Introduction

Epistemology was of no interest to me in my student days. None of the topics discussed grabbed my attention, not even the issue of how to reply to skepticism concerning the existence and knowability of an external world; such skepticism had never tempted me. It all seemed quite dull. Then two things happened that made epistemology both fascinating and unavoidable.

In the 1960s and 70s the field of *meta*-epistemology emerged. Beliefs come with a variety of distinct truth-related merits: *being true*, of course, but also *being warranted*, *being entitled*, *being rational*, *being a case of knowledge*, and the like. Among the traditional concerns of epistemologists has been the attempt to formulate criteria for the presence of such merits in beliefs. The emergence of meta-epistemology consisted of philosophers stepping back and taking note of the fact that the criteria on offer fall into certain structural types. And rather than doing what their predecessors had done, assume the rightness of a certain type and then discuss the substantive issues within the confines of that type, philosophers were now led to inquire into the tenability of these various types and to ask whether, perhaps, some important types had been neglected. I found this fascinating. And rather soon it became clear to me why epistemology had been of no interest to me in my student days.

One of the structural options that emerged with great clarity from the meta-epistemological discussions was that of *foundationalism*, and more specifically, of that species of foundationalism that has come to be called *classical foundationalism*. Let me explain, ever so briefly, what classical foundationalism is; more elaborate explanations will be found in a number of the essays that follow. Foundationalisms of all sorts begin by distinguishing between *mediate* beliefs, those held on the basis of other beliefs, and *immediate* beliefs, those not so held. Then, with their eye on some particular merit in beliefs, they do two things. They specify the conditions under which immediate beliefs possess the merit in question. And on the

assumption that mediate beliefs possess the merit because it gets transferred to them from immediate beliefs that possess it, they specify how a mediate belief must be related to one or more immediate beliefs that possess the merit for the merit to get transferred to the mediate belief. Foundationalist theories all have this sort of bi-partite structure. What distinguishes classical foundationalism from other versions of foundationalism is its insistence that for immediate beliefs to possess the merit in question, they must be *certain* for the person whose beliefs they are.

It became clear to me, in retrospect, that in my graduate course in epistemology we had unwittingly taken classical foundationalism for granted and spent our time worrying over problems that arise within that structure, never realizing that there are other epistemological structures in which at least some of those problems do not arise. My professor was by no means unusual in thus taking classical foundationalism for granted. Once classical foundationalism had been identified as one structural option among others, it became clear that epistemology in the empiricist and analytic traditions had been overwhelmingly dominated by classical foundationalist proposals.

A second development around the same time also spurred my interest in epistemology. In my graduate school days, logical positivism appeared to be in the prime of life. And logical positivism posed for me, as a religious person, a serious challenge. The logical positivists venerated modern natural science and abhorred metaphysics and religion. They thought natural science was the road ahead for humankind. To their credit, the positivists recognized that making such a declaration required of them an explanation of what distinguishes natural science from metaphysics and religion, and indeed from all those other intellectual endeavors that they regarded as dead ends. They proposed drawing the distinction by employing a thesis about meaning. For those statements that are not analytically true or false, a statement has meaning in the sense of making a genuine factual claim if and only if it is empirically verifiable. The road ahead for humankind consists of developing a body of theory all of whose non-necessary statements are empirically verifiable. Metaphysics and religion fail this test, so it was said; natural science passes it.

Everything now rests on the concept of empirical verifiability. So what is that? It turned out the positivists were incapable of articulating a concept of the empirically verifiable which has the consequence that all reputable natural science is empirically verifiable and none of the bad stuff, especially metaphysics and religion, is empirically verifiable. This inability was their undoing.

The collapse of logical positivism in the 1960s was, for me, a welcome development. But soon it became clear that the collapse of positivism meant that I and other theists were confronted once again with a challenge that had a far longer and more substantial pedigree than positivism – a challenge that, if positivism were true, was deeply misguided and not something to spend any time on. The positivist challenge to the theist was not, strictly speaking, an epistemological challenge; the positivists declared that the language of religion lacks meaning, since nothing is said that is empirically verifiable. Religious language does not make genuine statements, it does not express genuine beliefs. Once this challenge was dismissed from the scene, the theist was once again confronted with the older epistemological challenge which takes for granted that religious language does express genuine beliefs but says that there is something improper about a theistic belief if it is not held on the basis of good propositional evidence. It is not rational, not responsible, not justified, or whatever. This has appropriately been called the *evidentialist* challenge to theistic belief. It's a challenge that is deeply ingrained in the mentality of modern intellectuals. The death of the positivist challenge brought back to life the evidentialist challenge.

Confronted with the evidentialist challenge, the theistically religious person can do either of two things. He can try to meet the challenge – by showing that he already holds his beliefs on the basis of good evidence, by setting out to acquire evidence so that henceforth he can hold his beliefs on the basis of good evidence, or by trimming his beliefs until he has good evidence for what remains of them. Alternatively, he can challenge the challenge. In conjunction with two good friends, both superb philosophers, William P. Alston and Alvin Plantinga, I set out to explore the latter option. Is there good reason to accept the evidentialist challenge to theistic belief? Is it true that, for a belief about God to be up to snuff, it has to be held on the basis of good propositional evidence?

Well, why have those who issued the challenge believed that it was valid? What were their reasons for thinking that evidentialism concerning theistic beliefs is true? Our attempt to answer this question led us back to John Locke. It was Locke who first clearly and explicitly issued the evidentialist challenge concerning theistic belief. The recently developed meta-epistemology made it unmistakably clear what led him to do so. It was his adherence to classical foundationalism.

The question that then confronted Alston, Plantinga, and myself, was whether classical foundationalism is true. If not true in general, is it nonetheless true for theistic beliefs? If not true for theistic beliefs, is there some

other compelling epistemological structure that yields the same conclusion concerning beliefs about God, namely, that to be up to snuff, they must be held on the basis of good propositional evidence? And if classical foundationalism is not true in general, is there anything in general to put in its place? Subsequent work by Alston, Plantinga, myself, and many others, has addressed all of these questions.

Among the various lines of thought that emerged from these inquiries was that which has come to be known as *Reformed epistemology*. In the chapter titled "Epistemology of religion," I briefly discuss Reformed epistemology within the context of a sketch of the history of the epistemology of religious belief. In the chapter titled "Reformed epistemology," I offer a more detailed account of the movement.

The fact that my interest in epistemology was spurred by two distinct but more or less simultaneous developments, the emergence of metaepistemology and the resuscitation of the evidentialist challenge to theistic belief, is reflected in the fact that the essays in the first part of this collection are essays in general epistemology and those in the second part are essays in the epistemology of religion. If I had been rigorously deliberate and systematic in my thinking about these issues, I would have written the essays in general epistemology first, and then, as an application of my general epistemology, I would have written the essays in epistemology of religion. But that's not how it went. I moved back and forth between the specific and the general. The essay, "Can belief in God be rational if it has no foundations?" was written before any other in this collection.

I have explained what motivated my writing of these essays. Now let me highlight a topic, or question, that runs throughout. I have described Locke as holding that there is something defective in beliefs about God if they are not held on the basis of the sort of evidence required by classical foundationalism. But upon reading Locke with care, it became clear to me that he was saying something much more precise than that there is something defective about such beliefs. He was saying that a person is not *entitled* to her beliefs about God if she does not hold them on the basis of satisfactory propositional evidence. He was saying that she is not *permitted* to hold her theistic beliefs, she is not a *responsible* believer, if she does not hold them on the basis of such evidence. The language of "ought" and "ought not," of "should" and "should not," pervades Locke's discussion of these matters. That realization led me, in turn, to identify what I came to regard as a serious defect in analytic epistemology of the past half century. I found most of it preoccupied with what the writers called *justification*, this being customarily understood as what has to be

added to true belief to make for knowledge. Not only were they themselves preoccupied almost exclusively with justification; I found many of them taking for granted that being justified was in fact the only truth-related merit in beliefs that is of interest to the epistemologist – apart, of course, from being a case of knowledge. The discussions were almost all about the nature of justification and the conditions for its presence in beliefs. There were some discussions about rationality; but these were very much in the minority.

I came to believe that beliefs have a number of distinct merits (and demerits) that are of interest to the epistemologist, and that a good deal of confusion in epistemology has been caused by the assumption that there is just one. There's the merit that Locke had his eye on and that I call *entitlement*. There's the merit of *warrant* that Plantinga has his eye on in his trilogy on warrant.[1] There's the merit of *rationality* that Richard Foley has his eye on in his books and essays on rationality.[2] There's the merit of *reliability* that Alvin Goldman has had his eye on.[3] The list goes on and on.

There was in Locke's day, and there remains in our day, the social practice of holding people responsible for what they believe and for how they believe it, and of holding people responsible for what they do not believe. As I indicated above, the vocabulary that we typically use for this is the vocabulary of "ought" and "ought not," of "should" and "should not." Locke's aim was to intervene in how that practice was conducted in his day. He strongly believed that when it came to matters of morality and religion, the practice should be radically reformed.

At the root of the wars and controversies over religion that Europe was experiencing in Locke's day was the assumption, by each of the contending parties, that they were entitled to their moral and religious beliefs. Locke held that they were not entitled. They would be entitled only if they held their beliefs on the basis of evidence of a classical foundationalist sort. If Europeans could be persuaded to revise their practice of holding each other responsible for their moral and religious beliefs so that it accorded with this principle, religious peace would ensue.

[1] See *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford University Press, 1993), *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford University Press, 1993), and *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
[2] See *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) and *Working Without a Net* (Oxford University Press, 1993).
[3] Among other writings, see "What Is Justified Belief?" In George Pappas, ed., *Justification and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979) and *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

Only rather late in my reflection on these issues did I discern what, so I now think, was deepest in Locke's thought. Yes, he was a classical foundationalist with respect to being entitled to hold theistic beliefs; and yes, he did think that religious peace would ensue if people would follow his proposal. But what was deeper than any of this was Locke's conviction that religious peace was within reach only if there is some way of extricating ourselves from our diverse traditions so as to form our beliefs solely on the basis of the human nature that we all share in common. That's what Locke thought adherence to classical foundationalism would do, and that nothing else would do. For Locke saw classical foundationalism as satisfying what I call the "Doxastic Ideal" in the essay, "Epistemology of religion," an ideal that I trace back to Plato. Locke thought that the only beliefs that are certain for a person are those whose content is some necessary truth that is self-evident to the person, plus those whose content records some feature of consciousness of which the person is introspectively aware. If people can be taught to hold their religious beliefs on the basis of deductive or probabilistic arguments whose validity is self-evident to them and whose premises are of one or the other of those two sorts, then at last our shared human nature and not our diverse traditions will form our beliefs.

Here was epistemology on a grand social scale. I found it gripping. Not for a moment did I believe that Locke's proposal for achieving social peace had any chance of success. Neither did I accept his classical foundationalism, or his evidentialism concerning theistic belief. And I hold that it was pure fantasy on Locke's part to suppose that we can free ourselves from the influence of our immersion in one and another tradition. Nonetheless, the spirit of Locke hovers over the essays in this collection in that, ever since reading Locke, the merit in beliefs that has drawn my attention is *entitlement*. I concede the importance of knowledge and of its constituent, warrant. I concede the importance of rationality in its various forms. But it's the phenomenon of being a responsible believer that has intrigued me. In my book *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*,[4] I explored Locke's own account of entitlement and explained why it doesn't work. Here, in several of these essays, I offer my own account.

My first stab at developing an account of entitlement in general, and of entitlement to beliefs about God in particular, is to be found in the essay already mentioned, "Can belief in God be rational if it has no foundations?" At the time of writing the essay I was on the way to seeing the

[4] Cambridge University Press, 1996.

need to distinguish entitlement from rationality, but not quite there yet. Accordingly there is some blurring of the two concepts in the essay, as there is some blurring of those two concepts with the concept of justification. The essay should have been titled, "Can belief in God be *entitled* if it has no foundations?"

Even more significant than my blurring of the distinction between entitlement and rationality is the fact that, at the time of writing the essay, I had not yet seen with full clarity the solution to a puzzle that anyone talking about entitlement has to face up to; I was on the way to seeing the solution, but not quite there. In the essay "Ought to believe – two concepts," chapter 3 of the present volume, I argue in detail that we human beings seldom hold our beliefs as the result of *deciding* to hold them. Yet we often hold people responsible for what they believe and for how they believe it; sometimes we even hold them responsible for their ignorance. What sense does this make if beliefs (and ignorance) are not the product of volition?

It was when reading Locke's small book, *On the Conduct of the Understanding*, that the solution became clear to me. Entitlement has to do with how we conduct our understandings. A fundamental component of human life is *practices of inquiry*, that is, social practices that are ways of finding things out or believed to be such. When we say that someone ought to believe or ought not believe this or that, or that he should not have been ignorant of so-and-so, we are indirectly reproaching him for his failure to employ some relevant practice of inquiry with appropriate competence. In "Ought to believe – two concepts," I distinguish this use of "ought" and "ought not," when applied to beliefs, from another common use of the same terms (about which I'll have more to say in a moment). Then, in chapter 4, "Entitlement to believe and practices of inquiry," I offer a general account of entitlement as grounded in practices of inquiry; in chapter eleven, "On being entitled to beliefs about God," I apply this general account to the specific case of entitlement to beliefs about God.

Not only does the spirit of John Locke hover over these essays, in my preoccupation with the doxastic merit of entitlement; the spirit of Thomas Reid hovers over them as well. Indeed, in how I actually treat the issues there is much more of the spirit of Reid than of the spirit of Locke. In 1979, for reasons so insignificant that I don't remember what they were, I happened to read Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind*. I felt that I had met a soul-mate. Here was a fellow opponent of classical foundationalism; Reid was, in fact, the first great opponent of classical foundationalism in the modern period. Here was also a fellow metaphysical realist.

I had no sympathy with the opinion, then spreading like wildfire, that to be an anti-foundationalist one had to be an anti-realist, a view typically grounded in views about the role of concepts in cognition.

And there was a third thing that I found fascinating in Reid. Reid's epistemology was not free-standing but set within the context of a rich and extraordinarily insightful account of the belief-forming self. Reid employed this account to offer a compelling reply to the skeptic, to offer an equally compelling reply to Locke's claims about the need for evidence, and so forth. Apart from some adumbrations in Hume, this was entirely new in philosophy of the modern period. And the fact that I found it fascinating was a sign of the fact that in the analytic epistemologists that I had been reading, there was nothing of the sort. Roderick Chisholm, one of the finest of the analytic epistemologists, declares that he too was much impressed by Reid. Yet nothing of this side of Reid rubbed off on him. He employs no account of the belief-forming self in his epistemology. Beliefs are just there.

My fascination with Reid comes to the surface in the two essays that conclude this collection: "Reid on common sense" and "What sort of epistemological realist was Thomas Reid?" But as I suggested above, his spirit hovers over the collection as a whole. In "Historicizing the belief-forming self," I argue that Reid does not take sufficient account of the fact that our belief-forming selves are formed not just by what our human nature bequeaths to us but also by how we are shaped by experience. But that's only a modification of Reid's view, not a replacement. My interest in entitlement comes from Locke; the understanding of the belief-forming self that I employ throughout is basically Reidian.

Let me now, in closing, describe briefly the sequence of topics in these essays. Part one consists of essays in general epistemology. In chapter 1, "The world ready-made," I defend, against the metaphysical anti-realists, an assumption that underlies all my thought, namely, that there is (in the words of William James) a ready-made world. In chapter 2, I argue against the common view that close scrutiny of how concepts function in human experience leads to the conclusion that that function makes experiential access to ready-made reality impossible. In the next chapter, "Ought to believe – two concepts," I distinguish between two uses of the term "ought" (and its synonyms) as applied to belief, namely, those that express what I call *the proper function concept of ought* and what I call *the responsibility concept of ought*. It is the latter concept that interests me. Then in chapter 4 I give a general account of entitlement. And in the following chapter, "Historicizing the belief-forming self," I explain why

Locke's hope, of extricating ourselves from our immersion in tradition, has to be rejected. The belief-forming self is not just "hard-wired" but also "programmed."

Part two consists of essays in the epistemology of religion. The first essay in this part, "Epistemology of religion," is a historical overview of epistemology of religion. The second, "The migration of the theistic arguments: from natural theology to evidentialist apologetics," is also historical. At the time I wrote the essay, I found many writers assuming that the natural theology of the medieval theologian-philosophers was fundamentally the same project as the evidentialist apologetics of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophers and theologians; Karl Barth, for example, looks at natural theology through the lens of evidentialist apologetics. In this essay I argue that this is a serious error. Though there are indeed similarities, the projects are fundamentally different.

What then follows is a number of systematic essays. First, the essay that I have already mentioned, "Can belief in God be rational if it has no foundations?" In the next essay, "Once again, evidentialism – this time social," I consider the common claim that religious diversity places on the religious believer the obligation to justify his beliefs or give them up. And in "The assurance of faith," I consider the claim, made by Locke and many others, that the believer should always hold his or her religious beliefs with a certain tentativity. The essay following this, "On being entitled to beliefs about God," can be thought of both as a redoing of "Can belief in God be rational if it has no foundations?" in the light of a clear awareness of the connection between entitlement and practices of inquiry, and as an application to religious belief of general points made in "Entitlement to believe and practices of inquiry."

In this introduction thus far I have said nothing about Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, this having been for quite some time the main competitor of Reformed epistemology. The Wittgensteinians hold, as I understand them, that it is impossible to refer to God; their interpretation of "God-talk" is thus a theistically anti-realist interpretation. They themselves emphasize the implication that God-talk is not used to make statements about God. But equally it is not used to express hopes about God, to express gratitude to God, and so forth. The religious believer does not thank God for the food but uses God-talk to express gratitude for the food. If this interpretation of God-talk is correct, then not only is Reformed epistemology fundamentally misguided, but also the whole project of epistemology of religious belief is fundamentally misguided. In the essay "Are religious believers committed to the existence of God?",

I spend quite some time explicating the Wittgensteinian position, and then explain why I find it untenable. In the penultimate essay in this part, "Reformed epistemology," I explain in some detail the nature, origins, and significance of Reformed epistemology.

Part three, the concluding part of the collection, consists of two essays in Reid interpretation, viz., "Reid on common sense" and "What sort of epistemological realist was Thomas Reid?"

Finally, in the postscript, "A life in philosophy," I end as I have begun, on an autobiographical note. In this essay, which was presented as the first Dewey Lecture at the American Philosophical Association in 2006, I offer my reflections on what it has been like to have lived through the remarkable changes witnessed by the discipline of philosophy in the past fifty years.

A question that some readers will have is how these essays relate to my two books, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* and *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*.[5]

The book on Reid was a work of love. Having found in Reid a soulmate, I wanted to write a book in which I presented what I saw as Reid's genius. For though it seems to me that Reid, along with Kant, is one of the two great figures of the late Enlightenment, Reid had virtually fallen out of the canon of modern philosophy. I wanted to do what I could to repair that slight.

The book about Locke was not – or not in the same way – a work of love. For one thing, I found that I could not write about Reid without writing about Locke; for I came to the conclusion that it was always Locke who was in Reid's gun sight. But there was a second thing that led me to write the book about Locke. The fundamental question to which Locke addresses himself on my interpretation, namely, how can we, given our diverse religious traditions, live in justice and peace with each other, remains on the agenda of the modern world. I wanted to see how Locke proposed answering this question, and to uncover what it is about his answer that so many people have found compelling.

So once again: How does this present collection relate to those books about two historical figures? I have already noted that the spirit of each hovers over this collection. But beyond that, apart from some additional historical work, the connection is two-fold. These essays are the systematic counterpart to the historical inquiries to be found in *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* and in *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*. And

[5] Cambridge University Press, 2001.