

# **Intellectual Virtues in *Rear Window*: A New Look at L.B. Jefferies's Look**

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## ABSTRACT

*Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window is a pillar of American cinematic history. Few would doubt that much. More questionable, though, is the moral character of the film's famed protagonist, L.B. Jefferies, who draws sincere pleasure from peeking into the private lives of his neighbors. The moral blameworthiness of Jefferies's objectifying voyeurism has long been intimated by many scholars who have written about the film. I take these intimations as a starting point, translating and explaining the morally blameworthy dimensions of Jefferies's intrusive looks in terms of Aristotelian philosophy. Following this, however, I appeal to the work of twenty-first-century responsibilist virtue epistemology to draw out the intellectual praiseworthiness of Jefferies's obsessive gaze (a conclusion respective of but unconcerned with these actions' immorality). Because shots from the protagonist's point-of-view comprise so much of the film's visual storytelling, I argue that the film's primary narrative opposition is not between good and evil or secrets and discovery as one might assume; instead, the narrative opposition, I argue, is present in spectatorial judgement—the concurrent sense of moral blameworthiness and intellectual praiseworthiness that one is prone to feel when seeing through the eyes of L.B. Jefferies.*

The role of looking for *Rear Window*'s curious protagonist, L.B. Jefferies (James Stewart), is an oft written about aspect of the film. Laura Mulvey, for instance, has appealed to Jefferies's controlling look in her well-known argument for the male gaze of traditional narrative cinema (15–6). Building on Jean Douchet's remark that Jefferies's spectating is an analogue for spectatorship in the cinema (8), Robert Stam and Roberta Pearson have explored the theoretical and moral implications of this analogy, concluding that *Rear Window* is "at once a cautionary tale for voyeurs and an ode to the cinema, present[ing] both alternatives with extraordinary lucidity" (205). Less cited but no less symptomatic of the critical relevance of Jefferies's gaze, Michael Walker has outlined voyeurism as one of the motifs central to Hitchcock's narratives, a chapter in which he posits *Rear Window* as cinema's "most profound film about voyeurism" (170). Whether one agrees with Walker's definitive statement is beside the point: the film's use of voyeurism is certainly profound.

Admittedly, this quick summary of writings barely scratches the surface of the critical approaches to the film. But while these studies and others like them deftly emphasize the psychological, narratological, moral, and even political implications of the protagonist's voyeuristic acts, the authors have a tendency to subordinate voyeurism's epistemological features: for example, when Stam and Pearson note in passing that Jefferies's look evolves "from scopophilia to epistemophilia, from indifference to concern" as the film progresses (203). The present essay, then, seeks to enhance the epistemological considerations of Jefferies's voyeuristic acts and the oppositional tension they create. After briefly demonstrating the similitude between Jefferies's acts of looking and Aristotle's characterization of incontinence, I will describe the various facets of so-called virtue epistemology to then show that Jefferies's morally suspect actions concurrently exemplify intellectually virtuous behavior. This, as a result, entails that an undergirding opposition of spectatorial judgement—moral blameworthiness on the one hand, intellectual praiseworthiness on the other—underwrites the look that constitutes much of the narrative in Hitchcock's film.

Lying dormant beneath this appeal to virtue epistemology is, of course, the underlying assumption that Hitchcock—or at least his methodical filmmaking—was to some degree philosophical. As Irving Singer notes, Hitchcock would have questioned such an assumption, viewing himself more as an entertainer who, accordingly, entertains (7). Like Singer, though, I see no need for Hitchcock's reservations to prevent philosophical readings of his work (8); a film of the complexity of *Rear Window* can certainly thread profound concepts into its narrative fabric without compromising its entertainment value. Of course, this does not at all mean one should imagine that

Hitchcock sat down with a pen and paper rigorously to contemplate philosophical truths and work out a way to weave them into a narrative. But it does require some degree of acceptance that Hitchcock's technical mastery of the medium through which he communicated engaging stories has the potential to effect readings of philosophical importance. At the very least, this seems to be the case in *Rear Window*.

### ***Rear Window* and the Moral Blameworthiness of L.B. Jefferies's Look**

To say wholesale what *Rear Window* is "about" would be rather reductive. There are multiple narrative threads woven into the film: for instance, the evolution of Jefferies's and Lisa Fremont's (Grace Kelly) relationship, an evolution that may mark Jefferies's progress from social, emotional, or sexual immaturity to maturity. Yet it would be fair to say that the film is at least partially about a pursuit of knowledge—in particular, knowledge of a murder—and this about-ness is of greater concern here.

Jefferies, a photojournalist with plenty of experience looking at and representing the world around him, has been injured on the job directly before the film's diegesis. Requiring a full-leg cast and a wheelchair while he recovers, this restriction of movement deeply contrasts with the daily freedom of movement provided for Jefferies by his career. Consequently, his bottled-up energy is projected elsewhere: namely, through his own window and into the windows of others, as he watches the lives and activities of his neighbors. Throughout the film, Jefferies's observations inform the fake names that he goes on to coin for these neighbors (e.g., Miss Torso [Georgine Darcy], Miss Lonelyhearts [Judith Evelyn], and The Salesman [Raymond Burr]). Jefferies's casual, intrusive gaze runs into trouble, however, when, following a loud scream, he notices a significant and mysterious change in the daily life of The Salesman and his wife (Irene Winston), soon to be known as Mr. and Mrs. Thorwald. Having previously been confined to her bed, where Jefferies and the spectator witness her and Mr. Thorwald argue incessantly, Mrs. Thorwald suddenly disappears. Her disappearance leads Jefferies—and, after some convincing, his nurse, Stella (Thelma Ritter), and his girlfriend, Lisa—to pursue knowledge of Mrs. Thorwald's suspicious disappearance, culminating in the discovery that she was murdered by her husband.

As of 1968, *Rear Window* was, in Hitchcock's words, "the most cinematic" of all the films he had made; he continues:

This film has as its basic structure the purely visual. The story is told only in visual terms. Only a novelist could do the same thing. It's composed largely of Mr. Stewart as a character in one position in one room looking out onto his courtyard. So what he sees is a mental process blown up in his mind from the purely visual. It represents for me the purest form of cinema which is called montage: that is, pieces of film put together to make up an idea. ("*Rear Window* [1968]" 95-6)

The “purely visual” dimension to which Hitchcock here alludes is no doubt vital to the storytelling of *Rear Window*. For starters, L.B. Jefferies’s life and recent accident are first delivered to the spectator through a series of shots of objects at the beginning of the film, including the cast on Jefferies’s leg, his broken camera, a framed picture of the crashing car that caused his injury, a negative of Lisa Fremont, and a stack of magazines with Lisa’s portrait as the cover. Without a word, the film provides at least a preliminary idea of Jefferies’s character, relationships, and interests. Moreover, Hitchcock’s use of the Kuleshov effect to display Jefferies peering into the courtyard and into the windows of his neighbors allows the spectator frequent access to the character’s mental states as well as the objects and people that correspond directly to those mental states.<sup>1</sup> And the role of the visual is indispensable for more than the storytelling; it is also indispensable for the story. While the spectator may rely largely on the synthesis of images for their creation of ideas, Jefferies himself relies equally on sight, first for his own voyeuristic pleasure and, later, for the pursuit of knowledge—knowledge of a murder—that continues to help motivate both Jefferies’s gaze and the progression of the narrative.

It is safe to say that this act of looking—this voyeurism, this scopophilia—of Jefferies is typically written about in terms that (rightly) imply some degree of moral blameworthiness regarding the act. Mulvey, for example, famously drew from Freud to qualify the scopophilic act as a way of deriving erotic pleasure from a gaze that objectifies other people (8-9); writing specifically about *Rear Window* (and two other Hitchcock films), Mulvey says, “the look is central to the plot, oscillating between voyeurism and fetishistic fascination” (15). Jon Gartenberg, as another example, has stated that “Hitchcock raises subtle moral issues in *Rear Window* about the dangers of voyeurism,” noting that Jefferies’s look “transgresses the right to privacy of other individuals” (5). In the paragraphs that follow, I address at greater length than Mulvey or Gartenberg the immorality of Jefferies’s gaze through a brief appeal to Aristotelian virtue ethics. A full-scale reconstruction of Aristotle’s ethical framework is well outside the scope of this paper, particularly because the philosophical focus is meant to aim at twentieth- and twenty-first century virtue epistemology. Nevertheless, Jefferies’s pleasure in objectification, fetishistic fascination, and transgression of privacy can quickly be translated into Aristotelian moral terms, the most pertinent of which would be incontinence (*akrasia*).

For Aristotle, incontinence, generally speaking, occurs when an agent performs an act in accordance with passions or appetites (such as pleasure or anger) that contradicts

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1. The Kuleshov effect refers to the ways in which a brief montage can synthesize the impressions left by individual shots to create new impressions inarticulable by any of those shots alone.

how they<sup>2</sup> would have acted had they followed their faculty of moral reason; incontinent actions are, importantly, still blameworthy, but not to the same extent as moral vice. Furthermore, incontinence can be spoken of as being qualified or unqualified, meaning one can speak of an agent as incontinent with respect to something or simply as an incontinent person (Aristotle 125-6). One such way of qualifying incontinence is recognizing the agent's subordination of reason to, say, pleasure due to "diseased states or habits" that guide their actions (Aristotle 128). If a diseased state prompts action towards a pleasure that reasoned choice would not permit, one would not say of the agent that they are unqualifiedly incontinent; however, one would note their subordination of reason as qualified incontinence: that is, incontinent with respect to whatever acts result from their habits or diseased states (Aristotle 128).

Jefferies's obsessive look could easily be read in this regard—as an action that runs counter to his reason and in accordance with his pleasure-creating habit—since he consistently shrugs off the justified remonstrances of both Stella and Lisa early in the film. In fact, before Lisa has become convinced of Mr. Thorwald's guilt, she interprets Jefferies's actions with an almost Aristotelian terminology: "Sitting around, looking out the window to kill time, is one thing—but doing it the way you are—with, with binoculars, and with wild opinions about every little movement you see—is, is diseased!" What Lisa picks up on here is Jefferies's qualified incontinence, his diseased habit's ability to induce action that contradicts what reason demands for moral action, his gaze's transgression against moral virtuosity. As Jefferies himself asks later in the film, "I wonder if it's ethical to watch a man with binoculars and a long-focus lens. Do you suppose it's ethical even if you prove he didn't commit a crime?" The answer? Well, no, it probably is not.

This after-the-fact moral reflection reveals a further dimension of Jefferies's incontinence: his impetuosity. Richard Kraut splits Aristotle's akratic (incontinent) person into two types, the weak and the impetuous. Both act with pleasure or anger and against reason, but the key difference arises as to when that reasoning happens. For the impetuous, it occurs following the action(s) in question:

At the time of action, the impetuous person experiences no internal conflict. But once his [sic] act has been completed, he regrets what he has done. One could say that he deliberates, if deliberation were something that post-dated rather than preceded action; but the thought process he goes through after he acts comes too late to save him from error. (Kraut sec. 7)

Jefferies's deliberation concerning the morality of his actions only after they have been performed aligns him with this breed of *akrasia*. So while his obsessive, pleasure-deriving,

2. Where hypothetical agents are concerned, gender neutral pronouns (they, them, their, theirs) are used.

privacy-transgressing gaze may escape a verdict of Aristotelian moral viciousness, the impetuous incontinence of his actions do, nevertheless, render him morally blameworthy.

I have no intention of attempting to save Jefferies's actions from this moral verdict, as I both believe he is blameworthy and doubt that many would be quick to provide moral defense for peeping into the private lives of unknowing others. However, to consider the voyeurism of Jefferies solely in terms of (a lack of) moral virtue is to restrict that consideration from addressing a different, important type of virtue: intellectual virtue. Since the 1980s, philosophers have been working to articulate an epistemology that assesses knowledge not by evaluating the justification or evidence for a true belief but rather by evaluating the intellectual virtuosity of the agent who produced that true belief; this has since been coined, "virtue epistemology."

### **Intellectual Virtues and Virtue Epistemology**

The contemporary notion of intellectual virtue and praiseworthiness has much historical backdrop. It would be remiss, however, not to begin with Edmund Gettier. In 1963, Gettier shocked the field of epistemology by casting significant doubt on the millennia-old justified, true belief theory of knowledge (JTB theory), a theory which held that the necessary and sufficient conditions for a subject having knowledge of a proposition are that (1) the subject believe that proposition, (2) the proposition is true, and (3) the belief is justified. This theory (or versions of it) had maintained predominant status since Plato's *Meno* and *Theaetetus*. In his brief essay, Gettier provided two counterexamples—now often referred to as Gettier problems or Gettier cases—in which subjects are shown to have justified, true beliefs that do not amount to knowledge (122–3). The soundness of Gettier problems has had many proponents and doubters, but regardless, the massive and widespread effect of his essay on the field of epistemology is certain: many responded with addendums to or clarifications of the JTB theory (Goldman) while others attempted to rework necessary and sufficient conditions for justification (Feldman and Conee) and still others sought to rework a theory of knowledge that did not rest on justification (Lewis; Code). Virtue epistemology is best thought of as the latter type, and it began with the work of Ernest Sosa and Lorraine Code in the 1980s. For current purposes, however, Heather Battaly's enlightening summarization of virtue epistemology's origins and directions is more relevant than a discussion of these early attempts.

Battaly outlines the many aims of epistemologists through a series of distinctions by which philosophical opinion has been notably divided. A few of these are quite helpful for contextualizing Jefferies's intellectual praiseworthiness. The first distinction—between belief-based and virtue epistemologies—is rooted in the difference in what one views as

being most epistemically fundamental. Much of analytic epistemology's history is devoted to the former of these; belief-based epistemologies have held justification and knowledge to be the most fundamental concerns and belief to be the primary "object of epistemic evaluation" (Battaly 640). Accordingly, in these epistemologies, it is the belief of an agent that is evaluated for justification or knowledge. Virtue epistemologists, however, hold intellectual virtues and vices to be more fundamental, so the agent who produces belief is evaluated for the virtuosity or viciousness of their intellectual actions and motivations (Battaly 640). The difference is subtle but profound: either a belief is broken away from the agent who produced it and evaluated for its justification, or the agent's intellectual actions (and, for some, intellectual motivations) engaged in producing beliefs is assessed for epistemic virtuosity or viciousness. As a relatively simple example, say I believe that there is a cup in front of me. A belief-based epistemology would be most concerned with determining whether I am justified in holding this belief and, relatedly, whether that belief amounts to knowledge. A virtue epistemology may not deny that I have knowledge, but saying so is not its primary aim; instead, it aims first and foremost to evaluate my intellectual actions (and possibly motivations) in producing that belief.

This begs the question as to what qualifies as intellectual virtue and why. Here enters the distinction among virtue epistemologists: reliabilist virtue epistemology and responsibilist virtue epistemology. For virtue reliabilists, intellectual virtues are cognitive faculties that reliably produce or get at the truth; similarly, "virtuous thinkers are reliable truth-producers; i.e., their faculties of sense perception, memory, induction, and deduction reliably produce true beliefs" (Battaly 645). This notion of reliability is context dependent: it is no counterexample to virtue reliabilism to say that a faculty like 20/20 vision does not reliably produce true beliefs about microorganisms. Moreover, these faculty-virtues may be natural in an agent or acquired over time, and their use by the agent need not be intentional action motivated by some form of intrinsic epistemic good (e.g., love for knowledge, understanding, truth); in other words, for the reliabilist, an agent can virtuously acquire true belief without being motivated to do so (Battaly 646–7).

Because reliabilist faculty-virtues are often natural in the agent and enacted without the agent's choice, virtue reliabilists do not speak of agents as being intellectually praiseworthy, regardless of the intellectual virtues they exhibit. By contrast, virtue responsibilists hold that intellectual virtues are analogous to Aristotelian moral virtues, meaning they are relatively stable traits of intellectual character such as intellectual courage or intellectual humility, and that these traits can only be acquired by an agent over time (i.e., they cannot be natural in the agent) (Battaly 648). The responsibilist intellectual virtues are virtuous not (or not only) because they reliably produce true belief but because

the agent intentionally enacts them and is motivated to do so by an *intrinsically* valuing epistemic good, such as valuing the attainment of truth simply for truth's sake (Battaly 648–9). Finally, and importantly, an agent who acts with such responsibilist intellectual virtue is, in the voluntarist sense (the sense that praise and blame require volition), praiseworthy for their intellectual actions (Montmarquet 393–4, 399–400).

Though both kinds of practitioners of virtue epistemology agree that the intellectual virtues and vices are more fundamental concerns than justification or knowledge, this does not prevent virtue epistemologists from adapting their work to address the problems of traditional analytic epistemology, like the provision of necessary and sufficient conditions for propositional knowledge. These so-called “virtue theories” of knowledge (Battaly 641) could be expressed, in their most general form, as the following: a subject S has knowledge that proposition P if S produces the true belief that P as a result of intellectually virtuous acts. Of course, how one conceives of intellectually virtuous acts greatly alters what this theory states. For S to have knowledge that P, the virtue reliabilist would require only that S produced the true belief that P as a result of exercising reliably truth-producing cognitive faculties. The virtue responsibilist would have the much stronger requirement that, in order for S to have knowledge that P, S would need to have produced the true belief that P by acting with virtuous intellectual character traits, the enactment of which need be motivated by intrinsic epistemic good.

Separate from the theoretic or conventional attempts of responsibilist virtue epistemologists are so-called anti-theoretic (Battaly 640–1) or alternative efforts. These philosophers do not (or do not only) take up questions and problems central to traditional analytic epistemology; rather, they explore the distinctive features of individual intellectual virtues or vices or consider their real-world relevance, offering “profiles of individual virtues and vices, examinations of the relations among distinct virtues and vices, and the social, ethical, and political dimensions of cognition involved in misinformation, disinformation, propaganda” (Turri et. al sec. 4). It is this sort of work that best renders L.B. Jefferies's cognitive character in *Rear Window*: specifically, Lani Watson's profile of the intellectual virtue of inquisitiveness and Jason Baehr's profile of intellectual courage.

### **L.B. Jefferies's Intellectual Virtues**

Inquisitiveness and intellectual courage do appear to be two (but perhaps not the only two) responsibilist intellectual virtues that Jefferies exhibits in *Rear Window* as he pursues knowledge of Mrs. Thorwald's murder. However, determining his intellectual praiseworthiness is not as simple as stating that Jefferies asks questions or persists through fear and doubt. As the previous section highlighted, the following conditions are required for agents to exhibit intellectual virtues *qua* virtues in a given circumstance:

- (i) The intellectual action(s) in question must satisfy the conditions for a particular intellectual virtue (e.g., satisfy the conditions for inquisitiveness or intellectual courage).
- (ii) The intellectual action(s) in question must be motivated by valuing epistemic good intrinsically (e.g., having a love of knowledge or valuing the attainment of truth for truth's sake).
- (iii) The agent(s) in question must possess the intellectual virtue as a relatively stable trait of their intellectual character.

Only when a responsibilist intellectual virtue satisfies each of the above conditions is the agent who exercises the virtue intellectually praiseworthy.

To draw out why this is so, consider the following example: A student is taking a calculus course. Throughout the semester, the student asks numerous, excellent questions, and the student intends that these questions will help them to better understand the material. All the while, however, the student's motivation for better understanding the material and, therefore, for asking questions, cannot be attributed to their care for the relevant knowledge—they will gladly forget how to perform derivations the moment the class ends. Instead, the student is motivated almost entirely out of the desire to receive good grades on their exams, a non-epistemic good. Thus, the student acts with paradigmatic inquisitiveness (asks good questions aimed at understanding the material) but does not appear to possess or act with intellectually virtuous inquisitiveness (because they are not motivated by epistemic good) and is, as a result, not due intellectual praise for their actions. If their actions had been motivated by epistemic good, then their inquisitive actions would have been virtuous; and if, in addition, this virtuous inquisitiveness was also a stable character trait of the student, then the student would be intellectually praiseworthy as an agent. In other words, condition (i) must be met for an action to manifest a particular intellectual virtue; conditions (i) and (ii) must be met for an action to manifest an intellectual virtue and for that action to be virtuous; and conditions (i), (ii), and (iii) must be met for an agent to be intellectually praiseworthy in connection to the action(s) in question. Crucially, then, L.B. Jefferies and his intellectual actions need to meet each of the three conditions to be intellectually praiseworthy. Each condition will be covered in turn, beginning with condition (i).

### **Satisfying Conditions for Inquisitiveness and Intellectual Courage**

#### ***Inquisitiveness***

On inquisitiveness as an intellectual virtue, Lani Watson is the leading contributor. Watson first characterizes inquisitiveness as “a tendency to question” with the aim of improving “epistemic standing” (276). However, after some consideration,

Watson adds two additional features necessary for inquisitiveness: first, the requirement of sincerity, that is, that “a sincere question is one in which the questioner genuinely wants to know or understand the answer” (277); and second, the requirement of good questioning. Watson admits that fully elaborating on precisely what constitutes good questioning is bound to be difficult but holds that good questions must at least target relevant information and identify a proper context in which the question will successfully improve epistemic standing (278–9). By way of example, one can imagine an individual who asks genuine, thoughtful questions regarding a film they have recently watched, but who poses the questions to, say, their dog. Despite the quality of the questions, this individual’s actions would not satisfy the good questioning condition because the context is unlikely to improve the subject’s epistemic standing; therefore, the individual does not satisfy conditions for inquisitiveness.

In what ways, then, do Jefferies’s actions meet these conditions in *Rear Window*? The most obvious, of course, are the questions he asks of other characters that pertain to his initial suspicions. Not long after the loud scream and the crashing noise that initially stir Jefferies’s curiosity, he sees Mr. Thorwald leave and return to his apartment in the middle of the night numerous times with a suitcase. This unusual behavior gets Jefferies’s attention, and the next day, he poses a question to Stella: “Now what could he [Mr. Thorwald] sell at three in the morning?” The question not only gives verbal confirmation that an inquiry has begun, but it also reveals Jefferies’s sincere desire to improve his epistemic standing, for if Stella could produce an answer that reasonably fulfilled the question, it is quite feasible that Jefferies would release his suspicion, feeling it would lead to unjustified belief; likewise, if Stella could not produce an answer that reasonably fulfilled the question, his suspicion might progress to justified belief. In either case, Jefferies’s epistemic standing would improve: he either avoids a suspicion devolving to unjustified belief or progresses from suspicion to justified belief. Finding no defeaters to his suspicion in Stella’s sarcastic retort, “flashlights, luminous dials for watches, house numbers that light up,” Jefferies proceeds to express what has then become a clear belief: “I think he was taking something out of the apartment.” In addition, the question is both relevant and context-aware. The content of the question meets relevancy conditions in the sense that it acknowledges the occupation of the subject in question (salesman), the function of the object in question (holding other objects to be sold), and the oddity of the subject using that object at three in the morning. If the epistemic goal was, as it seems to have been, to test the suspicion that Thorwald was removing something from his apartment, the question posed is highly relevant. Finally, the question was context-aware in that it was asked of a person with more than enough intellectual ability and life

experience to give a satisfactory answer, if such an answer were available. The question, then, quite nearly manifests inquisitiveness.

Given Watson's characterization of inquisitiveness, the one component missing in the interaction between Jefferies and Stella is the *tendency* to question; a single question can hardly manifest a tendency. Jefferies, however, makes this tendency clear when he continuously asks questions of both Lisa and Tom Doyle (Wendell Corey). After asking a similar question to Lisa regarding Thorwald's late-night trips with the suitcase, Jefferies follows up with three additional questions all aimed at understanding Thorwald's behavior. And when Doyle informs Jefferies that Mr. and Mrs. Thorwald were seen leaving the apartment building at a time later than when Jefferies suspects Mrs. Thorwald was murdered, Jefferies asks, "Who said they left then?" and goes on to pose approximately ten more questions to Doyle as part of the same dialogue. While some of these questions are insincere in nature, many are as sincere, relevant, and context-aware as asking who witnessed the Thorwalds leaving the apartment building. Even from this fairly small sample, it is evident that Jefferies frequently employs the question as a communicative technique through which to accrue epistemic goods and improve epistemic standing.

However, to dwell for too long on the verbal evidence of Jefferies's inquisitiveness does a disservice to the film's visual storytelling; the spoken or written word is not strictly required for a spectator to grasp that questions are being asked. As Jan Alber points out, actors' facial expressions and body positions are the filmic equivalent to narrative prose's psychonarration—external representations that correlate to internal mental states (266–70, 279)—and Hitchcock no doubt made use of this in *Rear Window*. Just as the pleasure Jefferies garners from looking at his neighbors is shown in his wide eyes and smile, so too is his inquisitive, question-asking tendency shown through parted lips and raised brows; the point-of-view shots that follow his inquisitive facial expressions allow spectators to see what the objects of those questions are. In other words, Hitchcock's use of the Kuleshov effect enables a spectator to construct ideas of the questions Jefferies appears to ask internally but does not actually utter (see fig. 1).



*Figure 1. Rear Window.*

In this sequence of shots, Jefferies's facial expression and body position (propping up the camera) first establishes his inquisitiveness, the point-of-view shot establishes that at which his questioning is aimed, and the final shot establishes his reaction to receiving the answer. Roughly, the question he is asking himself might translate to, "What is Thorwald wrapping up in the sink?" and the answer, provided by Jefferies's long-focus lens, to "a saw and knife." As with the questions actually uttered, this, too, is a clear step in the direction of (but not amounting to) knowledge of Mrs. Thorwald's murder and understanding of Mr. Thorwald's behavior and is therefore sincerely aimed at improving epistemic standing. Similar to before, the relevancy of such a question largely derives from the atypical actions of Mr. Thorwald over the previous days and the sudden disappearance of his bed-ridden wife. Unlike his questions to Stella, Lisa, and Doyle, however, it is not the subject to whom Jefferies poses the question that determines its context-awareness; rather, in this case, what determines the question's context-awareness is the enhanced view enabled by the long-focus lens—to receive an answer to the question Jefferies appears to have in mind requires a context in which Jefferies is able to see the answer. The lens offers this context, and Jefferies uses it. Thus, demonstrated through both verbal and visual methods, Hitchcock clearly communicates the inquisitiveness of his protagonist.

### ***Intellectual Courage***

In *The Inquiring Mind*, Jason Baehr has offered one notable profile of intellectual courage and its features. Much like Watson on inquisitiveness, Baehr first submits the relatively "common sense" account that,

courage of any sort involves responding in a certain way to a conflict between the achievement of a particular good and one's own safety or well-being. With intellectual courage [...] the good in question is a necessarily intellectual one, while with other forms of courage some other kind of good is at stake. (164)

This characterization is not meant to be surprising, but it does raise some important questions. For instance, what precisely qualifies as a threat to one's safety or well-being? And what is the "certain way" one must respond to be courageous?

To answer questions like these, Baehr breaks down the features of intellectual courage into the virtue's context and its substance. The context for intellectual courage relates to the condition of threats to one's safety or well-being. Baehr notes that the internal experience of fear does not correctly qualify this context, as one can act courageously without ever experiencing such a feeling. Similarly, Baehr excludes the notion that a subject's perception of the threats at play must be rational, for continuing in one's pursuits in the face of even the most irrational perceived threats still requires courage (169–70). Accordingly, Baehr states that the context of intellectual courage requires only

the *appearance* of a threat to one's well-being. The subject in question must have the judgement or belief that their pursuits "may risk social, political, professional, or bodily *injury*; or ... risk the loss of considerable *good* along these lines" (170, emphasis original). This judgement or belief need not amount to fear in the subject, nor must the judgement or belief be rational, but to manifest intellectual courage, the subject must at least judge or believe that some risk exists that conflicts with their actions in pursuit of intellectual good.

With context determined, Baehr turns to the substance of intellectual courage, which concerns the ways in which one responds to the appearance of risk when moved by intellectual good. The clearest of these ways is to continue the pursuit of an intellectual good: that is, if a pursuit has begun, faced risk, and continued despite the risk, then doing so likely manifested intellectual courageousness. But Baehr is sure to note that persistent pursuit aimed at intellectual goods is not the only way intellectual courage can manifest; the virtue can also be found in persistent intellectual states that remain in accord with intellectual good and in the persistent transmission of intellectual goods (174–6). For instance, one might need to exercise intellectual courage in maintaining a true belief that contradicts the belief systems of their friends and families, or one might need to exercise intellectual courage when spreading knowledge that is bound to be unpopular with the audience to whom it is addressed.

Together, the context and substance of intellectual courage amount to the following definition: "Intellectual courage is 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" (Baehr 177). This definition thus provides the conditions that L.B. Jefferies's actions must satisfy to qualify as intellectually courageous.

To reiterate, the apparent threat need not be physical in nature; the threat of physical harm is sufficient for the manifestation of intellectual courage, but it is not necessary. The threat or risk may also be of a social kind. For instance, one might manifest intellectual courage in maintaining a belief or continuing a pursuit while undergoing criticism from their social circle for doing so. Jefferies actions quite clearly represent this type of intellectual courage in *Rear Window* on a number of occasions. His social interactions are limited to the small social circle of Stella, Lisa, and Doyle, and not one of them initially find his belief that Mr. Thorwald murdered his wife convincing, nor do they encourage his pursuit of knowing this proposition. Stella, to be fair, does not attack Jefferies's character for having this belief, but Lisa refers to the pursuit as "diseased" and to Jefferies as "not being clever"; Doyle, in turn, refers to the proposed evidence as "hallucinations" and, mockingly, to Jefferies as an "amateur sleuth." In the face of this dissent, Jefferies persists in his doxastic state and continues his pursuit of knowledge

despite social pressures to do the opposite. This is surely an example of the disposition outlined by Baehr, and in this case, the “threat to one’s well-being” is the social risk of expressing and maintaining belief that faces unanimous dissent.

Fixating on dissent is not to say, however, that Jefferies does not also judge or believe that bodily harm could not come to him as a result of his pursuit of knowledge. His awareness of at least the appearance of such a threat is first evident after he mentions Mr. Thorwald’s suspicious behavior to Stella. Having helped Jefferies return to his wheelchair, Stella notices that Mr. Thorwald’s blinds have been pulled up again, revealing the inside of his apartment. This prompts Jefferies to look in that direction and see Mr. Thorwald scanning the courtyard to determine if any neighbors are watching him; in response to this, Jefferies frantically rolls his wheelchair backwards into the apartment, and tells Stella to “Get back! Get back! Get out of sight! Get out of sight!” Even early on, then (well before the chilling moment in which Mr. Thorwald stares directly into Jefferies’s lens), Jefferies clearly judges that looking at Mr. Thorwald could involve some sort of threat to his or others’ physical well-being—which is an accurate judgement, as Mr. Thorwald eventually assaults Lisa and pushes Jefferies out of his window, breaking his other leg. Despite being aware that his knowledge-pursuing look might culminate in such harm, however, Jefferies persists in his course of action.

As with Jefferies’s inquisitiveness, Hitchcock represents this intellectual courageousness not only verbally but visually. Jefferies’s concern over the threat of being seen by Mr. Thorwald causes him and Stella to hide in the shadows of the apartment, presumably out of sight; while they remain in the shadows, viewers see through Jefferies’s eyes that Mr. Thorwald is fixing his gaze on something in the courtyard. Finally, the camera turns back to a third-person shot of Jefferies coming forward into the light—again in view of Mr. Thorwald—so that he can see what that something is. The retreat to the shadows thus represents Jefferies’s awareness of a possible threat to his and Stella’s well-being, while the return to the light to learn at what Thorwald is directing his gaze visually marks the continued pursuit of knowledge despite this threat. At this point in the film, Jefferies has already begun his pursuit of knowledge, an intellectual good. But it is in this scene that his belief that physical harm could result from his Thorwald-directed gaze first becomes obvious to a spectator, so it is from this moment forward that Jefferies’s looks at Mr. Thorwald—his actions in pursuit of knowledge—could be qualified as intellectually courageous.

Through this interpretation of Jefferies’s intellectual actions in the film (namely, his dialogue with other characters and his looks into Mr. Thorwald’s apartment), I have argued that the actions themselves satisfy the conditions for both

inquisitiveness and intellectual courage. However, for these intellectual actions to be virtuous—that is, for these intellectual virtues to manifest *qua* virtues—the actions in question must be in large part motivated by considerations of epistemic good's intrinsic value, such as an agent's love for knowledge or attainment of truth for truth's sake. It is this that separates inquisitiveness from intellectually virtuous inquisitiveness, and intellectual courage from intellectually virtuous courage.

### **L.B. Jefferies's Epistemic Motivations**

To begin this evaluation, take the previous example in which students were motivated to learn calculus only because they wanted to earn good grades. They were inquisitive, but not virtuously so. Now consider a different set of students who are in the same calculus course. This set of students, like the other, asks many relevant, context-aware questions with the sincere intention of understanding the material. Unlike the other students, these students are only partially motivated to ask such questions by the desire to earn good grades. They still, of course, care about the final grade they receive in the course, and this at times prompts their questioning. But in addition to this motivation, they want to learn about calculus for more epistemically-rooted reasons: they want to learn how to do derivations because they recognize the cognitive value of mathematics; they want know whether Newton, Leibniz, or both invented calculus because they recognize knowledge as an intrinsic good. Thus, while both students are inquisitive, only the second student is virtuously inquisitive because their intellectual actions are in large part motivated by intrinsic epistemic goods; they want to know because knowing is good.

That Jefferies is so motivated in *Rear Window* is rather clear, and this motivation is likely what Stam and Pearson were referring to when they stated that Jefferies's scopophilia transforms into epistemophilia over the course of the film. If scopophilia is loosely defined as pleasure derived from looking, then epistemophilia might be termed as pleasure derived from acquiring true beliefs and gaining knowledge. Still, one might establish this epistemophilia by eliminating other, non-epistemic motivations from having a dominant role in prompting Jefferies's intellectual actions. A person could, for instance, be motivated to solve a murder for financial reasons (if there were a reward), public praise, or an internal sense of justice. If any of these played a dominant role in motivating Jefferies's pursuit of knowledge, his inquisitive and intellectually courageous actions would not be intellectually virtuous. The fact remains, though, that the film provides no reason for a spectator to believe that any of these three possible motivations play a more dominant role than Jefferies's sheer pleasure in knowing. There is no mention of potential financial gain; the inquiry is purposefully withheld from the public eye when Jefferies chooses to call Doyle, an old friend, rather than the police; and Jefferies makes no

mention of the justice he feels in avenging Mrs. Thorwald's murder.

In fact, the only explicit insight spectators get regarding Jefferies's motivations confirm his desire to acquire truth for truth's sake. In Jefferies's apartment, after he has expressed his suspicions, Lisa asks of him, "What is it you're looking for?" and he responds, "I just want to find out what's wrong with the Salesman's wife." The response seems routine, insignificant. But its significance is in what it lacks: Jefferies does not name non-epistemic motivations in addition to his simple desire to "find out"; in other words, he does not want to find out what's wrong with the Mr. Thorwald's wife *because of* something non-epistemic (e.g., justice, money, praise). He just wants to find out, wants to know, wants truth. The apparent lack of non-epistemic motivations in Jefferies's pursuit of intellectual good combined with the explicit presence of epistemic good motivating his actions thus suggests that Jefferies's intellectual actions in *Rear Window* are not only properly understood as inquisitive and intellectually courageous but also as virtuously inquisitive and virtuously intellectually courageous. His actions express the intellectual virtues, and his motivations are largely epistemic in nature.

The final requirement in deeming Jefferies an intellectually praiseworthy agent, taken up in the following section, is concerned with establishing inquisitiveness and intellectual courage as stable character traits of Jefferies's cognitive character. To do this, the film must in some way suggest that Jefferies consistently manifests these intellectual virtues outside of just the pursuit of knowledge regarding Mrs. Thorwald's murder.

### **Inquisitiveness and Intellectual Courage as Character Traits**

Acknowledging that the film takes place over the course of only a few days, it is difficult to refer to particular actions of Jefferies as indicative of stable character traits. An agent could, to be sure, act with intellectual virtues for a few days but lack those intellectual virtues as stable aspects of their character. That possibility poses a challenge for determining that inquisitiveness and intellectual courage are stable traits of Jefferies's cognitive character. The challenge, however, is not insurmountable. Jefferies' career allows for a fairly strong sense of his stable intellectual character, as he has seemingly been a photojournalist for some time. (It should be noted, too, that philosophers of intellectual virtues often use real-life journalists as models for intellectually virtuous character [e.g., Baehr 165–6].) While it is conceivable that some journalistic efforts may require little intellectual prowess or prolonged inquiry, Jefferies's efforts certainly seem to. For instance, after his editor (Gig Young), calls Jefferies to congratulate him on getting his cast removed, only to learn that the cast is not to be removed for another week, his editor expresses regret: "That one week is going to cost me my best photographer—and you a big assignment." The two discuss the assignment:

JEFFERIES. Where?

JEFFERIES'S EDITOR. Indo-China. Got a code tip from the bureau chief this morning. The place is about to go up in smoke.

JEFFERIES. Didn't I tell you! Didn't I tell you it was the next place to watch!

JEFFERIES'S EDITOR. You did.

JEFFERIES. Okay. When do I leave? Half-hour? An hour?

JEFFERIES'S EDITOR. With that cast on—you don't.

Not only does a viewer learn from this interaction that Jefferies is willing and eager to engage in long and difficult inquiry in order to acquire and disseminate truth and information (an epistemic good), but also that he is, according to his editor, the best at it. In other words, he is inquisitive—willing and able to ask thoughtful questions of the world around him—and his camera provides the best answers.

Regarding his intellectual courageousness, viewers are quick to learn that Jefferies's assignments frequently involve some form of danger that must be overcome. For starters, the film's narrative is to some degree prompted by the bodily injury Jefferies sustains while on the job. And later, when describing to Lisa why he thinks (incorrectly, as we find out) that she would not enjoy accompanying him on his trips, Jefferies summarizes some common struggles he has to face: "Lisa, on this job you carry one suitcase. Your home is the available transportation. You sleep rarely, bathe even less, and sometimes the food that you eat is made from things you wouldn't even look at when they're alive!" A spectator, then, would be quite justified in assuming that Jefferies frequently continues journalistic pursuits—pursuits that likely have some form of epistemic good attached, like acquiring and disseminating knowledge—despite the appearance of threats to his well-being. Thus, through these elaborations of Jefferies's career, viewers get at least some insight into elements of his cognitive character: He is both willing and able to inquire successfully (inquisitive) and equally willing to face apparent dangers, struggles, and even sustain severe bodily injury in pursuit of epistemic ends (intellectually courageous).

If Jefferies's career provides spectators enough information to characterize him broadly as both inquisitive and intellectually courageous, then *Rear Window's* protagonist has met each of the three conditions required to be an intellectually praiseworthy agent. His actions in the film satisfy the distinctive conditions for inquisitiveness and intellectual courage, the inquisitive and intellectually courageous actions are motivated by intrinsic epistemic good, and the intellectual virtues are, finally, stable traits of Jefferies's cognitive character.<sup>3</sup> He is, therefore, intellectually (not morally) praiseworthy.

3. Something should be said of Lisa's cognitive character, as well. She, too, could be said to exemplify inquisitive and intellectually courageous actions throughout

### **Conclusion**

Various levels and types of conflict are at play in the narrative of *Rear Window*. There is, for one, the obvious conflict between the protagonists, Lisa, Jefferies, and Stella, trying to uncover a murder versus the antagonist, Mr. Thorwald, trying to cover up the murder. There is also the emotional conflict between Jefferies and Lisa that charges many of the characters' interactions with one another. In this essay, however, I submit an additional, subtle opposition that is equally vital to the narrative tension. By reading Jefferies's scopophilia against Aristotelian virtue ethics, I have shown that his looks may often be deemed morally blameworthy insofar as they represent impetuous incontinence (i.e., unreflective pleasure getting the better of reason). At the same time, through an appeal to alternative—or anti-theoretic—responsibilist virtue epistemology, I have sought to show that Jefferies is nevertheless an intellectually praiseworthy agent, his look and character frequently manifesting both virtuous inquisitiveness and virtuous intellectual courage. This tension-creating conflict is not only problematic for spectatorial judgement regarding Jefferies as an agent (i.e., whether to subject him to praise or blame); it also deeply affects the experience itself of viewing the film. In the many, many point-of-view shots that place viewers in the subject position of Jefferies, a spectator is forced, as it were, to partake in this conflict of moral blame and intellectual praise, to weigh truth versus morality, knowledge versus the good life.

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the film—and, in fact, may very well be the more intellectually courageous of the two, given her venture into Mr. Thorwald's apartment late in the film. It is also quite likely that she manifests different, additional intellectual virtues that Jefferies does not, such as intellectual humility. I have chosen to focus on Jefferies primarily because it is his point-of-view that constitutes much of the film's visual storytelling, and thus his moral blame and intellectual praise that contributes to the oppositional spectatorial judgement that (I am arguing) comes about as part of the viewing experience.

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