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Introduction

This book was originally conceived as a series of loosely connected studies addressing topics, both central and peripheral, in contemporary epistemology. What gradually became clear in the writing of it, however, was that in the course of *examining* various epistemological questions I inevitably found myself at the same time *taking a stand* on many of those questions, and—as the publisher's anonymous referees of the draft manuscript both insisted—this collection of stands taken constitutes at least the rudiments of a coherent and fairly comprehensive positive philosophical theory of knowledge. And both anonymous referees also suggested that I should stop being so coy about it and tell the reader straight out what that theory is. The point is well taken, and these introductory remarks are consequently intended to give a brief synoptic overview, first, of the central theses of that theory and, then, of the course of reflections by which I undertake both to develop and to defend them. As is always the case with introductory remarks, what is really important, namely the detailed *arguments*, will be missing. In the balance of this introduction, then, epistemological doctrines will be mentioned, assorted names will be dropped, and various theses will be *claimed* to be effectively criticizable or defensible—all very dry and unsatisfying. The full text here summarily described, however, where the promised critiques and defences are actually *offered*, will, I hope, prove to be both less dry and more satisfying, and perhaps (although I recognize that this is highly unlikely) even convincing.

The positive theory

The leading thesis developed in this book, to formulate it most dramatically, is that knowledge is simply *adequately justified belief*. To put it less dramatically but more accurately, we correctly judge that S knows that *p* whenever, from our *de facto* epistemic perspective, we judge S able adequately to justify

his belief that *p*. Since from any *one* epistemic perspective the judgements that S has done everything requisite to be entitled confidently to believe that *p* and that S has done everything requisite to establish the truth of *p* stand or fall together, a further "truth requirement" is vacuous and idle. Truth may arguably be an outcome of enquiry, but it can function neither as enquiry's goal nor as a constraining condition on any *de facto* epistemic policy or procedure. This book thus both implicitly and explicitly calls into question in a fundamental way many received understandings regarding the relationships among the concepts of *knowledge, justification*, and *truth*.

The *"perspectivalist"* view here advocated, whose origins lie in Peircean pragmatism, is predicated upon explicit recognition of our inescapable epistemic *situatedness*. Unqualified attributions of knowledge are always made only from our own epistemic perspective, with reference to a particular context of enquiry, and *enquiry* itself is correlatively understood as always addressed to determinate questions, properly raised only within the framework of a set of background beliefs, themselves not then and there in question, which render appropriate the application of particular investigative procedures, techniques, and norms of epistemic conduct.

The corresponding conception of justification is consequently *proceduralist*, holding that, in the first instance, it is *conducts of persons* that are justified or unjustified. A person's *belief* is justified, therefore, only if she is justified in believing it, and that will be so just to the extent that she is in a position to justify her believing it, an *internalist* consequence which I argue applies equally to inferentially derived theoretical and "immediate" spontaneous perceptual beliefs. The Cartesian theses that matter-of-factual knowledge both needs and has available incorrigible foundations are thus rejected in favour of a *resolute anti-scepticism* coupled to a *thoroughgoing fallibilism*.

Those, then, in short compass, are the chief claims and contentions advanced and defended in the course of this book. Thus sensitized, an attentive reader should be able to detect most of them at work throughout the book, but with various degrees of implicitness. As explicitly formulated theses, however, they surface at different times and in a different order. The reason is that, as is my unrepentant custom, I undertake to develop and expound my own philosophical views dialectically, through a careful critical confrontation with and among alternative views and the arguments offered by their advocates. As one of the publisher's referees remarked, the result is not an easy read: "A typical chapter begins by launching the reader into some detailed arguments, with little initial sense of the shape of the chapter as a whole, and relying upon the reader's understanding of the problems that

concern him and the assumptions on which he relies." ("For those equipped to hang on," he charitably added, "it can be an exhilarating ride".) The point is again well taken, and I have made some effort, probably inadequate, to address it in the present version. Some additional help, however, may also be provided by the following:

Outline of the chapters

As did contemporary epistemology itself, I begin with René Descartes. Descartes is often said to have presented, in his first *Meditation*, a compelling intuitive argument for scepticism regarding our knowledge of the natural world of causally interacting objects in space and time; that is, an argument in support of the claim that it is possible to doubt that any such world exists. Chapter 1 opens with an assessment of this imputation. I argue that a close reading of the original text fails to support the received view. Even when granted a variety of charitable exegetical concessions, Descartes' reasoning turns out to rest upon a series of problematic and highly contentious presuppositions quite sufficient to vitiate its claim to be either intuitive or compelling. In the balance of the chapter, I argue that the same holds true for a variety of sceptical reasonings in the general Cartesian style; that is, arguments which appeal to "closure principles" and to our supposed inability to rule out sceptical counter possibilities incompatible with either the truth of or our knowledge of what is supposedly known. The central constructive aim of the chapter, then, is to underscore and support the positive theory's steadfast *anti-scepticism*; in particular, the thesis that knowledge cannot be undermined by *mere* possibilities, but only by possibilities which there is some positive reason to suppose actually obtain.

Complementary to this resolute anti-scepticism is a thoroughgoing *fallibilism* with respect to matter-of-factual convictions, which is the central constructive theme of Chapter 2. More specifically, the chapter is addressed to the notion of *certainty* which Descartes' own epistemological picture sets in opposition to such ostensible global fallibilism. In particular, I consider and find wanting the characteristically Cartesian contention that there is a unique mental operation—a species of *epoché*, paradigmatically illustrated by the *cogito*—which not only suspends judgement and retreats from any "thick" claim to objective truth, but also yields a "thin" truth-claim regarding subjective matters with respect to which we are epistemically infallible. There is, in short, supposed to be an essential connection between certainty and *subjectivity*.

The relevant conception of subjectivity turns out to be more difficult to locate than one would initially suspect. The search takes me, *inter alia*, into the difficult territory of Kant's distinction between "original apperception" and "inner sense", for which I attempt to provide some suitable exegetical enlightenment. My overall conclusion is that neither the deliberate suspension of objective commitments in an act of *epoché* nor the modes of causal self-affection that Kant thematized under the rubric "inner sense" issues in a class of incorrigible Cartesian certainties. A *pure epoché* would yield something that is in a trivial and vacuous sense "infallible"—where no truth-claim is made, no error is possible—but which, for just that reason, is not a truth-susceptible judgement at all, subjective or otherwise. An exercise of "inner sense" indeed issues in a judgement regarding something properly deemed subjective—e.g. a report of the occurrence of a perceptual experience—but it does not exclude the possibility of error. The illusion of subjective certainties results from the fact that an *ordinary* claim of perceptual appearing—a 'looks'-, 'sounds'-, 'feels'-, 'smells'-, 'tastes'-, and so, generically, 'seems'-judgement—combines a trivially "infallible" objective *epoché* with such an error-susceptible subjective report.

Such judgements of perceptual appearing have traditionally been cast in ostensibly foundational epistemic roles. Struck by the large number of falsehoods that he had accepted in his youth and by the highly doubtful nature of the "edifice" that he had subsequently based on them, Descartes proposed "to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations". Correlatively, he regarded his method of doubt and the incorrigibly certain beliefs to which its successful application was to lead as two moments in the process of securing such epistemic foundations, upon which he could then "establish [something] in the sciences that was stable and likely to last". Chapter 3 engages with the question of whether we can expect to find such "foundational" beliefs, beliefs which would constitute "direct" or "immediate" independent knowledge of a family of facts capable of serving as the ultimate court of epistemic appeal for all factual claims about the world, both particular and general.

My particular stalking-horse in Chapter 3 is consequently the confrontation between Wilfrid Sellars' well-known critique of the "Myth of the Given" and, to begin with, William Alston's notion of "immediate knowledge". The latter, however, is *ab initio* ambiguous between the notions of knowledge that is *underived*, i.e. non-inferential or spontaneous knowledge, and knowledge that is *epistemically independent*, i.e. knowledge that does not depend for its epistemic status on other knowledge. Sellars finds no fault with the conclusion that

some knowledge must be immediate in the former sense—not all knowledge can be derived from other knowledge—but argues that the idea of knowledge that is immediate in the second sense rests on blurring the distinction between non-propositional causes and propositional contents. The only *normative* paradigm of a belief being "based on" particular "grounds" is the paradigm of inferential support; where the ostensible "grounds" do not have the logical shape of a proposition, a belief can be "based on" them only in the sense of being a *response to* them.

Sellars' rejection of epistemically independent knowledge is thus reflected in a *strong epistemic internalism*, according to which one's non-inferential (e.g. perceptual) belief counts as knowledge only if one knows that its spontaneous occurrence is, in normal circumstances, a reliable indicator of the fact believed. Since the positive theory of knowledge here advocated in fact endorses such a comprehensive strong internalism, a goodly portion of Chapter 3 is dedicated to exploring the integrated normative account of epistemic justification, language-mastery, concept-possession, and perceptual experience which gives rise to and supports those internalist convictions. Central to that account, and also to the theory of knowledge developed here, is an *epistemic proceduralism*, according to which the *activity* of *justifying* is prior in the order of understanding to the *state* of *being justified*, which consequently, whether predicated of beliefs or of believers, must be elucidated in terms of the notion of actual and potential justificatory practices.

The chapter closes with an argument for the dialectical instability of "concept externalism", the thesis, articulated by Franz von Kutschera and defended by Crispin Sartwell, that the notion of justificatory reasoning has no essential role to play in an account of the *concept* of knowledge; that is, that what is essential to knowledge is only true belief. The critical argument highlights the crucial internalist interplay between objective warrant and subjective confidence: A responsible and reflective epistemic agent proportions the strength of his subjective convictions to his objective epistemic entitlements. What secure those entitlements are the justificatory arguments available to him. It follows that spontaneous thoughts and judgements that are "immediate" or "foundational", in the sense of being in fact *underived* or *non-inferential*, nevertheless owe their normative epistemic character as expressions of knowledge to their potential embedding in justificatory reasoning practices.

The notion of *justification* having assumed its traditional place of prominence, Chapter 4 turns to the classical "justified-true-belief" account of knowledge. Here is where the positive theory's *perspectivalism* comes explicitly and articulately into view. The centrepiece of the chapter is a critical

exploration of Robert Fogelin's reinterpretation of the classical account in terms of a conjunction of two readings of the traditional justification clause, one "internalist" and "deontological", according to which it endorses the propriety of a subject's actual epistemic conduct, and one "externalist" and "evaluative", according to which it asserts the adequacy of the subject's *de facto* grounds to establish the truth of what is believed. Fogelin's analysis yields an insightful diagnosis of the challenge offered by familiar "Gettier problems" as essentially resting on a contrast of informational states. What is crucial to a Gettier scenario is that someone, given the information *ex hypothesi* available to *him*, has responsibly come to believe some claim to be true on grounds that *we*, who are stipulated to be privy to *additional* information, recognize do not establish its truth.

I offer a revision of Fogelin's diagnosis which replaces his contrast between assessments of epistemic propriety and assessments of truth-determinativeness with one between two wholly "deontological" assessments of propriety from distinct *epistemic perspectives*. In the balance of the chapter, the resulting "perspectivalist" account is distinguished from such widespread "contextualist" views as that advocated by Keith DeRose, and then deployed critically against both Fogelin's own "Pyrrhonian" sceptical conclusions and the more moderate "elusiveness" and "instability" theses defended by David Lewis and Michael Williams, according to which epistemological enquiry *per se* generates a unique epistemic context within which matter of factual knowledge becomes impossible.

Chapter 5 offers an (admittedly somewhat revisionist) "internalist-perspectivalist" interpretation, based on the positive conclusions developed and defended in preceding chapters, of G. E. Moore's epistemological views and arguments. In particular, I challenge Barry Stroud's diagnostic interpretations of Moore's anti-sceptical strategies and defend Moore's arguments against Stroud's well-known criticisms. The central constructive achievement of the chapter is a more detailed working-out of the perspectivalist-pragmatist conception of enquiry as necessarily addressed to determinate questions and conducted within a setting of (defeasible) agreements regarding pertinent investigative methods, applicable epistemic norms, and matters of fact not then and there in question. In this context, the point of Moore's "defence of common sense" is to call our attention to the vast collection of matter-of-factual propositions that, in Wittgenstein's words, "we affirm without special testing"; propositions which supply the normative epistemic *standard* for closing off a sceptical dialogue of challenge and response with the observation that it is *more reasonable* to consent to a disputed conclusion than