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BOOK REVIEWS

Beyond "Justification": Dimensions of Epistemic Evaluation, by William P. Alston. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Pp. ix + 256. \$45.00 (Cloth).

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In *Beyond "Justification"* William Alston rejects the orthodoxy that there is one central epistemic desideratum—justification or warrant. This is not, however, a repudiation of epistemology in general or of Alston's reliabilism in particular. Instead, in the first part of the book he provides a careful, reliabilism-based analysis of the distinct epistemological desiderata. In the second part he considers the epistemology of epistemology, and discusses various kinds of scepticism.

It might be thought that this new approach to epistemology would have been supported by the argument that justification is supposed to meet incompatible requirements, such as being an effective means to having true beliefs on the one hand and being cognitively accessible on the other. In fact, the only argument given is the inability of philosophers to agree on what this central epistemic desideratum amounts to. This suggests an experimental reading of the book. Let us bracket off any beliefs about justification as such and follow Alston's investigation of the various epistemic desiderata and their connections. And let us use this discussion to decide if there is, after all, a central epistemic desideratum that we could identify with justification. Before proceeding it should be stressed that a review of this sort inevitably provides a somewhat distorted picture, ignoring the wealth of detailed insight on many topics.

The epistemic desiderata considered by Alston fall into five groups: (1) truth; (2) truth-conducive desiderata such as reliability; (3) cognitive access to reliability, etc. (4) deontological features such as permissibility; and (5) features of systems of belief such as the provision of understanding. Alston asks just why truth is itself disqualified as a candidate for justification. He considers and partially endorses Laurence Bonjour's answer that we just do not have direct and unproblematic access to the truth (p. 42). Alston notes, though, that there are unproblematic cases of perception, which could be described as having direct access to the truth. But I take it that the whole dismal topic of epistemology only arises because often we do not have such direct access, and hence we are forced to consider the means we take to the end of having true beliefs. This leads to us taking the



truth-conducive desiderata as central, and Alston devotes more space to these than any others.

Deontological features are treated as of little importance precisely because they do not seem to be conducive to the truth (pp. 174–75). As for the features of group (5), which center on understanding, Alston grants they have their own importance, although they are not truth-conducive. Alston reveals his naturalist, externalist and reliabilist convictions in giving group (3) a rather brief treatment, pointing out that in certain rather sophisticated contexts we need to reflect upon the ways we form beliefs and this requires some cognition of reliability (pp. 163–64). Here the internalist will reply that, while a brief treatment of actual cognitive access is appropriate, accessibility is far more important. Recall the partially endorsed BonJourian point that truth is not directly accessible. That was why we needed epistemology in the first place. So what progress has been made if we have a means to the end of truth that is likewise inaccessible?

This leaves group (2), the truth-conducive desiderata, which are given the most thorough treatment. Especially important—and persuasive—is Alston's solution to the Problem of Generality and his identification of the adequacy of the ground with the reliability of the process. Both are based upon psychological realism. He writes, "I assume there is always a unique correct answer to the question 'What mechanism, embodying what function, was operative in the generation of this belief?'" (p. 139). Here, by a *function* Alston means an assignment of outputs to inputs. The relevant measure of reliability is then the conditional probability of the truth of the output on the truth/veridicality of the input. To the objection that we can think of any number of input-output functions, Alston points out that the function to consider is the one that actually operates in real human beings. Alston then extends this account to cover epistemic virtues, where we are no longer considering the reliability of a psychological mechanism but of the person as a whole.

At this point we might well wonder why Alston has not retained the identification of justification with reliability, or even with high probability of the belief conditional on the believer's total experience. For much of the book may be taken as a defence of a reliabilist account of truth-conducivity, which Alston clearly takes to be the central desideratum. And the second, and shorter, part of the work, on the epistemology of epistemology, reinforces this. Thus, towards the end, Alston writes: "TC [(truth-conducive)] desiderata are the most important ones for our cognitive activity, which has as its basic aim a high preponderance of true over false beliefs about matters of interest and importance to us" (p. 229).

In the concluding paragraph to the work Alston talks of an "epistemology of belief . . . without any supposition of a uniquely central epistemologically valuable property of beliefs picked out by 'justified'" (p. 246), but that leaves open the possibility that without (pre-) supposing such a central property one will emerge, as this book seems, rather impressively, to show.

This, then, is an important work in the tradition of externalist, naturalist approaches to epistemology, and one whose excellence in detail I have not been able to convey. But what should we internalists make of it? Alston tries to give us a voice in the second part of the work, which

expounds a partial solution to the sceptical problem in terms of the reliability of doxastic practices, such as trusting perception. Alston, however, grants the supposed inevitable circularity of any attempt thoroughly to refute the sceptic. Along the way Alston responds to the internalist appeal to cognitively accessible criteria, like having done your epistemic duty, by noting that scepticism remains as to whether doing your epistemic duty is truth-conducive.

Internalists should fight back. Here are three, related criticisms of Alston's externalism. The first is that while he grants that we do sometimes have direct access to the truth in perception he does not explore the topic of evident beliefs. It is here that the deontological is most relevant. It is easy to be careless, self-deceiving, or downright dishonest in declaring something evidently true. And that may have brought appeals to the evident into disrepute. So we should be conscientious seekers after truth, but if we are then, I submit, the evident will protect us from scepticism, although not perhaps in a way Descartes would have recognized.

The second criticism is Alston's lack of enthusiasm for logical probabilities. He is not alone and no doubt Rudolf Carnap's *The Logical Foundations of Probability* has a lot to answer for. Carnap was, I take it, assuming the total accessibility of logical probabilities. But recall the predicament that what is accessible is not always clearly truth-conducive and what is clearly truth-conducive is not always accessible. Fortunately some accessible fragments of the theory of logical probabilities are all we need. One fragment is that, as Alston notes, we may assign $K\%$ logical probability to the statistical syllogism ($K\%$ of F s are G s; this is an F ; so, *ceteris paribus*, this is a G). The *ceteris paribus* clause might make even this seem quite inapplicable, but it is providential—maybe it really is providential—that the situation of the conscientious sceptic is precisely that in which very many ordinary considerations have been bracketed off, and so statistical syllogisms apply.

Another fragment might be that, where the evidence does not decide between an objectively more complicated theory and a simpler one, the simpler one is at least as probable as the more complicated one. Some further fragments state the low logical probability conditional on the available evidence of various propositions that in a deontologically relaxed moment we would dismiss as obviously false. There are heaps of these and all we require is that they have low probability conditional upon total evidence. An example might be that planet Earth was built a hundred years ago as a holiday home for aliens living in the exhaustingly busy center of the Galaxy.

Alston does raise two objections to identifying epistemic probabilities with probabilities "as typically treated in probability theory" (p. 97). One is the supposed principle that every necessary truth has probability 100% (p. 98). This may be replaced by a list of logical truths, all to be given probability 100%, and a few chosen deductive inference-schemata. There is no need to take whichever is true—and hence necessarily true—of, say, the Axiom of Choice and its negation as having probability 100%. What remains of Alston's objection is a complaint against the idealization of logical omniscience, namely that to calculate logical probabilities we need to assume all relevant hypotheses have been surveyed and all rel-

evant inferences noted. This is, I grant, one reason why logical probabilities are only partially accessible, but not an objection if that is granted. The other objection is that, where the ground for the belief in question (that P) is not an experience but itself a belief (that J), then the adequacy of the grounds for P should not be identified with Prob (P/J) for it also depends on the adequacy of J. I fail to see this as an objection. The standard formula would have it that the adequacy of the ground for P in these circumstances is the logical probability Prob (P&J/E) where E is the total, or the relevant, experience.

The third criticism follows from the way that, for good reasons, Alston explicates reliability not in terms of known frequency, or even actual frequency, but the frequency in a large run of actual or possible cases (p. 134). I interpret him as offering a counterfactual frequency account of reliability: what would occur if there were a large number of cases. But, precisely because this is a probabilistic situation, there is no fact of the matter as to what would occur. So we need an amendment: the reliability of a belief-forming process is the frequency of truths that would *probably* occur if there were a large number of occurrences of the type of process in question. What sort of probability is this though? It cannot itself be analyzed as reliability on pain of circularity. And it had better be objective if epistemology is to have teeth. It must be logical probability.

The point of these three criticisms is that we need not despair of a traditional epistemology, concerned with accessible means to be used when the end, truth, is not directly accessible. Within such an epistemology the truth-conducive epistemic desiderata, as expounded by Alston, play a key role.

Can God Be Free? by William L. Rowe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. vii + 173. \$45.00 (Hardback).

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William Rowe's *Can God be Free?* is a nicely conceived and extremely well-written work. The focus on crucial conceptual relations between essential perfect goodness, divine freedom, divine responsibility, worship and praise has occupied Rowe's work for the last twelve years and the argumentation in *Can God Be Free?* is subtle and very polished. In chapter 1 Rowe provides some background on the famous series of exchanges between Gottfried Leibniz and Samuel Clarke on divine freedom and perfection. But Rowe's main focus in chapter (1) is to rebut Leibniz's well-known attempt to reconcile divine perfection and freedom. Leibniz's well-known proposal was that God both necessarily and freely actualized the best possible world. Rowe offers an interesting proof that this proposal cannot be true. Rowe's response takes the form of a simple two-premise argument.

1. If God exists and is omnipotent, perfectly wise and good, then He chooses to create the best possible world.