses on how character shapes the function of a particular faculty, testimony. Following the lead of Roberts and Wood, my objective is not to devise a comprehensive definition of knowledge or solve the puzzle of justification, but rather to understand the practice of meaningful belief formation—or, more precisely, what impedes it—especially in the context of testimony in John’s Gospel.<sup>29</sup> The most fruitful explanations are found in a responsibilist analysis of intellectual virtues *as safeguards* and *regulators* of the use of one’s faculties. This will become clear in two steps.

First, choosing between responsibilism and reliabilism comes down to determining whether a facultative or character analysis is most useful. There is no single right answer. Contextual factors and one’s explanatory interest determine which kind of virtue is most controlling. Guy Axtell, therefore, recommends a sliding scale between narrow and broad trait ascriptions.<sup>30</sup> In his scheme, “narrow typed reliability” refers to lower-level, faculty virtues. These are most important at the small scale, explaining an individual instance of belief. The person with good eyesight or a sharp memory is likely to have an epistemic advantage in this or that case. By contrast, “broadly typed reliability” refers to high-level, reflective virtues. These are shaped by the holistic and

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<sup>28</sup> Battaly, “Introduction,” 4; Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 9–11; Lepock, “Unifying the Intellectual Virtues,” 106.

<sup>29</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 20–23; see also Callahan and O’Connor, “Well-Tuned Trust as an Intellectual Virtue,” 246. See Murray Hogg, “The Knowledge of God: John’s Gospel and Contemporary Epistemology” (ThM thesis, Melbourne School of Theology, 2011), 106.

<sup>30</sup> Axtell, “Agency Ascriptions in Ethics and Epistemology,” 75–76.

habitual tendencies of the knower.<sup>31</sup> High-level virtues are more useful tools for broadly evaluating agents and the quality of their inquiries.<sup>32</sup> Open-mindedness is likely to make a scientist excellent over the course of his career. So, in deciding to approach the Gospel of John with either a reliabilist or responsibilist lens, one relevant question is to ask which set of explanatory factors the author stresses as most important. As chapter 2 elucidated, John presents an epistemology that reflects the agent's moral state, a fact which points to a responsibilist analysis.

But even a responsibilist, character-based analysis does not dismiss the faculties as unimportant. So, the second step concerns how faculty function fits into a responsibilist grid. Numerous scholars have argued that epistemic faculties rise or fall depending on their proper functioning. This insight goes back as far as virtue theory itself, with Aristotle arguing that the faculty of sense perception “is completely exercised *when it is in good condition* and its object is the best of those that can be perceived by the senses.”<sup>33</sup> More recently, Alvin Plantinga has argued that beliefs are warranted if one's epistemic faculties are functioning properly according to their “design plan”—the environment in which they were intended to produce true knowledge.<sup>34</sup> The responsibilist character traits have a hand in shaping the proper function of the faculties. This occurs in two ways.

First, character-intellectual virtues guard against vices that would prevent epistemic faculties from functioning properly. Guy Axtell calls “higher-level” (responsibilist) virtues “capacities for metacognitive control” that “guard against certain

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<sup>31</sup> Axtell, “Agency Ascriptions in Ethics and Epistemology,” 75–81; see also Crisp, “Virtue Ethics and Virtue Epistemology,” 27–28; Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 125–26.

<sup>32</sup> Lepock, “Unifying the Intellectual Virtues,” 112.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.4 1174b (emphasis mine).

<sup>34</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 16.

biases and promote the agent's epistemic reliability."<sup>35</sup> This screening function of good intellectual character explains why virtue is important without being the primary driver of knowledge.<sup>36</sup>

Second, for better or worse, character steers the use of one's faculties.<sup>37</sup>

Aristotle writes of sensory knowledge being "dragged about by emotions,"<sup>38</sup> and goes on to elaborate regarding verbal discourses:

Argument and teaching . . . are not effective in all cases: the soul of the listener must first have been conditioned by habits to the right kind of likes and dislikes . . . For a man whose life is guided by emotion will not listen to an argument that dissuades him, nor will he understand it. . . . It seems that emotion does not yield to argument but only to force. Therefore, there must first be a character that somehow has an affinity for excellence or virtue, a character that loves what is noble and feels disgust for what is base.<sup>39</sup>

To Aristotle, the emotions do more than pull the listener away from the truth she is hearing. They render her unable to properly hear and thus understand it. Emotion, in this case a vicious lack of love for the good, robs the offerings of sense perception before they can take root in the hearer's mind as knowledge.

Echoing Aristotle's insistence on the importance of "the right kind of likes and

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<sup>35</sup> Axtell, "Agency Ascriptions in Ethics and Epistemology," 77–80; see also Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> This point answers the charge of Ahlstrom-Vij that reliabilism is superior because responsibilists cannot explain how character-intellectual virtues actually generate knowledge ("Against the Bifurcation of Virtue," 292–94). Using the terminology of "essential" and "dispositive" to describe reliabilist and responsibilist functions, respectively, Thomas Aquinas makes the identical point about the latter screening for the former: "A thing may belong to the contemplative life in two ways, essentially or dispositively. The moral virtues do not belong to the contemplative life essentially, because the end of the contemplative life is the consideration of truth . . . . On the other hand, the moral virtues belong to the contemplative life dispositively. For the act of contemplation, wherein the contemplative life essentially consists, is hindered both by the impetuosity of the passions which withdraw the soul's intention from intelligible to sensible things, and by outward disturbances. Now the moral virtues curb the impetuosity of the passions, and quell the disturbance of outward occupations. Hence moral virtues belong dispositively to the contemplative life" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province [N.p.: Benzinger Brothers, 1947], Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2.2.180).

<sup>37</sup> Lepock, "Unifying the Intellectual Virtues," 106; Christopher Lepock, "Metacognition and Intellectual Virtue," *Virtue Epistemology Naturalized: Bridges between Virtue Epistemology and Philosophy of Science* 366 (2014): 42–43.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 7.3 1147b.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.9 1179b.



dislikes,” Roberts and Wood identify the will as the steering capacity of faculties.<sup>40</sup> But contrasting from Aristotle’s purely negative representation of emotion over against virtue, Roberts and Wood represent the will as the “central intellectual faculty” that has the capacity to form “concerns, desires, and emotions,” and “make choices and efforts.”<sup>41</sup> The will can impose a defense mechanism that suppresses the use of intellectual faculties which are otherwise in proper working order.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, character matters.<sup>43</sup> A virtuously working will satisfies Plantinga’s requirement by creating an environment for the proper function of cognitive faculties.<sup>44</sup> However, if the will attracts to other values more than truth, then the faculties will malfunction.<sup>45</sup>

### **Intellectual Vices**

So, reliabilist and responsibilist virtues influence the formation of beliefs in complementary ways. Moreover, the regulating effect of character on the faculties works in both moral directions. The study of intellectual vice stretches back to ancient times, but it has only recently received specific attention alongside virtue within analytic epistemology.<sup>46</sup> In a landmark early study, Casey Swank argued that epistemic vices are

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<sup>40</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 87–88; see also Baehr, *The Inquiring Mind*, 24; Lepock, “Metacognition and Intellectual Virtue”; Christopher Hookway, “How to Be a Virtue Epistemologist,” in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, ed. Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski and Michael R. DePaul (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 187.

<sup>41</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 111–12.

<sup>42</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 96.

<sup>43</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 97.

<sup>44</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 110.

<sup>45</sup> And this regulation of steering need not be intentional. As evident in Aristotle’s description above, the will can influence knowledge in subtle and undetected ways. The agent’s “higher-level” character virtues manage the findings of her “lower-level” faculties, but not always conscientiously. As Christopher Lepock argues, the character-level management of the faculties is a metacognitive function that often takes place without conscious deliberation (“Metacognition and Intellectual Virtue,” 38–41).

<sup>46</sup> Ian James Kidd, Heather Battaly, and Quassim Cassam, “Introduction: From Epistemic Vices to Vice Epistemology,” in *Vice Epistemology*, ed. Ian James Kidd, Heather Battaly, and Quassim Cassam (London: Routledge, 2021), 1–5.

*epistemic traits that are bad*, not necessarily *traits that are epistemically bad*.<sup>47</sup> They are extensions of non-epistemic vices, qualities that make someone personally “unattractive.”<sup>48</sup> To Swank, an intellectual vice is an epistemic pattern that makes someone a “bad person” in a personal and not merely a functional way. Intellectual vices include closed-mindedness, gullibility, insouciance,<sup>49</sup> prejudice, pride or arrogance,<sup>50</sup> and wishful thinking.<sup>51</sup>

Following Swank’s lead, most of the literature on epistemic vice assumes the equivalent of responsibilism and proceeds to wrestle with more specific questions about what constitutes character-based intellectual vice. An important division has emerged in this discussion.<sup>52</sup> In harmony with Aristotle, so-called *motivationalists* ascribe vice to the

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<sup>47</sup> Casey Swank, “Epistemic Vice,” in *Knowledge, Belief, and Character*, ed. Guy Axtell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 195–204 (emphasis mine); see also Kidd, Battaly, and Cassam, “Introduction: From Epistemic Vices to Vice Epistemology,” 5.

<sup>48</sup> Swank, “Epistemic Vice,” 202–203. This concept mirrors responsibilist Jason Baehr’s argument that intellectual virtue is rooted in a concept of “personal worth,” defined as “the notion of being a ‘good person’ or of being good *qua* person” (*The Inquiring Mind*, 91).

<sup>49</sup> This attitude is a casual lack of concern about the truth. See Quassim Cassam, *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 79–81.

<sup>50</sup> In contrast with intellectual humility, Roberts and Wood implicitly define this as “a disposition . . . to make unwarranted intellectual entitlement claims on the basis of one’s (supposed) superiority or excellence” (“Humility and Epistemic Goods,” 271).

<sup>51</sup> List gleaned from Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 152; Jason Baehr, “Epistemic Malevolence,” *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 1/2 (January 2010): 204; Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 74–77, 79–81, 133. As in the inventory of virtues above, the adjective “intellectual” should distinguish several of these vices from non-epistemic analogues, e.g., pride. But these appear in shortened form to avoid needless repetition.

<sup>52</sup> It is not obvious how the various views on epistemic vice map onto the reliabilist–responsibilist divide. For starters, vice motivationalism clearly corresponds with virtue responsibilism. But obstructivism is slightly less clear. Cassam believes that it is not strictly accurate to apply the responsibilist label to obstructivist vice epistemologists (email message to author, October 14, 2020). However, he defines vice in a way that broadly corresponds to character. For instance, he requires that vices merit personal criticism for the agent. Thus, it is inappropriate to ascribe vice in a case of, say, forgetfulness (*Vices of the Mind*, 4). This requirement contrasts with the strictly facultative concern of the virtue reliabilists. Moreover, Heather Battaly distinguishes obstructivist vices from so-called effects-vices, which need not be reprehensible and are defined by the sole criterion of being an obstacle to knowledge. She claims that effects-vices are analogous to reliabilist virtues, implying that obstructivism is a species of responsibilism. See Heather Battaly, “Vice Epistemology Has a Responsibility Problem,” *Philosophical Issues* 29, no. 1 (October 2019): 27. Finally, Christopher Lepock classifies motivationalism and obstructivism as vice analogies of two distinct varieties of virtue responsibilism: *phronomic* and *zetetic*, respectively (“Metacognition and Intellectual Virtue,” 43). Therefore, this study will treat motivationalism and obstructivism as subcategories within the broader responsibilist category.

agent’s motivations, namely her orientation toward or against the truth.<sup>53</sup> By contrast, *obstructivists* take a broader approach, defining an epistemic vice as “a blameworthy or otherwise reprehensible character trait, attitude, or way of thinking that systematically obstructs the gaining, keeping, or sharing of knowledge.”<sup>54</sup> Obstructivism is a sort of consequentialism, since its main interest is what kinds of qualities effectively interfere with knowledge.<sup>55</sup> Obstructivists maintain that vice can exist even when the agent’s motives are good.<sup>56</sup> So, both motivationalists and obstructivists agree that badly-motivated traits that inhibit knowledge are intellectual vices. The difference is that the latter adds another category of vice that is not blameworthy (badly motivated) but nevertheless reprehensible (reflects poorly on the knower).<sup>57</sup> For instance, a person who grew up indoctrinated in dogmatism and closed-mindedness by the Taliban may not have any control over his ability to adopt these epistemic qualities, but they nevertheless reflect badly on him, and qualify as reprehensible intellectual vices.<sup>58</sup> With this category of reprehensible but not blameworthy, obstructivism acknowledges that responsibility for having a trait need not imply that the agent found her way into it voluntarily.<sup>59</sup>

Which account of intellectual vice should guide an inquiry into the Gospel of

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<sup>53</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 5–6. One subset of motivationalists argues that vice requires bad motivations, while others maintain that merely the lack of good motives qualifies as intellectual vice. See Battaly, “Introduction,” 5; Alessandra Tanesini, “Epistemic Vice and Motivation,” *Metaphilosophy* 49, no. 3 (April 2018): 351; Jason Baehr, “The Structure of Intellectual Vices,” in *Vice Epistemology*, ed. Ian James Kidd, Heather Battaly, and Quassim Cassam (London: Routledge, 2021), 31.

<sup>54</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 3–11.

<sup>56</sup> Tanesini, “Epistemic Vice and Motivation,” 351.

<sup>57</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 17–22, 126–31.

<sup>58</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 19–21.

<sup>59</sup> Battaly, “Vice Epistemology Has a Responsibility Problem,” 25; Baehr, “The Structure of Intellectual Vices,” 26. The notion of an agent bearing responsibility for a non-voluntary character defect harmonizes well with the biblical notion of unintentional sin (Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27), and more specifically, the charge of morally responsible blindness that occurs as a major theme in John’s epistemology. See the discussion in chapter 3.

John? Is it important to account for the motives underlying bad thinking? One should not take for granted that such questions will be answerable from the limited window into characters that the Gospel narrative provides. Therefore, I will approach the case studies looking for possible vices with a filter calibrated to Cassam's broader obstructivist definition, and only then consider what insight the text gives on the motivations of the characters.

The above discussion of the interplay between the reliabilist and responsibilist virtues took for granted that vices obstruct the proper function of epistemic faculties. This obstruction could happen by means of the will. For instance, the intellectually proud person, thinking she has nothing to learn, will not employ her faculties to their potential, and thus be a bad listener.<sup>60</sup> More insidiously, vices might interfere with perception itself. For instance, prejudice might make an eyewitness "see" an event wrongly.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, some intellectual vices work by a pernicious cycle of self-reinforcement as they obstruct their own detection. Examples are closed-mindedness and intellectual carelessness.<sup>62</sup> Testimony from outside could plausibly open a window to see one's epistemic vice and thus break the cycle of self-deception. However, the agent might easily dismiss it. Testimony itself is a faculty not immune to the compromising effects of vice.<sup>63</sup>

### **Testimony as a Faculty Regulated by Virtue**

I have surveyed the relationship between virtuous or vicious intellectual character and epistemic faculties. In this section I examine how this relationship bears on the key faculty in this study. Testimony is an important and well-worn pathway for

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<sup>60</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 7–8.

<sup>61</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 144–47.

<sup>63</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 155–57.

human knowledge.<sup>64</sup> Notwithstanding the poor reputation it garnered in the Enlightenment, “Testimony or credulity . . . is a crucially important part of our noetic arsenal . . . [it is] the source of an enormously large proportion of our most important beliefs.”<sup>65</sup> Most of what we know, we know because someone told us.<sup>66</sup>

Catherine Elgin defines testimony as “[communications] that purport to convey information and transmit warrant for the information they convey.”<sup>67</sup> It conveys information, of course, through the hearer’s trust. This trust is risky because it puts the listener in a position of dependence on the testifier, who might be misleading.<sup>68</sup> To believe testimony is implicitly to believe three things: “others’ epistemic faculties; their resulting beliefs; and their reports.”<sup>69</sup> In this way, testimony is “parasitic on other sources of belief” for its warrant.<sup>70</sup> If no one has firsthand knowledge, gained through properly-working faculties and transmitted through true reporting, then testimony is unsound.

By pushing the hearer to make a judgment of trust or rejection, testimony serves as a clear example of the will’s steering capacity over the faculties. Virtue alone can navigate the Aristotelian mean between vicious skepticism and gullibility.<sup>71</sup> One area

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<sup>64</sup> Callahan and O’Connor, “Well-Tuned Trust as an Intellectual Virtue,” 250–51.

<sup>65</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 77, 87; Callahan and O’Connor, “Well-Tuned Trust as an Intellectual Virtue,” 259; Catherine Z. Elgin, “Take It from Me: The Epistemological Status of Testimony,” *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 65, no. 2 (September 2002): 306; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 359.

<sup>66</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 104.

<sup>67</sup> Elgin, “Take It from Me,” 292.

<sup>68</sup> Callahan and O’Connor, “Well-Tuned Trust as an Intellectual Virtue,” 251; Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 81–82, 85.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Fricker, “Epistemic Trust in Oneself and Others—An Argument from Analogy?” in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O’Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 186.

<sup>70</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 87; see also Jennifer Lackey, “The Epistemology of Testimony and Religious Belief,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, ed. William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 205.

<sup>71</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 104–108; Callahan and O’Connor, “Well-Tuned Trust as an Intellectual Virtue,” 247–48; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 366.

of application is how readily one believes testimony. On the one hand, some have suggested that testimony is only warranted if its offerings can be confirmed independently. This is surely too high a bar. In most cases of testimonial knowledge, independent confirmation is impossible.<sup>72</sup> But on the other hand, neither is it wise to adopt the loose standard of generally presuming testimony to be true.<sup>73</sup>

Rather, hearing testimony well depends on a fair-minded assessment of broader context: the situation, subject matter, track record and credentials of the testifier, etc.<sup>74</sup> Consider the requirements that make an expert witness trustworthy in court. He is called to the stand based on his education, respect among peers in his field, and record of expertise in the subject matter the case requires. For any of these factors to be missing would seriously detract from the value of his testimony. Thus, hearers weigh testimony against their prior knowledge and the circumstances, and judge whether it is trustworthy.

Intellectual vices can interfere with testimony by the mechanism of poorly-tuned trust. An imbalance between the virtues of trust, autonomy, and caution can make for vicious skepticism or gullibility that threaten the reception of testimony in general. But more specifically, the actual content of testimony may prove a stumbling block. Again, the will is operative. Eleonore Stump points out that unwillingness to believe what a person is saying can interfere with the bond of trust that causes the hearer to believe the testifier.<sup>75</sup>

Not all testimony should be trusted. Though justification of knowledge is outside the primary scope of this study, assessing virtue and vice requires some regard for

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<sup>72</sup> Elgin, "Take It from Me," 294.

<sup>73</sup> Elgin, "Take It from Me," 295–96.

<sup>74</sup> Elgin, "Take It from Me," 307; John Bishop, "Trusting Others, Trusting in God, Trusting the World," in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 162.

<sup>75</sup> Stump, "Faith, Wisdom," 206–7. This phenomenon will arise in the discussion of John 5:35 below.

the “oughtness” of believing testimonial knowledge. This fact inevitably leads to the doorstep of warrant. The biggest question, that of reductionism, asks whether testimony is enough to confer its own warrant.<sup>76</sup> The non-reductionist observes that most people tell the truth most of the time, and that it is very normal to know things through unconfirmed testimony.<sup>77</sup> For this reason, “testimony is a *basic* source of justification on an epistemic par with sense perception, memory, inference, and the like.”<sup>78</sup> This means that “hearers may be justified in accepting what they are told merely on the basis of the testimony of speakers.”<sup>79</sup> But the reductionist is more cautious, requiring non-testimonial reasons to confer justification for believing testimony.<sup>80</sup>

The reductionism question is relevant to the “oughtness” of believing testimony, because if non-reductionism is correct, the reductionist is epistemically wrong to skeptically hold out for more, ultimately unnecessary, confirmation. But if reductionism is correct, the non-reductionist runs the risk of being gullible and misled.<sup>81</sup> Either way, getting reductionism wrong can lead to intellectually vicious hearing of testimony.

Which view is correct? The point of inspecting Johannine testimony through the lens of virtue epistemology is not to impose outside requirements on the text, but rather to bring perceptive epistemological questions and categories to the text to read it more fruitfully. So rather than bring an *a priori* answer on reductionism to testimonial cases in the Gospel of John, I will approach each case asking whether and how the author presents belief in testimony as morally obligatory.

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<sup>76</sup> Lackey, “Epistemology of Testimony,” 207–10.

<sup>77</sup> Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function*, 79–82.

<sup>78</sup> Lackey, “Epistemology of Testimony,” 207.

<sup>79</sup> Lackey, “Epistemology of Testimony,” 207.

<sup>80</sup> Lackey, “Epistemology of Testimony,” 208.

<sup>81</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 104–8; Fricker, “Epistemic Trust,” 175.

## Epistemological Approach to the Case Studies

The above discussion of virtue and vice epistemology exposed some distinctions in the study of virtue and vice. At this point, it is worth reviewing these distinctions to draw a comprehensive map of vice-epistemic analysis of the case studies in the following chapter.

First, I will follow the lead of Roberts and Wood in foregoing the thorny issues of defining or justifying knowledge. The point is to gain practical understanding of how epistemic vices torpedo the function of epistemic faculties. Using their terms, the approach will be regulative rather than analytical.<sup>82</sup>

The second issue concerns Axtell's spectrum between narrow and broad typed reliability, an alternative way to describe reliabilism versus responsibilism. This study will follow a responsibilist tack. As chapter 2 demonstrated, John's epistemology is so morally charged that intellectual character surely lies nearer to the heart of the book than functional faculties. If someone fails to believe in Jesus, John will not be recommending a hearing exam or a class on logic. Faculties are a necessary channel, but the key question is how a person uses them. I will fix on one important epistemic faculty in the Fourth Gospel, testimony, and examine the variety of responsibilist vices that interfere with its proper function.

The third issue concerns whether a motivationalist or an obstructivist definition of epistemic vice better explains failure of belief in the Gospel of John. Rather than choosing an answer to this question *a priori*, I will catch vices with a wide obstructivist net, and only subsequently consider what moral verdict, if any, the author implies on the characters. Fourth, rather than imposing a solution to the question of reductionism to testimonial cases in the Gospel of John, I will approach each case asking whether and how the author presents belief in testimony as appropriate and morally necessary.

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<sup>82</sup> Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, 20–22.



## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDIES OF VICE INTERFERING WITH TESTIMONIAL KNOWLEDGE IN JOHN

#### **Introduction**

The previous two chapters laid a foundation for inspecting the virtue/vice dimension in cases of failed testimony in John. In this chapter, I will apply those concepts and terms to three passages that feature characters disbelieving valid testimony, asking what insights they can shed on the moral life of those characters: 2:23–3:36; 5:30–47; and 9:1–41. In the first two cases, the discussion of vices will occur separate from the discussion of the narrative. In the third case, however, I intersperse the discussion of vices along the narrative. The reasons are that (1) 9:1–41 contains the most longitudinal development of characters’ moral profile, and (2) many of the vices that occur there will have already appeared and received fuller discussion in the previous two sections.

#### **Nicodemus, the ἄνθρωποι of Jerusalem, and John’s Disciples (2:23–3:36)**

In his inaugural appearance in John, Nicodemus is best understood as an exemplar of how the populace of Jerusalem views Jesus. The recurrence of ἄνθρωπος (2:23, 25; 3:1, 19) binds together the section and shows that Nicodemus illustrates the people, even including John the Baptist’s disciples, who fail to believe valid testimony about Jesus (3:11, 32).<sup>1</sup> His introduction as a member and representative of a larger class

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<sup>1</sup> For the function of ἄνθρωπος linking Nicodemus with the people of Jerusalem, see Michael R. Whiteman, “The Dissembler of John 3: A Cognitive and Rhetorical Approach to the Characterization of Nicodemus,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 1 (2016): 153; and R. Alan Culpepper, “Nicodemus: The Travail of New Birth,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmerman, Wissenschaftliche

(3:1) further clarifies this role. He is a man, who, like other men, holds a kind of malformed faith in Jesus that has not believed testimony. Later in chapter 3, literary clues indict some of John the Baptist’s disciples alongside Nicodemus in this testimonial failure.

As will become apparent, a suite of intellectual vices appears in these two paired cases of testimony rejection. In the initial conversation, Nicodemus approaches Jesus with pre-formed conclusions about his identity that resist revision according to new evidence. The author will diagnose an ethical love of darkness as the underlying cause of unbelief, suggesting that Nicodemus and his ilk reason against Jesus according to this love. As for the disciples of John, a spirit of rivalry with real and imagined opponents causes the political effects of their rabbi’s testimony to overshadow the very question of its truth content.

### **How Testimony Rejection Appears through the Passage**

From the lens of epistemology and testimony, the section proceeds as follows. First, the *ἄνθρωποι* of Jerusalem express a kind of faith based in Jesus’s signs, which he discerns to be deficient (2:23–25). Then Nicodemus, an *ἄνθρωπος* (3:1), exemplifies this deficient faith by not believing Jesus’s testimony (3:1–18). Flowing from this interaction, the narrator passes his verdict about why *ἄνθρωποι* like Nicodemus do not believe: they love the darkness and do not want their evil deeds exposed (3:19–21).

The section continues into a new scene as John discovers that the testimony he has given of Jesus (cf. 1:19–36) has scarcely met with belief, even among his own

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Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 253. Moreover, Bennema points out that Nicodemus mirrors the signs-based “faith” of the people of Jerusalem by his declaration in 3:2 (*A Theory of Character* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014], 149). See also D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 185; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 122; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2003; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 1:531–33; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 149.

disciples (3:22–30). This juxtaposition of Jesus’s and John’s testimony, both meeting with resistance, explains why Jesus earlier spoke of himself as one of multiple witnesses (“our testimony” in 3:11).<sup>2</sup> The narrator then summarizes that no one believes either John’s testimony of earthly things or Jesus’s testimony of heavenly things (3:31–36).

### **Nicodemus and the ἄνθρωποι of Jerusalem (3:1–21)**

Why do Nicodemus and the other ἄνθρωποι not receive Jesus’s and John the Baptist’s testimony? The author initially answers that Jesus judges them not to be true followers because of what is “in them” (2:24–25).<sup>3</sup> Though the precise ground of Jesus’s disapproval remains obscure at this point, at least the Evangelist portrays mankind’s positive faith-response as somehow deficient. The specific reason unfolds throughout the interactions between Jesus and Nicodemus (3:1–18)<sup>4</sup> and between John and his disciples (3:22–30).

Jesus’s declaration that Nicodemus disbelieves his valid eyewitness testimony (3:10–11; cf. 3:32) culminates a back-and-forth interaction featuring Nicodemus’s

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<sup>2</sup> This reading of the plural is contested. Herman Ridderbos, who takes it to refer to Jesus and his disciples (see, e.g., 1 John 1:1ff; John 1:14), dismisses the notion of John the Baptist as the second witness by claiming that the phrase “we have seen [Jesus]” does not apply to him (*The Gospel According to John*, 133). To the contrary, John’s testimony crucially rests on his seeing, as emphasized by the pair of perfect-tense instances of “I have seen” bookending his testimony in 1:32 (τεθέαμαι) and 1:34 (έώρακα). C. K. Barrett, viewing the Gospel as a two-level drama, takes the implied “we” as Jesus and the subsequent church (*Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. [London: SPCK, 1978], 211). Craig Keener takes the witnesses to be Jesus and the Father (cf. 5:31–32, 36–37; 8:13–14, 17–18) (*The Gospel of John*, 1:558). While all of these approaches point to fellow witnesses alongside Jesus that are affirmed broadly in the Gospel, the most natural reading would seek its additional witnesses in the nearest possible literary context. The author supplies this witness by juxtaposing the testimonies of Jesus and John and adding the conclusive statement in 3:31–36, which both reiterates several themes from Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus and contrasts their testimonies as “above” and “of the earth,” respectively (3:31). See Catrin H. Williams, “John (the Baptist): The Witness on the Threshold,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmerman, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 54–56.

<sup>3</sup> The ambiguous phrase “did not entrust himself to them” (2:24) means at least this much. See Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 202; Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 122; Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 145. It is possible to infer additionally that Jesus responds to true faith by entrusting himself with further self-disclosure (10:14–15). See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 184.

<sup>4</sup> Bennisma, *A Theory of Character*, 149.

misunderstanding of Jesus. He repeatedly errs by applying an overly literal or earthly interpretation of Jesus's words that one must be born from above (ἀνωθεν) (3:3–9).<sup>5</sup> Jesus describes the problem in terms of a contrast between earthly things and heavenly things (3:12). While it is clear that “earthly things” describes Jesus's foregoing message for Nicodemus, it is less clear how that can be classified as earthly. The most likely explanation is that Jesus is using material images, such as wind and physical birth, to lift Nicodemus's understanding to the higher realities they symbolize.<sup>6</sup> However, Nicodemus trips on the images and fails to mount the escalator. His misunderstanding at this lower level suggests that he has no hope of grasping higher matters. Thus, part of Nicodemus's testimonial failure is a confusion of earthly versus heavenly meaning.<sup>7</sup>

**Closed-mindedness.** Is the ability to look beyond the physical realm an issue of character? It certainly cannot be reduced to that dimension alone—the Spirit gives this insight through the birth from above (3:5–8). The examination of the Spirit's role is beyond the scope of this study. But at the human level, perhaps Nicodemus's need of the birth-from-above manifests itself in a sort of epistemic inflexibility, a refusal to consider explanations beyond a certain bracketed range of possibility.

Lackey and Battaly have identified the epistemic vice of *closed-mindedness* as “an unwillingness or inability to engage, or engage seriously, with relevant intellectual options.”<sup>8</sup> “Inability” suggests that closed-mindedness can result from the lack of

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<sup>5</sup> As Jerome Neyrey (“John 3,” 123) points out, the author's synonymous use of ἀνωθεν and ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ in 3:31 settles the ambiguity in Jesus's meaning, contrary to Nicodemus's understanding.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Lincoln writes, “It is likely . . . that ‘earthly things’ is a reference to Jesus' attempt to move from the earthly level of physical birth and the blowing of the wind to the heavenly” (*The Gospel According to Saint John*, 152). See also Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 222; Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 212; Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 134; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:559.

<sup>7</sup> Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 150; Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 151.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Lackey and Heather Battaly, “Closed-Mindedness and Dogmatism,” *Episteme* (Cambridge University Press) 15, no. 3 (September 2018): 262.

exposure to relevant information or perspectives.<sup>9</sup> However, in the present case of a conversation with Jesus, Nicodemus has ample opportunity to consider a different perspective. It is a failure of willingness that keeps him from acknowledging the limitations of his materialistic interpretation of Jesus's words.

But is this assessment fair to Nicodemus? Is it possible that he is engaging in a good-faith conversation and yet stumbling in confusion at Jesus's cryptic words? Being confused is not an intellectual vice. Moreover, Nicodemus twice does what any intellectually virtuous but confused person should do: ask for clarification (3:4, 9).

However, Jesus's responses interpret Nicodemus's puzzled queries as evidence of unbelief rather than a good-faith search for clarity.<sup>10</sup> First, in verse 7 he characterizes Nicodemus's question in verse 4 with the verb θαυμάζω: "do not marvel." In general NT usage, this term conveys amazement with either a positive or negative connotation possible.<sup>11</sup> However, in the Fourth Gospel the polarity is exclusively negative (4:27; 5:20, 28; 7:15, 21).<sup>12</sup> It is an amazement of blamable incredulity. Likewise, after Nicodemus's second question in verse 9, Jesus describes his response as unbelief and rejection of his testimony (3:11–12). Jesus provides an additional clue about Nicodemus in verse 10, implying that his status as a teacher renders him without excuse for failing to understand

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<sup>9</sup> Recalling the distinction from chapter 3, a vice obstructivist such as Quassim Cassam would classify this unintentional form of closed-mindedness as reprehensible but not blameworthy, whereas a motivationalist such as Alessandra Tanesini would not recognize it as a vice.

<sup>10</sup> Given John's Christology (see especially 1:1–18) and literary purpose (20:31), I assume that when Jesus the literary character speaks, he represents the implied author's point of view. In other words, there is complete overlap of opinion between the narrator's Jesus and the narrator himself. Therefore, Jesus's moral assessment of Nicodemus coextends with the narrative perspective. See Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 147–48.

<sup>11</sup> J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), "θαυμάζω"; Walter Bauer and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), "θαυμάζω."

<sup>12</sup> Georg Bertram, "Θαῦμα, Θαυμάζω, Θαυμάσιος, Θαυμαστός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:40; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:555.

Jesus's words, rooted as they are in the OT Scriptures.<sup>13</sup> This epistemic failure is both reprehensible and blameworthy.

**Dogmatism.** Nicodemus's opening statement to Jesus sheds further light on the mechanism of his closed-mindedness, as John introduces him out of the gate prematurely counting his epistemic winnings: "We know that you are a teacher come from God" (3:2). As I discussed in chapter 2, Jesus's origin serves in the Gospel of John as a proxy for his identity, making Nicodemus's statement a sort of confession.<sup>14</sup> Within the broad category of closed-mindedness, Lackey and Battaly have defined *dogmatism* as the variety that refuses to "engage seriously with relevant alternatives to the beliefs one already holds."<sup>15</sup> So, closed-mindedness fails to consider alternatives, and dogmatism does so in protection of an already-held belief. In full view of John's Christology expressed in the Prologue, Nicodemus's confession is true but far from sufficient. His observation of Jesus's signs has led him to this conclusion. What he needs for further knowledge is the added clarity of Jesus's own testimony. The narrative of these paired interactions is thick with irony, beginning with Nicodemus's confident "we know" (3:2) and ending with John's melancholy "no one receives [Jesus's] testimony" (3:32; cf. 3:11). In-between, Jesus criticizes Nicodemus for not knowing the necessity of the Spirit-wrought *ἄνωθεν*-birth (3:10). If Nicodemus were not so busy declaring what he already knew, he might have been ready to give Jesus's testimony a more sensitive hearing, and consequently come to believe it. In Quassim Cassam's profile of closed-mindedness (which corresponds with Lackey and Battaly's narrower category of dogmatism), he

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<sup>13</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 169; Bennema, *A Theory of Character*, 150; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 198.

<sup>14</sup> Neyrey, "John 3," 116–17. Neyrey thus calls it a "pseudo-confession" (119).

<sup>15</sup> Lackey and Battaly, "Closed-Mindedness and Dogmatism," 262; see also Lackey and Battaly 2018, 262. See also Quassim Cassam, *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 151.

points out that this vice can work more subtly than simply refusing contrary evidence, but also works by “reinterpretation of information that is inconsistent with one’s prior conception.”<sup>16</sup> Nicodemus’s problem is a slanted interpretation rather than a flat refusal to accept Jesus’s words.

**Intellectual arrogance.** Nicodemus and his Jerusalem cohort are not only guilty of failing to hear Jesus well because they hold a pre-formed idea of who he is. They also bear responsibility for the attitude that has led them to think that they are warranted for landing so decisively on their position. It is not only that they have concluded, “He is a God-sent teacher,” and thus failed to hear his more assertive claims about his identity. The supposition that they are safe in this conclusion is underlain by a certain metacognitive stance (“my current thinking is sound”) that can be described as *intellectual pride or arrogance*, “a disposition to make unwarranted intellectual entitlement claims on the basis of one’s (supposed) superiority or excellence.”<sup>17</sup> Its manifestations include overestimation of one’s abilities, unaccountability, and unwillingness to consider that one has made a mistake when the evidence begins pointing in that direction.<sup>18</sup> Nicodemus’s case illustrates dogmatism and intellectual arrogance working hand-in-hand. He has too swiftly landed on a position, too proudly failed to consider this position open to revision, and thus set up a deflective shield that skews his interpretation of Jesus’s words.

**Wishful thinking.** In explaining Nicodemus’s persistent misunderstanding, 3:19–21 adds an additional character dimension to his failure to believe Jesus’s testimony: “People [ἄνθρωποι] loved the darkness rather than the light because their

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<sup>16</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, “Humility and Epistemic Goods,” in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, ed. Michael Raymond DePaul and Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 271.

<sup>18</sup> Alessandra Tanesini, “‘Calm Down, Dear’: Intellectual Arrogance, Silencing and Ignorance,” *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 90, no. 1 (June 1, 2016): 82–83.

works were evil” (3:19).<sup>19</sup> Likewise, these people “hate the light” (3:20). John identifies a damning vice which inhibits knowledge by a protective impulse for some perceived good that is threatened by the truth. *Wishful thinking* is an apt label.<sup>20</sup> This seems to describe the tendency to believe what one would prefer to be true in a way that is disproportionate to the available evidence. If wishful thinking applies to the judgment of 3:19–20, this vice only amplifies the more radical issue of man’s disordered loves.<sup>21</sup> People’s affinity toward darkness is problem enough, but it takes on an epistemic dimension when they think in a way that supports and affirms the object of this love—that is, when they engage in wishful thinking.<sup>22</sup> Their failure to come to the light is akin to the person who fears the potential pain of going to the dentist, and so leverages wishful thinking to protect his love of painlessness by telling himself that his teeth are probably fine and do not need

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<sup>19</sup> The detail that Nicodemus has approached Jesus at night (3:2) subtly places him under this indictment. See Neyrey, “John 3,” 118, and Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 156.

<sup>20</sup> Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 152. Cassam classifies it as a kind of “thinking vice,” an attitude that characterizes instances of poor thinking rather than a stable character trait (*Vices of the Mind*, 12–13).

<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, there is little consideration for the love of God in the modern analytic virtue-epistemology conversation. However, the implicit standpoint of the Johannine text is so obviously theocentric that human love directed away from the light (cf. 1:4–5) cannot fail to register as vicious. The moral judgment implicit in 3:19 finds resonance in Augustine, who defines vice as the inward tendency of “that affection of the mind which aims at enjoying one’s self and one’s neighbor, and other corporeal things, without reference to God” (*On Christian Doctrine*, 3.10.16). According to Augustine, misdirected love is the foundation of all vice, intellectual or otherwise. The matter of vice and disordered love will receive fuller treatment in the discussion of 5:40–47 below.

<sup>22</sup> I assume in this discussion that rejection of the light is a cover for evil deeds which are not identical to that rejection. Jerome Neyrey (“John 3,” 122) argues to the contrary, pointing to the parallel with the one who “does what is true” in verse 21 to indicate that good/true and evil/false are interchangeable pairs in 3:19–21. Thus, by this reading, man’s evil deed is just his rejection of the truth. While it is undeniable that belief constitutes no small part of John’s positive ethic and is even called “the work of God” (6:28–29), to equate evil deeds with epistemic rejection takes insufficient account of 3:19, where evil works are attributed as the cause (γάρ) of people’s hatred of the light. If the evil works were understood as epistemic rejection of Jesus’s testimony, it would make little sense to assign this as the cause of their love of darkness. Should not the order be reversed, with people’s loves serving as the foundation of their epistemic choices (cf. 7:17)? Moreover, because the epistemic dimension shares space with the ethical in John’s metaphor of darkness (see chapter 2), equating evil works with epistemic rejection would render the second half of verse 19 something like the tautologous: “people loved ignorance of Jesus rather than knowledge because they epistemically rejected Jesus.” For agreement with the view that differentiates evil deeds from rejection of the light, see Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Born from Above: The Anthropology of the Gospel of John*, *Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie* 29 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), 119; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 233–34; Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 217; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 208; Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 141–43; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:572–74.



examination.

### **John's Disciples (3:25–30)**

Jesus is not the only witness in this passage. His plural grammar in 3:11 and the author's arrangement of pericopes puts Jesus's testimony in parallel with John the Baptist's. In 3:27–28, John expresses frustration over his own disciples's failure to heed his testimony that Jesus is the preexistent and preeminent one, using in verse 29 the metaphor of a bridegroom and his friend (cf. 1:15, 20, 27, 30).<sup>23</sup> This prior testimony serves as an important backdrop for the scene, grounding John's word in eyewitness experience that is emphasized by the repeated "I have seen" bookending his testimony in 1:32 (τεθέαμαι) and 1:34 (έώρακα). The eyewitness nature of John's testimony confers sufficient warrant to incur moral accountability on those who disbelieve it.

**Epistemic insouciance.** John's frustration is prompted by a delegation of his disciples approaching him with the ostensibly problematic report that Jesus has emerged as a popular baptizer (3:26). What makes their handwringing over Jesus's fame damning is that they implicitly blame John for contributing to it by platforming Jesus, whom they describe as "he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness." They have noted the effect of John's testimony without heeding its substance. Whether or not John's words are true is not their concern, but what the words have done—namely, confer credibility on Jesus and thus threaten to eclipse John's public prominence.

Quassim Cassam describes the vice of *epistemic insouciance* as a "casual lack of concern about the truth." Whereas lying, in a perverted way, maintains a measure of regard for the truth by intentionally misdirecting others away from it, epistemic

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<sup>23</sup> The wedding metaphor represents Jesus's primacy over John. "The point of comparison is the difference between the bridegroom and the 'friend of the bridegroom.' The bridegroom is the principal person because 'he has the bride'" (Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 147). More specifically, in view of the prophetic wedding motif between the Lord and his people (e.g., Isa 62:4–5; Jer 2:2; Hos 2:16–20), John may be subtly affirming Jesus's messianic office. See Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 222–23; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 211; Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 161.

insouciance does not even ask the question of truthfulness. Words are merely tools for bringing about the insouciant person's desired effects.<sup>24</sup> In their warning to John about Jesus's burgeoning popularity, these disciples display an attitude common among politicians of every age: they are playing the game of public opinion.<sup>25</sup> This concern blocks them from the intended *telos* of John's testimony, belief in Jesus. The two of their company who did respond to John's initial testimony, Andrew and another unnamed disciple (1:36–37; cf. 1:40, 43), have already provided a foil to these insouciant remaining disciples of John. Rather than hearing him point out Jesus as the lamb of God and following him, they are stuck in a rut of self-contradiction. They believe in John sufficiently to guard his public image, and yet they do not believe the words of his testimony enough to celebrate Jesus's emerging prominence.

**Emulousness.** As part of a broader family of “vices of distrust,” Carter and Meehan describe *emulousness* as “motivation by a spirit of rivalry,” which can blind people from duly considering certain pieces of evidence that point in the direction of a rival's position.<sup>26</sup> In their loyalty to John, these disciples have missed the designed obsolescence of his ministry—that its purpose is to point the way to a greater one coming. It is telling that their complaint about Jesus's popularity immediately arises from a dispute (ζήτησις) with “a Jew” (3:25), a member of the literary character-group which has already arisen as challengers of John's ministry (1:19–28).<sup>27</sup> This atmosphere of

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<sup>24</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 79–81.

<sup>25</sup> The chief priests and the elders in Matthew 21:23–27 display another clear case of epistemic insouciance, which Jesus exposes with his counter-question to their initial challenge. Wrapped up in how the crowd will react to their opinion of John's baptism, they forget to reflect on what the answer might be.

<sup>26</sup> J. Adam Carter and Daniella Meehan, “Vices of Distrust,” *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 8, no. 10 (October 2019): 28.

<sup>27</sup> Alicia D. Myers argues that this fact-finding mission is not necessarily antagonistic, but builds toward an ambiguous characterization of “the Jews” through the Gospel (“Just Opponents? Ambiguity, Empathy, and the Jews in the Gospel of John,” in *Johannine Ethics: The Moral World of the Gospel and Epistles of John*, ed. Sherri Brown and Christopher W. Skinner [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017], 169). But even if their opening interaction with John does not constitute outright opposition, their battery of questions has a suspicious tenor and at least represents a skeptical testing of the warrant for his

conflict has lured them into a reductionistic “us versus them” emulous mentality which views every development on a zero-sum ledger: it either helps John and hurts the Jews, or vice versa. From this epistemic standpoint, Jesus cutting into John’s baptism “market share” is difficult to see as anything but a threat. Sensing this attitude, John responds by reminding them that, like any faithful friend of a bridegroom at a wedding, he joyfully plays a subordinate and anticipatory role to Jesus (3:29–30).

## Conclusion

This passage juxtaposes two cases of testimonial failure. Nicodemus disbelieves Jesus because he has latched onto a pre-formed interpretation of Jesus’s works, and thus he is closed to alternative explanations. This dogmatic closed-mindedness is further sealed by an intellectual arrogance which assumes that his interpretation is correct and does not listen sensitively enough to Jesus’s testimony of heavenly things. Finally, as a lover of the ethical darkness, wishful thinking has prevented Nicodemus from believing in Jesus, whose presence as the light would confront and unsettle his evil deeds.

Scholars have issued varied assessments of the character judgment of Nicodemus implicit in this narrative. Is he a secret believer?<sup>28</sup> Is he a dissembling antagonist?<sup>29</sup> Or is the picture ambiguous?<sup>30</sup> The last of those positions is safest. While

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ministry. See Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 171; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 146; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:431–33. For a brief survey of the vast literature on the historical identity of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι and a study of their literary function in John, see Ruben Zimmerman, “‘The Jews’: Unreliable Figures or Unreliable Narration?,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmerman, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 71–109. Exact delineation of the historical referent of this character group is unnecessary and lies beyond the scope of the present study; for the sake of argument I follow Zimmerman’s structuralist model of treating them as mere literary characters (79).

<sup>28</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. C. Clifton Black, John T. Carroll, and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 3rd ed., *The New Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 88.

<sup>29</sup> Whitenton, “The Dissembler of John 3,” 142.

<sup>30</sup> Culpepper, “Nicodemus: The Travail of New Birth,” 255; Bennema, *A Theory of Character*,

Nicodemus displays a degree of interest in Jesus and a degree of correctness in his assessment, the scene closes with the conclusion that his faith-response is fatally deficient at this point. A vice-epistemic analysis helps illuminate the contours of that failure. Lacking the birth-from-above, he will remain hopelessly locked out of saving knowledge of Jesus by the toxic mixture of dogmatism, closed-mindedness, and intellectual arrogance, all underlain by misguided love.

John the Baptist, the second witness in the passage, has provided trustworthy eyewitness testimony of Jesus's identity. Yet some of his own disciples are stuck with an emulous spirit in a chess-match over public favor. Consequently, they fall into the trap of epistemic insouciance, seeing no more in John's testimony than a blow to their rabbi's popularity. Through the lens of vice epistemology, what might at first appear as a simple misunderstanding takes on a darker shade. They have not merely mistaken John's meaning about Jesus, but have listened deficiently due to self-centered commitments.

### **The Jews Reject the Father's Battery of Witnesses (5:30–47)**

This text gives epistemic vices not in narrative form, but in Jesus's accusations. Here John portrays Jesus giving the Gospel's most concentrated discourse on the various witnesses to his identity, and the reasons his opponents reject it. It comes at the end of a longer discourse in which Jesus responds to the Jews trying to kill him, first because he healed a man on the Sabbath, and then because he subsequently inflamed their rage by claiming equality with God (5:16–18). My thesis requires demonstrating that the narrator presents testimony as having sufficient warrant to obligate belief in a rightly thinking person. Therefore, I will begin this discussion by examining the witnesses Jesus identifies and the testimonial warrant he attributes to them. Then, I will go on to inquire into the intellectual vices that keep his interlocutors from belief.

## Warranted Witnesses

Jesus appeals to a litany of witnesses: himself; his God-given works; the Father's own testimony in the Logos; and the principal author of the Scriptures, Moses. In every case, the witnesses are valid and the Jews's unbelief is blameworthy. The Torah's requirement of two or three witnesses to confirm a matter (Deut 19:15) stands in the background of these witnesses and implies judgment against disbelief of them. Jesus is the first witness, and the others strengthen his case.<sup>31</sup>

**Jesus (5:31).** Jesus names himself as the first witness. By speaking of self-testimony, he refers to the suite of bold claims he has just made about his equality to God the Father, including sharing the divine functions of resurrection and judgment (5:17, 19–29).<sup>32</sup> James Gaffney points out that in John's Gospel, Jesus is not only the prime object of faith but also a witness to himself. People should *believe Jesus* (with him as the direct object of πιστεύω) in order to *believe in him* (πιστεύω + εἰς). He was the witness whom Nicodemus rejected in 3:1–18 above. In 5:46–47, Jesus parallels his words with Moses's writings as testimonies about him that his opponents have failed to believe.<sup>33</sup>

Jesus claims in verse 31 that if he were the only witness about himself, his testimony would not be true. He is speaking about epistemology, not ontology. The absence of corroborative witnesses would not make him any less the Son of Man. What he must mean is, "If I alone bear witness about himself, my testimony does not have sufficient warrant to obligate belief." However, by presenting fellow witnesses, he mounts the argument that his testimony is "true" in the sense of being warranted and

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<sup>31</sup> Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 205; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 324.

<sup>32</sup> Barrett writes, "Here John means that it is impossible for Jesus, who acts only in conjunction with the Father, to pose as an independent, self-authenticating authority" (*Gospel According to St. John*, 264). Supporting evidence for this identification of Jesus's testimony comes in the close parallel in 8:13, where the Pharisees respond to his bold "I am" claim by making nearly the same point against Jesus that he makes here about the insufficiency of his testimony alone.

<sup>33</sup> James Gaffney, "Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel," *Theological Studies* 26, no. 2 (June 1965): 231; Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 28; Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 205.

binding according to the Torah's standards of two or three witnesses.<sup>34</sup>

**John the Baptist (5:33–35).** He first calls John the Baptist to the stand, putting his testimony in the most persuasive light possible. Jesus's interlocutors sent for John to hear him (5:33a).<sup>35</sup> They are familiar with his testimony (5:33b). He shone with revealed insight like a "burning and shining lamp" (5:35a). Jesus's hearers, at one time, rejoiced in the light of John's prophetic revelation (5:35b). The implication is that trustworthy testimony has been available and remains available, but his hearers are the ones who have changed.

At the same time, the matter of John provides a glimpse into Jesus's epistemological thinking (5:34). John is not the source of the testimony that Jesus "receives" (*λαμβάνω*). Rather, the Father fulfills the official role of second witness (5:32, 36).<sup>36</sup> Though he prefers the Father's testimony, Jesus is enough of an epistemic pragmatist to lean on John's lower-caliber testimony to save his hearers (5:34). He assumes that this appeal to John will leverage more convincing justification to his hearers, because they once respected his testimony, making them more likely to respond

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<sup>34</sup> Contra Morris (*The Gospel According to John*, 324–325), who reads this claim to mean that Jesus's testimony would indeed be untrue if he gave it alone. This interpretation undermines the connection to the two-witness principle (Deut 19:15), which Morris affirms is in the background here. In the Torah, the presence of a second witness changes not the reality of what happened, but the epistemic obligation of the community to respond to the alleged crime. See Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 279–80. In view of the apparently contradictory claim in 8:14, Jesus's statement in 5:31 may be a concession to his interlocutors's evidentiary standard for the sake of argument, which he will go on to satisfy (Thomas W. Simpson, "Testimony in John's Gospel: The Puzzle of 5:31 and 8:14," *Tyndale Bulletin* 65, no. 2 [2014]: 214). But whether or not Jesus agrees that it is finally necessary, he appeals to a multitude of witnesses to demonstrate the Jews's obligation to believe in him by the Torah's bar.

<sup>35</sup> This probably refers to the interview in 1:19–28. See Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 206; Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 202; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:657.

<sup>36</sup> Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 205–206. But does *λαμβάνω* here mean that Jesus receives the Father's testimony of him as an epistemic learner, the way a jury might receive a witness's courtroom testimony? This reading boasts the initial plausibility of matching all the other uses of *λαμβάνω* with the object of *μαρτυρία* in John (3:11, 32, 33). However, the evidence in the near context suggests that by *λαμβάνω*, Jesus means that he places the highest epistemic value on the Father's testimony and banks on its validity to persuade others. First, in verse 36 he uses "have" (*ἔχω*) in a way identical to "receive" in verse 34 and goes on to say that the works he does from the Father constitute this testimony. Second, continuing in verses 37–38, Jesus implies that his hearers should have responded correctly to the outward-facing works of verse 36. So, this testimony is for the epistemic benefit of others, not of Jesus himself.

to Jesus in faith.<sup>37</sup>

**The works given by the Father (5:36).** Moving from John to the Father's greater testimony, Jesus first highlights the works the Father gave him to do. In the Fourth Gospel, the "works" (ἔργα) of Jesus are testimonial load-bearing acts, meant to point to his deity and thus engender faith in their observers (10:25, 38; 14:11; 15:24).<sup>38</sup> "Works" functions as a technical term in John, describing the revelatory nature of Jesus's acts (10:25).<sup>39</sup> Because his works are unique, they bear witness to him in a way that leaves observers without excuse for unbelief (15:24).

Jesus's works do not testify automatically. Works require interpretation, which brings the observer's character into play.<sup>40</sup> Gaffney writes, "On a plane of sheer rational inference the conclusion to be drawn from Jesus' words and works is not an inescapable one."<sup>41</sup> It was a miraculous healing work (5:16) and his corresponding verbal interpretation (5:18) that precipitated the opposition Jesus now addresses.

**The Father himself (5:37–40).** In verse 37, Jesus introduces the Father himself as a witness, distinct from the works he has commissioned. However, the referent of this testimony is ambiguous.<sup>42</sup> In verse 38 he speaks of the Father's voice, form, and

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<sup>37</sup> Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 206.

<sup>38</sup> Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 89–90; Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 196. It is beyond the scope of this study to determine the relationship between Jesus's works and his "signs" (σημεία), which perform a similar epistemic function (e.g., 2:11, 23; 7:31; 20:30–31) (see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2015], 326). A similar complication is determining how these terms relate to the miraculous and non-miraculous deeds of Jesus (see Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 89–91).

<sup>39</sup> Boice, *Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 89–91; Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 206; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 328.

<sup>40</sup> Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John*, Biblical Interpretation Series 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 153.

<sup>41</sup> Gaffney, "Believing and Knowing in the Fourth Gospel," 232. The discussion on 9:1–41 below further demonstrates the ethical non-triviality of interpreting Jesus's works.

<sup>42</sup> Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 266; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 262.

word, and in verse 39 begins explicitly discussing the Scriptures. Are verses 37–39 naming the same witness in different ways, or is the witness in verses 37–38 distinct from the Scriptures?

On the one hand, D. A. Carson takes the witness as “a general reference to all of the Father’s revealing work . . . in antecedent redemptive event, in Scripture, in peculiar attestation of Jesus (as at his baptism), in the life of those who come to recognize who Jesus is.”<sup>43</sup> By contrast, some other interpreters locate this witness apart from the Scriptures, in the Father’s immanent and self-authenticating presence in Jesus.<sup>44</sup> Jesus’s explicit movement toward the Scriptures in verse 39 suggests that he earlier alluded to them in verses 37–38, but this does not require the Father’s witness to coextend with the Scriptures without remainder. The accusations of verse 38 suggest that the answer lies in a distinction between the inner and outer components of God’s revelation in Scripture. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between “sensible” testimony of God consisting of the outward form of his revelation, and “intelligible” testimony consisting of “a vision of his essence,” or a spiritual knowledge of God in Christ. The former relates to the latter through participation: “Christ himself is the natural Word of God. But every word inspired by God is a certain participated likeness of that Word.”<sup>45</sup> Aquinas’s reading is consistent with the pattern noted in chapter 2 of dual layers, sensible and spiritual, in John’s epistemology. Some modern interpreters echo Aquinas’s recognition that in verse 38, Jesus indicts his contemporary Jews for experiencing the outer form of the Scriptures (γραφαί) but not the inner reality of the λόγος to whom they have borne witness all

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<sup>43</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 262; cf. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 328.

<sup>44</sup> Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 267; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 1:227–28; Sanghee M. Ahn, *The Christological Witness Function of the Old Testament Characters in the Gospel of John*, Paternoster Theological Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 255–56.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 5.820–21. He takes the Father’s testimony in verse 37 to be the theophanies at Jesus’s baptism and transfiguration. Nevertheless, the sensible/intelligible distinction applies just as well to the written Scriptures, which would be a less exotic referent in this context than those theophanies which receive no mention in John.



along.<sup>46</sup> This prior rejection of the Scriptures's λόγος becomes manifest in their rejection of Jesus standing before them, the λόγος become flesh.<sup>47</sup>

Jesus is not making a statement about the depth or quality of revelation available to them. Rather, he is casting blame on them for the way they received this revelation. The implication is that if they had heard God's voice, *as they should have*, and if they had seen his form, *as they should have*, and if his word abided in them, *as it should have*, then they would believe in the God-sent Jesus.

**Moses (5:45–47).** Jesus's subsequent movement toward Moses (5:45–47) suggests that his writings in the Torah are the Scriptures to which Jesus refers in verses 38–39. Jesus is not appealing to Moses as a type who personally anticipated him, but a witness who testified about him.<sup>48</sup> Because his interlocutors have not believed Moses's written testimony, they do not believe Jesus (5:46–47). This is equivalent to his previous claim that the word of the Father does not abide in them (5:38). Their non-belief in Jesus so clearly evidences a non-belief in the Torah that Jesus presents Moses as the Jews's accuser at the future judgment. Moses's testimony is therefore trustworthy enough that only vicious thinking can deny it.

### Vices in Operation

In Jesus's telling, his opponents disbelieve because they are afflicted by the vices of prejudice, affective polarization, lovelessness toward God, and the fear of

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<sup>46</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Revised Edition, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 78; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare, and J. K. Riches (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 267; Ridderbos 204; Keener 1:659. For a discussion of these issues revolving around the distinction between γραφαί and λόγος in broader Johannine context, see Ahn, *The Christological Witness Function of the Old Testament Characters in the Gospel of John*, 255–56.

<sup>47</sup> Most interpreters take the ὅτι in verse 38 as explanatory rather than causal. See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 263; Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 267; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 78; Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 204.

<sup>48</sup> Ahn, *The Christological Witness Function of the Old Testament Characters in the Gospel of John*, 261–62.

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**Prejudice.** Jesus tells the Jews that they were “willing (ἠθελήσατε) to rejoice (ἀγαλλιαθῆναι) for a while (πρὸς ὥραν) in [John’s] light” (5:35), implying that their willingness expired. The Jews initially acknowledged John’s testimony as valid, and even responded with joy. Jesus does not specify what turned the tides on their response to John, but it seems likely that Jesus himself as the object of this testimony proved distasteful.<sup>49</sup>

With the phrase “willing to rejoice,” Jesus presents volition as the hinge for affection in John’s hearers. The subtext of this statement is that the window of rejoicing in John’s proclamations closed when his hearers experienced a change of will. At that point, they were no longer “willing to rejoice” in what he was saying. The object of their rejoicing inevitably follows their will. Even though he is recruiting John’s testimony for a marginal epistemic advantage (9:34), Jesus hints in verse 35 that he expects this appeal to have limited effect on his hearers, since the failure of the will that has turned them against John also lies behind their disbelief of Jesus.

Is “unwillingness to believe the truth” a vice? If Jesus’s opponents are set against the truth as such, they are guilty of *epistemic malevolence*.<sup>50</sup> If they casually disregard the truth, they are committing *epistemic insouciance*. However, if they are consciously seeking the truth, then whatever other vices they are committing, these two are not among them.

The available windows into the inner life of Jesus’s interlocutors suggest that they think they are seeking the truth. The whole discourse springs from the Jews’s effort

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<sup>49</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 326; contra Ridderbos (*The Gospel According to John*, 203), who proposes that the turnaround came as a result of a change in opinion about John himself. Carson (*The Gospel According to John*, 261) suggests that they failed to see that Jesus was the object of the testimony from John that excited them. Whatever the precise mechanism, the phrase “willing to rejoice for a while” requires that the change took place in their will.

<sup>50</sup> Jason Baehr defines this as intentional opposition to knowledge, as such (*The Inquiring Mind: On Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 204).

to persecute Jesus for two reasons: because Jesus heals on the Sabbath (5:16) and thus breaks it (5:18a), and because he claims equality with God by calling him “my Father” (5:18b). Their consciousness of motive is clear in verse 18, where John speaks improperly by saying that “he was breaking the Sabbath.” It would fly in the face of John’s Christology to suppose that he is endorsing this claim.<sup>51</sup> The simpler solution is that he is explaining the reasoning of the Jews: because *they thought* he was breaking the Sabbath.<sup>52</sup> Both of these specified motives require persons to think themselves to be searching for the truth. Accordingly, Jesus affirms that they regard themselves as truth-seekers (5:39). Therefore, neither malevolence nor insouciance applies to this situation.

Jesus exposes the Jews for seeking the truth with a predetermined stance against some conclusions to which this quest might lead.<sup>53</sup> Their change of stance regarding John must have been a reaction to what he was saying. Though at one time they were willing to acknowledge, even with joy, that he was shining as a lamp of truth, their love of darkness (cf. 3:19) eventually caught up with them and turned them against the object of John’s testimony. Cassam describes *prejudice* as an attitude vice, a posture toward or away from something that leads to poor thinking.<sup>54</sup> The Jews were open to John’s testimony in principle, but prejudiced against its object, Jesus.

**Affective polarization (5:40).** Jesus accuses his interlocutors of refusing to come to him for eternal life, even though the Scriptures they study testify about him (5:39–40).<sup>55</sup> They are caught in a tragic irony. They have gone to the right source: the

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<sup>51</sup> See the discussion below on 9:1–41 for a fuller defense of why these healings of Jesus do not violate the Sabbath.

<sup>52</sup> Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 198; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:646.

<sup>53</sup> “The opposition is depicted as having already determined the verdict in this controversy or trial at its outset” (Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 198).

<sup>54</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> On the reading of ἐπαυῶτε in the indicative mood, see Barrett, *Gospel According to St. John*, 267; Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 207; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 230; Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 263; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 78; Ridderbos, *The Gospel According*

Scriptures which testify about Jesus. They have done so for the right reason: to find eternal life, an idiomatically Johannine way of describing the *telos* of belief in Jesus (3:16).<sup>56</sup> Yet they have come up short. Why? Because they “refuse to come to [him] that [they] may have life.” The juxtaposition of verses 39 and 40 is striking. By Jesus’s portrayal, the Jews have approached the Scriptures asking, “How do we gain eternal life?” The Scriptures have testified with pointed finger, “Go to Jesus,” and they Jews have looked at him and said, “No, thank you.”

Jesus does not accuse the Jews of disputing the factuality of the biblical testimony of him. Rather, they have succumbed to a personal animus that prevents them from acting on it properly. This is not to say that the Jews would consciously affirm the premise of verse 39b, but that in Jesus’s analysis, their volition has steered the epistemic ship in the wrong direction.

Psychology researchers Bowes et al. define *affective polarization* as “the tendency to perceive the opposing party as immoral and unlikeable.”<sup>57</sup> It is “linked with partisan hostility and undue certainty in one’s political opinions” and has a negative relationship with intellectual humility.<sup>58</sup> These descriptions suggest that affective polarization may be an affective phenomenon that arises from the convergence of multiple intellectual vices, such as intellectual arrogance, dogmatism, and hostility

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*to John*, 294; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 659.

<sup>56</sup> Interpretations differ as to whether Jesus is affirming the Jews’s belief that eternal life is found in the Scriptures. Some scholars answer in the negative because eternal life is found in Christ rather than the Scriptures (Ahn, *The Christological Witness Function of the Old Testament Characters in the Gospel of John*, 258; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 79; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:660). Others answer in the affirmative, though the way the Scriptures give eternal life is by testifying of Jesus, so only the one who believes in Jesus has properly interpreted and profited from them (Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:228; Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 207; Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 205). However, the distinction may not be meaningful, as both sides land in substantially the same place.

<sup>57</sup> Shauna M. Bowes et al., “Intellectual Humility and Between-Party Animus: Implications for Affective Polarization in Two Community Samples,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 88 (October 2020): 1.

<sup>58</sup> Bowes et al., “Intellectual Humility and Between-Party Animus,” 2.

toward others. This shoe fits Jesus’s interlocutors. Their perception of him is tainted by a personal hostility, or “ill-will,”<sup>59</sup> which prevents the Scriptures, which they claim to love, from having their intended testimonial result.

**Lovelessness toward God (5:42).** Jesus goes on to give another character-based reason for the Jews’s rejection of him: “you do not have the love of God within you” (5:42).<sup>60</sup> With this mention of deficient love for God, John has left behind the modern study of intellectual vice. Though the main concepts borrowed from that discipline still apply, the specific vice of failing to love God does not appear in the purview of secular analytic philosophy. However, Christians working in earlier strata of the Aristotelian virtue tradition have argued that love, and specifically love for God, occupies the foremost place among the virtues.

Augustine understands all true virtue as diverse expressions of love for God: “As to virtue leading us to a happy life, I hold virtue to be nothing else than perfect love of God. For the fourfold division of virtue I regard as taken from four forms of love. . . . The object of this love is not anything, but only God, the chief good, the highest wisdom, the perfect harmony.”<sup>61</sup> Two features of Augustine’s assertion merit special notice. First, it comes as a God-centered reflection on Aristotle’s *eudaimonistic* presentation of virtue (“as to virtue leading us to a happy life . . .”). Second, the sum of virtue is not love in the abstract, but love of God in particular. While love of God is not specifically an intellectual virtue, the responsibilist approach of this study focuses on the moral dimension of right knowing. If moral character has any effect at all upon the quality of

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<sup>59</sup> Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 205.

<sup>60</sup> This is an objective genitive: they do not love God (cf. 3:19). See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 264; Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 364; Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 269.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, 15.25. Thomas Aquinas concurs, “Charity is a virtue, for, since charity attains God, it unites us to God” (*Summa Theologica*, 2.2.23.3.Corp).

one's thinking, then surely a lack of love for God qualifies.

Both the flow of Jesus's discourse and the centrality Augustine assigns to love suggest that this dire verdict underlies the personal animus that prevents the Jews from responding to the testimony of the Scriptures (5:39) with faith in Jesus (5:40). In case the reader wonders why they are so prejudiced and affectively polarized against Jesus, he goes all the way down to the foundation: their lovelessness toward God (5:42), combined with the fact that Jesus comes in God's name (5:43a), makes him a special target of their rejection. His contrast with the hypothetical "another" who "comes in his own name" (5:43b) illustrates that their antipathy against Jesus is not *in spite of* his coming from the Father, but *because of* it.

**Conformity and the fear of man (5:44).** Jesus's rhetorical question in verse 44 names another character-based barrier to belief: the Jews "receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God." The parallel of "receive" (*λαμβάνω*) with "seek" (*ζητέω*) suggests that the former is functioning more actively and volitionally than simply "come to possess."<sup>62</sup> The deficiency in the Jews's desire is the source from which they seek glory. The close parallel with 12:43 illuminates what Jesus means by "glory." There, in the shadow of the Pharisees's threat of synagogue expulsion, the authorities who "believe" in Jesus shrink back from confessing him openly. John explains the internal valuation of competing goods that leads them to this choice, using language almost identical to 5:44: "for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God." In its context, the "glory" in 12:43 refers to approval and praise from others, inclusion in the web of social and commercial ties

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<sup>62</sup> Moreover, in verse 34 Jesus used *λαμβάνω* in a way that likewise cannot passively mean "come to possess," but must be something more volitional. If *λαμβάνω* meant "come to possess," this statement would not be true, because he does possess John's testimony about him. Rather, he is saying, "I do not put much stock in John's testimony, because I have the Father's much greater testimony." In other words, Jesus's use of *λαμβάνω* in both verses 34 and 44 is more axiological and volitional than "come to possess." See Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:660; Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*, 202, 205n55.

that the synagogue provides.<sup>63</sup> Believing in Jesus openly would lead to God's approval in the form of eternal life. On the other hand, not confessing Jesus would leave intact their approval from man in the form of synagogue membership. Their choice reflects their priorities.<sup>64</sup>

Linda Zagzebski names *conformity* as an intellectual vice, which partially characterizes the error of the Jews here.<sup>65</sup> They perceive that they exist in a social structure in which certain epistemic choices will cause them to fit in with the grain of their community, and others will not. Their desire not to stick out shapes their thinking. However, parallel with that matter of love discussed above, the problem is far more theocentric. They are not simply going with the human flow; they are expressing a preference for man over God. This must be a corollary of lovelessness toward God. Because they undervalue him, they undervalue his reward. The Bible presents *fear of man* as the vice that opposes the foundational virtue of fear of the Lord (Prov 29:25; cf. 9:10; Isa 51:12–13; Jer 1:8; Luke 12:4; 1 Pet 3:14). Desiring glory from God is a Johannine way of describing the fear of God. Jesus's insight is that desires that are disordered at this level cannot help but shape one's cognition.

## Conclusion

Jesus confronts the Jews with a battery of divinely appointed witnesses who support his claims to having divine origin, work, and authority. John, Jesus's works, the

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<sup>63</sup> Jeffrey M Tripp, "Claiming Ignorance and Intimidating Witnesses: Reading John 9 in Greco-Roman Forensic Context," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (July 2018): 487.

<sup>64</sup> The parallel with 12:43 need not imply that all the circumstantial details in 5:44 are identical. There is no reason to suppose that the synagogue membership of these "Jews" is on the line here. In fact, it is plausible that some of them will go on to be the Pharisees whose threat of synagogue expulsion against believers receives mention in 12:43. But the same broader issues are at play, and Jesus's interlocutors make the same valuation. There is some form of human approval and praise that they must forfeit to believe in Jesus.

<sup>65</sup> Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, 152.

Father testifying in the Logos, and Moses have all pointed to Jesus as the object of faith. It is to no avail. These testimonies cannot work because the Jews face Jesus with prejudice and affective polarization that stem from deep-seated lovelessness toward God and a fear of man over fear of God. Again, volition controls how those who see and hear testimony process it and form beliefs in relation to it.

### **The Trial of the Man Born Blind (9:1–41)**

The forensic scene following Jesus's healing of a blind man serves as a prominent example of valid testimony about Jesus that hearers reject. It consists of seven scenes: (1) healing (9:1–7), (2) neighbors's discovery of the healing (9:8–12), (3) first testimony for the Pharisees (9:13–17), (4) appeal to the man's parents (9:18–23), (5) second testimony and confrontation (9:24–34), (6) gathering of the outcast (9:35–38), (7) judgment of the willfully blind (9:39–41).<sup>66</sup> The testimonial event and its post facto interpretation, which mark the central interest of this study, occupy scenes 3–6. I will walk through them in turn, discussing the epistemic vices that characters exhibit.

However, again I must consider whether the narrative features testimony that is sufficiently reliable to render disbelief morally vicious. Several lines of evidence point to the affirmative. In general terms, the narrative presents the man as a model of factual and courageous testimony about Jesus: "His dogged persistence in declaring the facts about his blindness and his healing by Jesus, and still more his bold resistance of attempts by the religious authorities to discredit Jesus are remarkable."<sup>67</sup> The details reinforce this picture. Keener notes that recognition of the healing by the neighbors, who already knew the man (9:8–10), supports his testimony that a healing occurred.<sup>68</sup> Further, the

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<sup>66</sup> These section titles are mine, but for divisions see Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 73n27; J Warren Holleran, "Seeing the Light: A Narrative Reading of John 9," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 69, no. 1 (1993): 14.

<sup>67</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 161.

<sup>68</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:783.



Pharisees's initiative in asking the man what happened (9:15) implies an initial acknowledgment on their part that he has something to say.<sup>69</sup> Finally, two literary clues point to this man as "a model disciple."<sup>70</sup> First, Jesus fades from the scene through the heart of the action, and the healed man carries on as the protagonist. Second, he is the character who undergoes the most development. Therefore, John presents this healed man as a model firsthand witness of Jesus's healing work, who gradually matures into a confessor of Jesus's identity (9:38). Refusal to believe his testimony is a moral and epistemic problem.

### **First Testimony for the Pharisees (9:13–17)**

After the neighbors's initial recognition that the man has been healed (9:8–10), the temporal setting of the Sabbath drives the subsequent action. John notes it when the neighbors bring the man to the Pharisees (9:14). The first hint of epistemic mischief comes with the conjunction *οὐν* (9:15), which indicates that the Pharisees's questioning of the man is driven by their interest in persecuting this perceived Sabbath violation. From the start, their investigation is targeting Jesus.<sup>71</sup>

The exact relationship between *bias* and *prejudice* is debatable. Some authors use the terms side by side in apparently synonymous ways.<sup>72</sup> Others use bias and prejudice to describe positive and negative versions of the same kind of posture,

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<sup>69</sup> Holleran, "Seeing the Light," 19.

<sup>70</sup> Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 280.

<sup>71</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 156; Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 282. This intentionality in their questioning finds further support in Jesus's prior history of Sabbath controversies (5:9b–10; 7:21–23), the ensuing progress of this narrative, and the forensic tenor of this whole interaction. On the latter, Tripp ("Claiming Ignorance and Intimidating Witnesses," 472–73) writes, "Since John reflects forensic process and rhetorical tropes, it is possible to view the interrogation as a pretrial hearing assessing whether the man would be a good witness for the prosecution of Jesus." Finally, the intragroup deliberative question about "such signs" (9:16) implies that these Pharisees are investigating this event against the backdrop of a broader body of Jesus's work.

<sup>72</sup> William T. O'Donohue, "Oppression, Privilege, Bias, Prejudice, and Stereotyping: Problems in the APA Code of Ethics," *Ethics & Behavior* 26, no. 7 (October 2016): 527–544.

respectively.<sup>73</sup> However, the best way to define the relationship sees bias as a stance toward or against a person or thing, and prejudice as a preliminary judgment that can be a mechanism of negative bias.<sup>74</sup>

Accordingly, the Pharisees's targeted questioning about the Sabbath healing exposes an initial bias against Jesus. The narrative has not exposed enough of their inner life to warrant ascribing prejudice to them. The reader does not yet know why they are trying to pin a Sabbath violation on him, but they do not enter this scene as neutral factfinders.<sup>75</sup>

When the man gives his testimony, some of the Pharisees respond with an immediate judgment that Jesus is not from God (9:16a). They reason from a simple syllogism: (1) Jesus breaks the Sabbath; (2) one sent by God would keep the Sabbath, thus; (3) Jesus is not from God. Yet another group of Pharisees responds with less certainty, seeing the evidence as more mixed because of Jesus's signs (9:16b).

These two side-by-side responses demonstrate cases of *dogmatism*, both with and without *closed-mindedness*. First, both groups of Pharisees are being dogmatic—they are holding Jesus to a certain interpretation of the Sabbath law that creates conflict between the works of Jesus and the Torah. To understand this issue requires answering why, in John's perspective, Jesus's Sabbath healings do not constitute sin. The answer is twofold, one divine and one human.

The divine reason is that the heavenly prototype of the Sabbath, God's own rest at the culmination of creation, does not preclude him from continuing the life-giving

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<sup>73</sup> Parimal K. Bag, Bibhas Saha, and Shiva Sikdar, "Prejudice, Bias and Identity Neutral Policy," *Social Choice & Welfare* 56, no. 1 (January 2021): 173–203.

<sup>74</sup> This usage is consistent with the title of Terrance Hurley, "Commentary: Is It Possible to Determine the Extent to Which Informational Asymmetries and Prejudice Bias Responses?," *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 594–97.

<sup>75</sup> The fact that this event comes on the heels of earlier Sabbath controversies about Jesus further mitigates against the simplistic ascription of prejudice to these characters.

work that upholds creation. Paul Rainbow notes, “Though he finished his creative work on the seventh day, by sustaining life every day he continues to labor in his own Sabbath rest (Jn 5:17).”<sup>76</sup> Insofar as Jesus shares this life-giving divine work with his Father (5:21), the human Sabbath law cannot stop him from working. The human reason is that the boundary he violates is the halakhic standard rather than the true intent of Sabbath:

Jesus lost the Pharisees’ support by repeatedly ignoring their rule against healing people on the Sabbath (Jn 5:1–16; 9:1–17) and by shaming them in public for missing the deeper humanitarian values behind the biblical statute (Jn 7:22–24; 8:15). . . . Arguing from the legitimacy of circumcising on the Sabbath, to making a whole man well (Jn 7:23), Jesus invoked the rabbinic rule of *qal wahomer* (“from the lesser to the greater”). . . . The requirement to perform a circumcision on the eighth day had already been judged to override Sabbath restrictions (Jn 7:22–23; *m. Sabb.* 18:3; 19:1–3; *m. Ned.* 3:11).<sup>77</sup>

The Pharisees have failed to apply to the Sabbath healings the same theological-moral reasoning that has already led them to accept Sabbath circumcision. This inconsistency shows that they have distorted the Sabbath into something that God did not intend in the Torah. Both groups are hung up on their interpretation of the Sabbath law. The problem is not that they believe something wrong, but that they take it as a given that cannot be negotiated—they are being dogmatic. This position makes it next to impossible to conclude anything good about Jesus.

However, what differentiates the groups is closed-mindedness. The former group is closed-minded, so Jesus’s works do not register as relevant evidence. The latter group is ambivalent because, to their credit, they are taking the evidence seriously. The visible signs and their dogmatic reading of the law have put them on the horns of a dilemma that finds no resolution at this point in the narrative.<sup>78</sup> “So” (οὕτως) in verse 17

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<sup>76</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 81.

<sup>77</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 60–61, 133–34; cf. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 156–57; Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 157; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 175; Paul S. Coxon, *Exploring the New Exodus in John: A Biblical Theological Investigation of John Chapters 5–10* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource, 2014), 275–76.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln writes about verse 16, “Is Jesus to be viewed as a sinner or from God? Those who stress the law and Jesus’ violation of the Sabbath come to the former conclusion. But those who

implies that the indecisive result of the first round of testimony drives them back to the healed man for more testimony, along with his interpretation.

### **Appeal to the Man's Parents (9:18–23)**

In verse 18 the healed man's interlocutors switch from the Pharisees to the Jews. The relationship between these two groups in John is complex. To trace a coherent vice-epistemic profile of Jesus's opponents requires determining what continuity, if any, this new group has with the prior one.

Other than their distinct titles, two pieces of evidence point to discontinuity between the groups. First, they occupy distinct roles as literary characters throughout John, and the interplay between their actions here reflects those broader patterns. The Jews represent unbelief toward Jesus: "The hostile Jews represent the response of unbelief and rejection of Jesus' revelation. . . . Through the Jews, John explores the heart and soul of unbelief."<sup>79</sup> Complementing them are the Pharisees, who represent the persecutory impulse against Jesus: "If the unbelief of the world is represented by the Jews, then in similar fashion the hostility of the Jews toward Jesus is concentrated in the Pharisees."<sup>80</sup> These roles explain why the group interacting with the healed man switches identifiers at verse 18, the moment when the Pharisees's prosecution of a Sabbath violation feeds into the book's larger pattern of the Jews's unbelief.<sup>81</sup> The second piece of evidence for discontinuity is that taking them as distinct groups lends the whole account a certain symmetry, as the man moves from neighbors (9:8–12) to Pharisees (9:13–17) to

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are open to the witness of Jesus' works by seeing the sign are also open to a different conclusion" (*Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000], 99). Openness is the crucial concept here. Their inability to yield to Jesus's works-based witness demonstrates the closed-mindedness of their appropriation of the law. See also 7:40–43, where the narrator expects Jesus's observers to let the self-authenticating power of his words trump what seem like good conclusions based on their partial knowledge of his earthly origins vis-à-vis the Scriptural testimony.

<sup>79</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 129.

<sup>80</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 131.

<sup>81</sup> Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 131.

the Jews (9:24–34), each interaction ending with a confession (9:11, 17, 33).<sup>82</sup>

However, continuities also exist between the groups. The synagogue expulsion threat attributed to the Jews in 9:22 is almost identical to that attributed to the Pharisees in 12:42. Moreover, the Jews’s next questioning of the man in verse 24 is called “the second time.” Finally, the Pharisees seamlessly reappear at the conclusion of the story (9:40–41).

In general terms, many interpreters have identified the Pharisees as a subset of the Jews in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>83</sup> Bennema takes this to be the relationship between the groups in this case: the Jews appearing in verse 18 are a larger group that includes the Pharisees who began their investigation in verse 15.<sup>84</sup> This arrangement makes best sense of both the continuities and discontinuities between the groups.

Since a thread of continuity ties the Jews with the Pharisees in verses 13–17, their disbelief of the fact of the healing in verse 18 shows them backtracking on a premise that they accepted as a given in verse 16. Lincoln calls it “a change of tactics on the part of these authorities” as they look for another way out of the disturbing implications of Jesus’s healing work.<sup>85</sup> They are exhibiting the vice of *testimonial injustice* or *poorly-tuned trust*, withdrawing the appropriate credibility from the healed man’s testimony that they extended as recently as verse 17.<sup>86</sup> While Fricker discusses testimonial injustice that

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<sup>82</sup> Zimmerman, “‘The Jews’: Unreliable Figures or Unreliable Narration?” 91.

<sup>83</sup> Uta Poplutz, “The Pharisees: A House Divided,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmerman, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 119; Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 130; Zimmerman, “‘The Jews’: Unreliable Figures or Unreliable Narration?” 116.

<sup>84</sup> Cornelis Bennema, “The Identity and Composition of Οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Gospel of John,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 60, no. 2 (2009): 247. Presumably, bystanders who are less familiar with the healed man than the neighbors have joined the Pharisees to constitute this larger group, the Jews.

<sup>85</sup> Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 283.

<sup>86</sup> On testimonial injustice, see Miranda Fricker, “Epistemic Injustice and a Role for Virtue in the Politics of Knowing,” *Metaphilosophy* 34, nos. 1–2 (2003): 154–73. “Poorly-tuned trust” is adapted from Callahan and O’Connor’s discussion of the counterpart virtue, well-tuned trust (“Well-Tuned Trust as an Intellectual Virtue,” in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy

is generated by prejudice against the witness,<sup>87</sup> the narrative at this point gives no suggestion that the Jews are personally prejudiced against the healed man. Rather, their bias against him is generated by their aversion to what he is saying.

The Jews call in the man's parents to corroborate his claim to having been blind (9:18b–19). If they had met this man in a vacuum and heard his story, seeking further testimony would not only be justified, but a virtuous avoidance of gullibility. However, he came along with a crowd of neighbors and bystanders, who ostensibly gave their testimony as they presented him (9:13). The pile of sound testimony behind them illustrates how poorly-tuned their trust mechanism is. They are motivated by a search for different answers than well-tuned trust would lead them to accept from the warranted witnesses.

The parents answer all the questions they were asked, plus an unsolicited plea of ignorance on a notable unasked question—who healed their son (9:20–23)? They have sniffed out the Jews's reason for asking, which is the quest for a pretense for persecuting Jesus.<sup>88</sup> With great care lest their response be taken as an implied confession of Jesus—since it denies his persecutors the outlet they seek—they go out of their way to claim ignorance. Again, the Jews's motive in asking is biased against Jesus.

At the same time, their questioning of the man and his parents displays another example of *epistemic insouciance*. Their outer actions reveal that their inner dialog is not asking, “What is true?” but rather, “How can we prove that Jesus is not from God?” The fact that they have already passed judgment on anyone who would confess Jesus (9:22), even as they themselves struggle to process testimony that could validate such a confession, deepens the picture of epistemic insouciance. What drives their bias is an

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O'Connor [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014]).

<sup>87</sup> Fricker, “Epistemic Injustice and a Role for Virtue in the Politics of Knowing,” 164–65.

<sup>88</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 100.

interest in power over truth.<sup>89</sup>

## **Second Testimony and Confrontation (9:24–34)**

The Jews continue to be pressed by their dogmatic certainty of Jesus’s sinfulness, yet they continue to lack an outlet for this epistemic pressure. They have failed to discredit the man’s claim by means of his parents. Finding no release valve there, they return to double down on the healed man himself. They no longer ask what happened, but insist that he confess their predetermined right answer. “Give glory to God” (9:24a) attempts to put the man under a solemn oath (cf. Josh 7:19).<sup>90</sup> The subtext of saying “We know that this man is a sinner” is to intimidate the man into giving the answer they are looking for.<sup>91</sup> Again they manifest brazen epistemic insouciance, by now shedding any illusion of a fair trial and instructing the witness on the answer he must give.<sup>92</sup>

Their testimonial injustice, dogmatism, and closed-mindedness continue.<sup>93</sup> The disagreement that divided the Pharisees in verse 16 has now vanished. In a statement that echoes Nicodemus’s closed-minded assurance (3:2), they proclaim “we know” that Jesus is a sinner (9:24b). The verdict has been reached.<sup>94</sup> Quassim Cassam presents the *need for*

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<sup>89</sup> Coxon cites 11:47–48 and 12:19 as complementary examples of the authorities bypassing the question of truthfulness and fixating on how people believing in Jesus affects their own power (*Exploring the New Exodus in John*, 277). Keener sees dogmatism and bias here (*The Gospel of John*, 1:789). Tripp calls this “back-channel intimidation,” using the threat of ostracism from the social and commercial networks of which the synagogue was the epicenter (“Claiming Ignorance and Intimidating Witnesses,” 486–87).

<sup>90</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 100; Tripp, “Claiming Ignorance and Intimidating Witnesses,” 487; Coxon, *Exploring the New Exodus in John*, 277; Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 1:290.

<sup>91</sup> Coxon, *Exploring the New Exodus in John*, 278.

<sup>92</sup> Keener writes, “Their violation of what we know of traditional early Jewish principles concerning evidence suggests a bias so extreme it flouts any amount of evidence provided,” (*The Gospel of John*, 1:786).

<sup>93</sup> Lincoln calls this a “stubborn refusal to believe his account” (*Truth on Trial*, 101).

<sup>94</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 99; Beasley-Murray writes, “No evidence can alter that conviction!” (*John*, 158).

*closure* as a “‘psychological’ component of closed-mindedness,” or a mechanism that drives it.<sup>95</sup> Attributes of this character trait include:

1. reluctance to consider novel information once a given conception has been adopted or “frozen upon”
2. denial or reinterpretation of information that is inconsistent with one’s prior conception
3. displaying high levels of self-confidence and self-assuredness
4. being intolerant of others whose opinions contradict one’s own; and
5. having an authoritarian style of leadership and decision-making.<sup>96</sup>

All these attributes apply to the Jews at this point in the narrative. What is more, they show a trajectory of increasing closure. Whatever openness to evidence that even a portion of them exhibited in verse 16 has swung closed on their dogmatic certainty that Jesus is a sinner, not a man from God. It is no longer time for consideration and uncertainty, but to impose their will on the uncooperative witness.<sup>97</sup>

After the man responds by resting on the fact of his healing while pleading ignorance on what it implies about Jesus (9:25), they press him to recount his experience once again (9:26). The mounting epistemic pressure continues to seek an outlet. Beasley-Murray detects here an attempt to get the man to contradict his earlier statement and

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<sup>95</sup> Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 33. Blissett and Sibbald, writing in the field of medicine, describe premature closure bias as the assignment of a diagnosis before it has been adequately verified (“Closing in on Premature Closure Bias,” *Medical Education* 51, no. 11 [November 2017]: 1095). This combination of the concepts of closure and bias serves as a fitting parallel for what the Pharisees have done. Closure itself is not necessarily a problem, but vice occurs when one is biased by intellectual arrogance toward closure before it is time. The posture of semi-openness expressed by some of the Pharisees in verse 16 could have led to much different conclusions if they had been willing to keep the door propped open and receive the evidence differently than they did.

<sup>96</sup> List is from Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, 29.

<sup>97</sup> By the end of the story (9:38–41), it is evident that the Pharisees and the healed man have traveled in opposite epistemic directions (Andy M. Reimer, “The Man Born Blind: True Disciple of Jesus,” in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmerman, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*; 314 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013], 436–37). This mind closure is a specific example of the Pharisees’s negative progress.



discredit his testimony.<sup>98</sup>

The man's response, "Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" (9:27) ironically exposes how bare they have laid their motive: they are desperate to find a way to convict Jesus in the face of unassailable testimony to the contrary. These sarcastic questions suppose that the Jews's repeated hearing of these clear facts can only move them toward belief. The "why" question, in particular, strikes the reader as a haunting epistemic summary of the whole account and invites her to self-examination about how she receives testimony of Jesus. It demonstrates the volitional nature of hearing. No amount of evidence will overcome the anti-Jesus and pro-self biases that the Pharisees and the Jews brought into this episode.

They crown their intellectually vicious assault with a biting rejoinder that escalates from sarcasm to accusation (9:28a). They fall back on Moses as an epistemic safe harbor (9:28b–29), ostensibly in reference to the Sabbath regulation they purport to be enforcing. While they mean for their ignorance of Jesus to score a rhetorical point against him, it ironically strikes against them. They are making themselves the reference point for valid knowledge, displaying both *intellectual arrogance* and *intellectual haughtiness*.<sup>99</sup> The former is non-interpersonal, referring to overconfidence in one's epistemic excellence.<sup>100</sup> The latter is interpersonal, looking at others with disdain because one perceives them to be intellectually inferior.<sup>101</sup>

Moreover, this statement features the sort of in-group versus out-group thinking characteristic of *emulousness*. The Jews pit themselves against the healed man as their "other," creating polarization. This othering move insulates them from any

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<sup>98</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 158.

<sup>99</sup> Boice observes that here "the Jews argue from their own knowledge and authority" (*Witness and Revelation in the Gospel of John*, 42.).

<sup>100</sup> Tanesini, "'Calm Down, Dear,'" 82–83.

<sup>101</sup> Tanesini, "'Calm Down, Dear,'" 73–74.

obligation to heed the man's testimony. Lincoln writes, "They have attempted to define true Jewish identity in terms of their perspective on adherence to the Torah."<sup>102</sup> Through the narrative, the man has progressed toward greater clarity about Jesus, evidenced by his syllogism which leads him to conclude that Jesus is from God (9:30–33). But simultaneous with this development, "The religious authorities increasingly define themselves in opposition to the claims that emerge."<sup>103</sup>

By verses 30–33, the man has reached the point of preaching to his opponents. They respond with an *ad hominem* attack ("You were born in utter sin") and a refusal to receive his teaching (9:34).<sup>104</sup> Not only is their intellectual haughtiness running at full steam, but now they finally lay bare an undercurrent of *prejudice* beneath their bias and testimonial injustice against him. As noted above, the earlier portions of the narrative displayed their bias against the man without suggesting any motive of personal prejudice against him. Now, however, in categorizing this man as a sinner whose testimony is unreliable, they have found their final excuse for dismissing him.<sup>105</sup>

### **Gathering of the Outcast (9:35–38) and Judgment of the Willfully Blind (9:39–41)**

These final two scenes together provide "a narrative embodiment of Jesus' earlier words about the judgment produced by the light coming into the world (3:19–

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<sup>102</sup> Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 283.

<sup>103</sup> Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, 290.

<sup>104</sup> Beasley-Murray makes the astute observation that their claim that he was born in sin, which refers to the widely supposed reason for his blindness (cf. 9:2), blows their cover by revealing that they were never uncertain as to this man's former blindness (*John*, 159).

<sup>105</sup> It is impossible to determine whether this prejudice has developed in their minds only now, as a final resort in the failure of all their other attempts to escape the testimony, or whether it was silently directing their inquiry all along. Their opposition to Jesus in view of his Sabbath healing has provided enough fuel to their animosity that prejudice against the witness has not been necessary to explain the action.

21).”<sup>106</sup> As Jesus reappears after the Jews’s climactic rejection of the healed man, he sorts the two groups according to their contrasting responses to him: “illumination” versus “blindness and obduracy.” This, rather than condemning, is the judgment he came into the world to perform (9:39; cf. 12:47).<sup>107</sup> “Those who do not see,” like the once-blind man, come to see. “Those who see,” such as the Pharisees and Jews who have demonstrated crippling intellectual vices, become blind.<sup>108</sup>

Some Pharisees hear him discuss blindness and ask him whether they qualify (9:40). The reader expects the correct answer to be “Yes,”<sup>109</sup> but Jesus takes their question in a different direction. He interprets their “blind” as something not blamable—“the kind of blindness that knows it is blindness,”<sup>110</sup> so it does not apply to them. Rather, they have guilt precisely because they claim to see (9:41).<sup>111</sup> This account encapsulates the way that volition regulates the usage of one’s epistemic faculties. Beasley-Murray writes, “They certainly saw Jesus at work and heard his proclamation, but because they thought that they had the light, they refused to acknowledge that his works and word were from God.”<sup>112</sup>

Jesus’s words touch on the matter of blamability which arose in chapter 3. There, addressing Tanesini’s and Cassam’s views, I discussed the potential distinction

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<sup>106</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 102.

<sup>107</sup> Saeed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 120 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 385–86.

<sup>108</sup> Consistent with the broader sense/spiritual layering of knowledge in John (see chapter 2), throughout this narrative the healing of physical blindness serves as a symbol for the inner enlightenment about Jesus that this sign and all the others are supposed to effect. See Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 160; Holleran, “Seeing the Light,” 8.

<sup>109</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 102.

<sup>110</sup> Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 102–103.

<sup>111</sup> Sunny Kuan-Hui Wang, *Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 435 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 171; Reimer, “The Man Born Blind: True Disciple of Jesus,” 437; Holleran, “Seeing the Light,” 16.

<sup>112</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 160.

between intellectual vices that are merely reprehensible and those that are blameworthy, or culpable of personal wrongdoing. Whether or not this distinction is valid, the narrator presents the claim “we see” (cf. 9:24) as grounds for ascribing blameworthy vice to the Pharisees and Jews.

### **Conclusion**

As the Pharisees and the Jews put Jesus on trial through the proxy of the man-born-blind, the moral character of their knowing undergoes an equal and opposite development as that of their witness. It begins with hints of bias against Jesus which compels them to find a way to convict him as a Sabbath breaker. However, as the scene wears on and their options run out, they find themselves progressively hardening into unbelief and seeking epistemic tactics that are increasingly overt. Along the way, they display dogmatism, closed-mindedness, testimonial injustice, poorly-tuned trust, epistemic insouciance, arrogance, haughtiness, emulousness, and prejudice. Jesus’s climactic judgment against the Pharisees confirms the blameworthiness of their wrong thinking. It is their competing claim to knowledge that both blocks them from seeing the truth and renders them guilty.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This thesis took as its starting point the oft-recognized division between the sensual and spiritual layers of knowing Jesus in John's Gospel. All the characters who encounter Jesus have access to the former, but many are unable to attain the latter. Meanwhile, scholars have shown that literary characters in John serve as examples who demonstrate for readers a variety of believing and unbelieving responses to Jesus. I introduced the concept of epistemic vices—character traits which interfere volitionally with the proper function of epistemic faculties—as a tool for helping to answer, at least at the human and moral level, why characters fail to move from seeing and hearing to believing.

I then tested this concept on three cases of unbelieving response to testimony in the Fourth Gospel: Nicodemus and some disciples of John the Baptist (2:23–3:36), the Jews who oppose Jesus after a Sabbath healing (5:30–47), and the Pharisees and Jews who challenge him after another Sabbath healing (9:1–41). Intellectual vices that appeared in these narratives and discourse included affective polarization, bias, closed-mindedness, conformity, dogmatism, emulousness, epistemic insouciance, intellectual arrogance and haughtiness, poorly-tuned trust, prejudice, testimonial injustice, and wishful thinking. This exercise demonstrated both the value and limitations of using concepts from analytic virtue epistemology to exegete the Johannine text.

In terms of value, one might wonder whether a vice-epistemic analysis is an imposition from the outside that strains any regard for authorial intent. However, these test cases demonstrated that, while terms such as reliabilism, responsibilism, and the names of these vices do not appear in the text, the concepts do. Time and again, it is

moral character that inhibits hearers of testimony from believing. The John 9 narrative showed this with particular vividness, with its dynamic movement of antagonists into progressively deeper expressions of intellectual vice. The juxtaposition with the contrasting epistemic journey of the healed man showed that, consistent with his usual literary strategy, the author uses these characters to demonstrate to his readers the ways of hearing that will and will not lead to saving faith. Moreover, a vice-epistemic reading of John's disciples (3:22–30) helped to draw out character deficiency where mere misunderstanding may first appear to the reader. Therefore, even if the text does not name vices or define explicitly how they prevent one from moving from lower to higher knowledge of Jesus, the narrative implicitly shows these concepts in action.

However, two additional vices appeared in the study of John 5:30–47 (cf. 3:19) which show the limitations of modern vice epistemology in explaining the moral message of the Johannine text: lovelessness toward God and the fear of man. The inclusion of these moral deficiencies in the hearers does not put pressure on the *eudaimonistic* model of hearing and knowing, but it does increase the breadth and theocentricity of the menu of vices one might find in the text.

Moreover, it hardly needs to be said that the theocentricity of these vices makes them the most important of all. While dogmatism, closed-mindedness, and intellectual arrogance recurred frequently in the case studies, the moral of John's story is not that readers should be open-minded and intellectually humble. These virtues do serve as epistemic lubricants, but they need a positive value judgment to guide them toward the epistemic end with which John is concerned—belief in Jesus as the Christ. This volitional directionality is what love for God (5:42) and the desire for his honor (5:44) provide. Generic intellectual virtue does not find Jesus, but Godward intellectual virtue does. Godward, open-minded intellectual humility has listened carefully and lovingly to the testimony of the Scriptures and is therefore expecting their telos, Jesus (5:39). When he appears speaking the words of God and doing the works of God because he embodies the

word of God as the Logos,<sup>1</sup> the Godward intellectually humble and open-minded finally recognize the one they have been prepared to love. The result is faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 101.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE MINDS OF MEN UNDER VICIOUS HABITS: INTELLECTUAL VICE AND TESTIMONY REJECTION IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

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Trustworthy witnesses testify about Jesus's identity in John's Gospel. Some hearers respond in belief, but others respond in unbelief because they are in ethical and epistemic darkness. Intellectual vice, part of what constitutes this darkness, prevents the proper working of faculties, such as hearing testimony with an appropriate degree of trust. I examine cases in the Fourth Gospel in which testimony about Jesus fails to result in belief, determining which intellectual vices the characters exhibit and how these vices stand in the way of belief. Vices that appear include affective polarization, bias, closed-mindedness, conformity, dogmatism, emulousness, epistemic insouciance, fear of man, intellectual arrogance and haughtiness, lovelessness toward God, poorly-tuned trust, prejudice, testimonial injustice, and wishful thinking. I argue that this approach of studying intellectual vice coheres with John's purpose in writing and the intended function of literary characters in the Gospel account.



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