Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others

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Contents

1

The Importance of Intellectual Self-Trust

1. CLASSICAL FOUNDATIONALISM AND INTELLECTUAL TRUST

To what extent should we intellectually trust ourselves? Questions of trust arise about our opinions, and they also arise about the faculties, practices, and methods that generate these opinions. Moreover, there is a relation between the two. If I have trust in the reliability of my faculties, practices, and methods, I will tend also to have trust in the overall accuracy of my opinions, and vice-versa. Trust in one tends to transfer to the other.

Questions of intellectual trust also arise about other people's opinions and faculties, and they can even arise about one's own past or future opinions and faculties. Moreover, there is a relation between these questions and question of self-trust, for whenever one's current opinions conflict with those of others, or with one's own past or future opinions, there is an issue of whom to trust: one's current self, or the other person, or one's past or future self? However, one of the central claims of this work is that there is also an interesting theoretical relation between the two sets of questions. I argue in Part Two that the trust it is reasonable to have in one's current opinions provides the materials for an adequate account of the trust one should have in the opinions of others and in one's own past and future opinions. But in Part One, my focus is more limited. I am concerned with intellectual trust in one's current self.

Most of us do intellectually trust ourselves by and large. Any remotely normal life requires such trust. An adequate philosophical account of intellectual trust will go beyond this observation, however, and say

3

something about what necessitates intellectual trust, how extensive it should be, and what might undermine it.

I approach these issues from an epistemological point of view, which is to say I am concerned with the degree of self-trust it is appropriate for individuals to have insofar as their goal is to have accurate and comprehensive opinions. Opinions and the faculties that generate them can also be evaluated in terms of how well they promote other intellectual goals. They can be assessed, for example, on their informativeness, explanatory power, simplicity, testability, theoretical fruitfulness, and countless other intellectual dimensions. In addition, they can be assessed with respect to whether they further one's practical goals. The assessments that traditionally have been of the most interest to epistemologists, however, are those that are concerned with what I call 'the epistemic goal', that of now having accurate and comprehensive beliefs.

I am especially interested in investigating issues of intellectual self-trust from an internal, first-person perspective. My primary concern is not to look at inquirers from the outside and ask whether their opinions have the characteristics required for knowledge. Instead, I examine how issues involving self-trust look from the perspective of someone who wants to be invulnerable to self-criticism insofar as his or her goal is to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs. In previous work, I argued that there are various senses of rational belief, but that one especially important sense is to be understood in terms of making oneself invulnerable to intellectual self-criticism.[1] In what follows, I defend, extend, and occasionally revise this position. However, the account of intellectual self-trust I defend is independent of this account of rational belief; the former does not presuppose the latter. For convenience, I often use the language of epistemic rationality to report my conclusions, but my principal interest, to repeat, is in how issues involving self-trust look from the perspective of someone who wants to be invulnerable to self-criticism insofar as his or her goal is to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs.

Issues of self-trust are important in epistemology, I argue, because there is no way of providing non–question-begging assurances of the reliability of one's faculties and beliefs. Of course, much of modern epistemology has been devoted to the search for just such assurances. Descartes's project is perhaps the most notorious example, but there are

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1 See especially Richard Foley, *Working Without a Net* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

numerous, more recent examples as well. For the first half of the twentieth century, most of the philosophical community thought that classical foundationalism was capable of providing assurances of the overall reliability of our beliefs. A roster of the great philosophical figures of this period is also a roster of the great proponents of classical foundationalism: Russell, (the early) Wittgenstein, Ayer, Carnap, and C. I. Lewis. These philosophers had their disputes with one another, but they gave remarkably similar answers to the core questions of epistemology: some beliefs are basic and as such their truth is assured; other beliefs are justified by virtue of being deductively entailed or inductively supported by these basic beliefs; we can determine with careful enough introspection whether our beliefs are justified, and if they are, we can be assured that they are also for the most part true; and we are justified in relying upon the opinions of others only to the extent that we have good inductive evidence of their reliability.

These positions came under withering attacks in the last half of the twentieth century, with the result that classical foundationalism is now widely rejected.[2] As classical foundationalism has waned, a variety of movements and trends have taken its place. Indeed, the most salient feature of contemporary epistemology is its diversity. The demise of classical foundationalism has brought with it a bewildering but also intoxicating array of new views, approaches, and questions. There have been fresh attempts to refute skepticism; coherentism, probabilism, reliabilism, and modest foundationalism have staked their claims to be the successors of classical foundationalism; and naturalized epistemologies and socialized epistemologies have proposed novel approaches to epistemological questions.

Epistemology is a field in transition, and one potential benefit of the move away from classical foundationalism is that it should be easier to appreciate the importance of self-trust. Classical foundationalism masked the issue with a trio of powerful but ultimately unacceptable proclamations: there are basic beliefs that are immune from the possibility of error; rationality demands that our beliefs either be basic or appropriately supported by basic beliefs; and if we are rational in regulating our opinions, we can be assured that our beliefs are not deeply mistaken.

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2   Not every philosopher has disavowed classical foundationalism. See Richard Fumerton, *Metaphysical and Epistemological Problems of Perception* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); and Fumerton, *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995).

Once classical foundationalism fell, the way was cleared for discussions of the role of self-trust in our intellectual lives, but surprisingly little of this discussion has occurred. Issues of intellectual self-trust have still not received the full attention they deserve. In the sections that follow, I cite and express qualms about three trends in contemporary epistemology that help explain why this is so: the tendency to regard skeptical challenges as ill-formed; the popularity of externalist accounts of epistemic justification; and the assumption that evolutionary considerations provide assurances of the overall reliability of our intellectual faculties.

In subsequent chapters in Part One (Chapters 2 and 3), I discuss the grounds and limits of self-trust; but then in Part Two, I discuss its extension to other domains: trust in the intellectual faculties and opinions of others (Chapter 4); trust in one's own past intellectual faculties and opinions (Chapter 5); and trust in one's own future intellectual faculties and opinions (Chapter 6).

2. ATTEMPTS TO REFUTE SKEPTICISM

One of the primary attractions of classical foundationalism was that it calmed our worst skeptical fears. Even if Cartesian certainty was not to be obtained, we could at least be assured that if we are careful enough, our beliefs will be justified, and assured as well that if our beliefs are justified, they are mostly accurate. Since the fall of classical foundationalism, epistemologists have had schizophrenic attitudes toward skepticism. On the one hand, they often complain that one of the most glaring mistakes of classical foundationalists was to treat skeptical hypotheses too seriously. The evil demon and the brain-in-the-vat hypotheses come in for special scorn as being too far-fetched to be worthy of attention. On the other hand, epistemologists are more drawn than ever to proving that skeptical hypotheses cannot possibly be correct. We belittle those who stop and gawk at gruesome accidents, but when we ourselves witness an accident, we too stop and gawk. We cannot help ourselves, it seems. So it is with epistemologists and skepticism. More and more epistemologists say that radical skeptical hypotheses are not worthy of serious philosophical attention, but at the same time more and more cannot help but try their hand at refuting them. Because the refutations of classical foundationalists no longer seem promising, epistemologists are looking elsewhere to refute skepticism.

One strategy is to argue that radical skepticism is self-referentially

incoherent, because in raising their worries, would-be skeptics inevitably make use of the very intellectual faculties and methods about which they are raising doubts. In so doing, they are presupposing the general reliability of these faculties and methods. Hence, it is incoherent for them to entertain the idea that these same faculties and methods might be generally unreliable.[3]

The problem with this line of argument is that it fails to appreciate that the strategy of skeptics can be wholly negative, having the form of a reductio. Skeptics can conditionally assume, for the sake of argument, that our faculties, procedures, and methods are reliable and then try to illustrate that if employed rigorously enough, these same faculties, procedures, and methods generate evidence of their own unreliability and hence undermine themselves. Skeptics may or may not be right in making this charge, but there is nothing self-referentially incoherent about it.

A second strategy is to argue that the nature of belief, reference, or truth makes skeptical hypotheses metaphysically impossible. For example, Hilary Putnam argues that in thinking about the world it is impossible to separate out our conceptual contributions from what is "really" there. Accordingly, plausible theories of reference and truth leave no room for the possibility that the world is significantly different from what our beliefs represent it to be.[4] Donald Davidson defends an analogous position. He argues that at least in the simplest of cases, the objects of our beliefs must be taken to be the causes of them and that thus the nature of belief rules out the possibility of our beliefs being largely in error.[5]

Whatever the merits of such theories of belief, reference, and truth as metaphysical positions, they cannot lay skeptical worries completely to rest. Intricate philosophical arguments are used to defend these metaphysical theories, and these arguments can themselves be subjected to skeptical doubts. Moreover, the metaphysical positions cannot be used to dispel these doubts without begging the question.

Descartes is notorious for having attempted to use a theistic metaphysics to dispel skepticism. He claimed to have shown that God's

3   See Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Michael Williams, *Groundless Belief* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977); and Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
4   Hilary Putnam, *The Many Faces of Realism* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1987).
5   Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in E. LePore ed., *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 307–19.

existence is indubitable and then went on to claim that it is also indubitable that God would not permit the indubitable to be false. Not many readers of Descartes have thought that these two claims really are indubitable, but even if they were, this still would not be enough to dispel all skeptical worries, because they do not rule out the possibility of our being psychologically constituted in such a way that we find some falsehoods impossible to doubt. Any argument which tries to use the metaphysics of God to dispel this worry – for example, an argument to the effect that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, and such a God would not create beings for whom falsehoods were impossible to doubt – begs the question, even if the metaphysics is itself indubitable. The lesson, which is widely noted in discussions of the Cartesian circle, is that Descartes's theistic metaphysics cannot provide non–question-begging protection against the possibility of error.[6]

It is less widely noted but no less true that contemporary attempts to use a theory of belief, truth, or reference to rule out the possibility of widespread error are in precisely the same predicament. We have no guarantee of the general reliability of the methods and arguments used to defend these metaphysical theories, and any attempt to use the theories themselves to provide the guarantees begs the question. The lesson, as with Descartes, is that these metaphysical systems cannot altogether extinguish skeptical worries. Regardless of how we marshal our intellectual resources, there can be no non–question-begging assurances that the resulting inquiry is reliable; and this constraint applies to metaphysical inquiries into the nature of truth, belief, and reference as much it does to any other kind of inquiry.

3. EXTERNALISM AND THE ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE

In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," W. V. O. Quine attacks the analytic/synthetic distinction and with it the conception of philosophy as a

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6 Descartes himself occasionally seems to recognize this point. In his "Second Set of Replies," he says the following: "Now if this conviction is so firm that it is impossible for us ever to have any reason for doubting what we are convinced of, then there are no further questions for us to ask: we have everything we could reasonably want. What is it to us that someone may make out that the perception whose truth we are so firmly convinced of may appear false to God or an angel, so that it is, absolutely speaking, false? Why should this alleged "absolute falsity" bother us, since we neither believe in it nor have even the smallest suspicion of it?" J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, trans., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 103–4.

discipline that seeks to uncover analytic truths.[7] According to Quine, there are no analytic truths and, hence, it cannot be philosophy's job to reveal them. Rather, philosophy is best understood as being continuous with science. Our theories and concepts are to be tested by how well they collectively meet the test of observation, and philosophy is a partner with science in this testing enterprise. This conception of philosophy helped initiate the movement to naturalize epistemology, but it also had the effect of nourishing suspicions about the project of defining knowledge, which was receiving an enormous amount of philosophical attention in the aftermath of Edmund Gettier's 1963 article, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"[8]

Gettier presents a pair of counterexamples designed to illustrate that knowledge cannot be adequately defined as justified true belief. The basic idea behind both counterexamples is that one can be justified in believing a falsehood P from which one deduces a truth Q, in which case one has a justified true belief in Q but does not know Q. Gettier's article inspired a host of similar counterexamples, and the search was on for a fourth condition of knowledge, one that could be added to justification, truth, and belief to produce an adequate analysis of knowledge. However, during this same period, the influence of Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic grew, spreading with it the idea that conceptual analysis was, if not impossible, at least uninteresting. The literature on defining knowledge came to be cited as the clearest illustration of just how uninteresting conceptual analysis is. The proposed analyses of knowledge were often clever, but critics questioned whether they told us anything significant about how cognition works or how it can be improved. At best the analyses only seem to tell us something about the intuitions of twentieth-century English speakers trained in philosophy as to what counts as knowledge.

The doubts about analysis persist today, but despite them, something which closely mimics conceptual analysis is still widely practiced in epistemology and in philosophy generally. Even epistemologists who think that no statement is analytically true go to great lengths to distinguish and elucidate epistemological concepts. The result is something that looks very much like analysis but without the pretense that one has given a list of precise necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept.

7   Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1961), 20–46.
8   Edmund L. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis*, 25 (1963), 121–3.

On the other hand, what has changed significantly is the content of many of these close cousins of analyses. The movement to naturalize epistemology had a major role in encouraging this change, although a little historical background is needed to show how.

The initial response to Gettier's counterexamples was to look for ways of restricting or complicating the justification condition for knowledge. Some epistemologists proposed that knowledge is nondefectively justified true belief, where a justification is nondefective if (roughly) it does not justify any falsehood.[9] Others proposed that knowledge is indefeasibly justified true belief, where a justification is indefeasible if (roughly) it cannot be defeated by the addition of any true statement.[10] However, a secondary but ultimately more influential response to Gettier's counterexamples was to wonder whether something less explicitly intellectual than justification, traditionally understood, is better suited for elucidating knowledge. Justification is closely associated with having or being able to generate an argument in defense of one's beliefs, but in many instances of knowledge, nothing even resembling an argument seems to be involved.

Alvin Goldman played an especially interesting and important role in shaping this response. He was an early champion of a causal theory of knowledge. In a 1967 article, he contends that knowledge requires an appropriate causal connection between the fact that makes a belief true and the person's having that belief.[11] This proposal nicely handled the original cases described by Gettier, but it ran into other problems. Knowledge of mathematics, general facts, and the future proved particularly difficult to account for on this approach. Nevertheless, Goldman's recommendation captivated many epistemologists, in part because it fit well with the view of knowledge implicit in the emerging naturalized epistemology movement. According to this view, knowledge is best conceived as arising "naturally" from our complex causal interactions

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9 See, for example, Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 102–18; Ernest Sosa, "Epistemic Presupposition," in G. Pappas, ed., *Justification and Knowledge* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), 79–92; and Ernest Sosa, "How Do You Know?" in E. Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 19–34.

10 See, for example, Robert Audi, *The Structure of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Peter Klein, *Certainty*: *A Refutation of Scepticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981); Keith Lehrer, *Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); John Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986); and Marshall Swain, *Reasons and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

11 Alvin Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 64, 357–72.

with our environment. To think of knowledge principally in terms of our having a justification for our beliefs is to overly intellectualize the notion. Some kinds of knowledge, especially highly theoretical knowledge, might involve justification, but other kinds typically do not, for example, simple perceptual knowledge. Our perceptual equipment collects and processes information from our environment and adjusts our opinions accordingly, all without argument or deliberation except in unusual cases.

Thus, in the eyes of many philosophers, Goldman's causal theory of knowledge, whatever its specific defects, had the virtue of shifting the focus away from questions of our being able to justify our beliefs intellectually and toward questions of our being in an appropriate causal or causal-like relation with our external environment. The philosophical task, according to this way of thinking about knowledge, is to identify the precise character of this relation. A simple causal connection between the fact that makes a belief true and the belief itself won't do. So, some other 'natural' relation needs to be found.

There has been no shortage of proposals,[12] but it was Goldman again who formulated the view that had the widest appeal, the reliability theory of knowledge. Contrary to what he had proposed earlier, Goldman here argues that for a person's belief to count as knowledge, it is not necessary that the belief be caused by the fact that makes it true, although this will often be the case. It is necessary, however, that the processes, faculties, and methods that produced or sustain the belief be highly reliable.[13]

Reliability theories of knowledge led in turn to new accounts of epistemic justification, specifically, externalist ones. Initially, reliabilism was part of a reaction against justification-driven accounts of knowledge, but an assumption drawn from the old epistemology tempted reliabilists to reconceive justification as well. The assumption is that, by definition, justification is that which has to be added to true belief to generate knowledge (with some fourth condition added to handle Gettier-style counterexamples). Goldman had already argued that knowledge is relia-

12   For example, see D. M. Armstrong, *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Fred Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981); Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Ernest Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, especially Chapters 13–16.

13   Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

bly produced true belief. Relying on the above assumption, he further concludes that epistemic justification must also be a matter of one's beliefs having been produced and sustained by reliable cognitive processes. Because a cognitive process is reliable only if it is well suited to produce true beliefs in the external environment in which it is operating, this is an externalist account of epistemic justification. By contrast, most foundationalists and their traditional rivals, coherentists, are internalists, whose accounts of epistemic justification emphasize the perspectives of individual believers.

The proposals by Goldman and others provoked an enormous literature on the relative advantages and disadvantages of externalism and internalism in epistemology.[14] Most of this literature assumes that externalists and internalists are defending rival theories and that, hence, both cannot be right. However, a more interesting reading of the dispute is that they are not, or at least need not be, competitors at all. Rather, they are concerned with different issues, and each needs to acknowledge the legitimacy of the other's issues.

Externalists are principally interested in explicating knowledge, but along the way they see themselves as also offering an explication of epistemic justification, because justification, they stipulate, is that which has to be added to true belief in order to get a serious candidate for knowledge. Internalists, on the other hand, are principally interested in explicating a sense of justification that captures what is involved in having beliefs that are defensible from one's perspective; but along the way they see themselves as also providing the materials for an adequate account of knowledge, because they too assume that justification is by definition that which has to be added to true belief to get knowledge, with some fillip to handle Gettier problems.

It is easy to conflate these two very different ways of thinking about epistemic justification and the related notions of rational belief and reason, especially since some of the most influential figures in the history

14 For a summary and discussion of the relevant issues, see William Alston, *Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), especially chapters 8 and 9. Also see Robert Audi, "Justification, Truth and Reliability," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 49 (1988), 1–29; Laurence Bonjour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge," in French, Uehling, Wettstein, eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 5 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 53–71; Richard Fumerton, "The Internalism-Externalism Controversy," in J. Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 2 (Atasacadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1988); Alvin Goldman, "Strong and Weak Justification," in Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 2 (1988); and Ernest Sosa, "Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue," in E. Sosa, *Knowledge in Perspective*, 225–44.

of epistemology thought that one and the same notion could capture both ideas. Descartes, for example, urged his readers to believe only that which is altogether impossible to doubt and, hence, internally beyond the possibility of criticism. However, he also thought by doing so his readers could be altogether assured of acquiring knowledge.

Few epistemologists are so sanguine anymore. Descartes's search for an internal procedure that would provide an external guarantee of knowledge proved not to be feasible, but the lesson is not that either the internal or external aspect of the Cartesian project has to be abandoned. The lesson, rather, is that there are different, equally legitimate projects for epistemologists to pursue. One project, roughly put, is that of exploring what is required for one to put one's own intellectual house in order. Another, again roughly put, is that of exploring what is required for one to stand in a relation of knowledge to one's environment. It is not unusual for the results of both kinds of explorations to be reported using the language of justification and rationality, but the terms 'justified belief' and 'rational belief' have different senses when used by externalists than when used by internalists. The externalist sense tends to be closely connected with knowledge, whereas the internalist sense tends to be closely connected with internally defensible believing. Confusion occurs when epistemologists slide back and forth between the two, sometimes using the language of justification and rationality to report what has to be added to true belief to get a serious candidate for knowledge and other times to report what is involved in having beliefs that are defensible given the believer's perspective.

4. EPISTEMOLOGY, THEOLOGY, AND NATURAL SELECTION

For the medievals, religious authority and tradition were seen as repositories of wisdom. By contrast, Descartes and Locke regarded authority and tradition as potential sources of error and took reason to be the corrective. However, this did not prevent either from making liberal use of theological claims to undergird their epistemologies.

Descartes's use of theological assertions is well known. He claims that the existence of God is indubitable and that it is also indubitable that God would not permit the indubitable to be false. He concludes that if we follow the method of doubt and believe only that which is indubitable for us, we can be assured that of not falling into error.

Locke's reliance on theology is less bold than Descartes and hence less notorious, but it is no less essential to his epistemology. At the heart of

Locke's epistemology is the tenet that God has commanded us to have accurate opinions. As with all of God's commands, we have an obligation to do our best to obey this command. The resulting obligation, according to Locke, applies to all of our intellectual endeavors, but it is especially pressing to have accurate beliefs about matters of morality and religion, because with respect to these matters, the salvation of our souls is at stake.

These claims, like everything else in Locke's epistemology, are suffused with a spirit of intellectual optimism. Locke assumes that even ordinary people can have reliable beliefs about matters of morality and religion. They need only to make proper use of their intellectual faculties, which for Locke means believing claims with the degree of confidence that the evidence warrants.[15] Locke does not presume that one can be altogether assured of having only true beliefs if one regulates one's opinions in accordance with the evidence. On the contrary, he thinks that it is not possible to have certainty about matters of religion and morality. However, he does seem to think that one can be assured that one's beliefs about these matters are not wildly mistaken. I say 'seems' because Locke does not explicitly address this possibility. On the other hand, there is no hint in his discussions that one who follows one's evidence might possibly fall into massive error. A basic intellectual optimism is simply taken for granted.

The source of this optimism is the theological claim that God has provided us with intellectual faculties, most importantly the faculty of reason, which are well designed to generate accurate opinions. The following remarks are characteristic of Locke:

Every man carries about him a touchstone if he will make use of it, to distinguish substantial gold from superficial glittering, truth from appearances. . . . [T]his touchstone . . . is natural reason. (*Conduct of the Understanding*, §3)

Since our faculties are not fitted to penetrate into the internal fabric and real essence of bodies; but yet plainly discover to us the being of a God, and the knowledge of ourselves, enough to lead us into a full and clear discovery of our duty, and great concernment, it will become us, as rational creatures, to employ those faculties we have about what they are most adapted to, and follow the direction of nature, where it seems to point us out the way. For 'tis rational to conclude, that our proper employment lies in those enquiries, and in that sort of knowledge, which is most suited to our natural capacities, and carries in it

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15   See §4.2 for a discussion of Locke's principles of evidence.

our greatest interest, i.e., the condition of our eternal state. Hence I think I may conclude, that morality is the proper science, and business of mankind in general; (who are both concerned, and fitted to search out their *Summum Bonum*). (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, xii, 11).

Appeals to theology have a double purpose in Locke's epistemology. As in Descartes's epistemology, they provide assurances of reliability. God has properly equipped us for our intellectual tasks. All we need do is use our faculties for "what they are most adapted to, and follow the direction of nature, where it seems to point us out the way." But in addition, theology provides an explanation of why it is important for us to have accurate beliefs. We need accurate beliefs, especially in matters of religion and morality, because "the condition of our eternal state" is at stake.

Anyone familiar with twentieth-century thought is also familiar with its doubts about theism. One of the implications of these doubts for epistemology is that in general it is no longer thought appropriate to appeal to theological claims in trying to provide assurances that our beliefs are reliable or to explain the importance of our having reliable beliefs.[16] On the other hand, every age has its dominant assumptions that it is eager, sometimes overly eager, to employ to solve intellectual problems. Our age is no exception.

The question of why it is important to have reliable beliefs is not extensively discussed in contemporary epistemology, but when the question is raised, the answer is often placed in an evolutionary framework rather than the moral and theological framework in which Locke placed his answer. An especially familiar line of thought begins with the observation that it is important for one to have accurate beliefs if one is to make one's way about the world successfully. Without accurate opinions, one is unable to fashion effective strategies for satisfying one's needs and pursuing one's goals. Moreover, this observation is relevant not just to the prospects of individual human beings but also to the workings of natural selection on humans collectively. Natural selection has resulted in our having faculties that have allowed us to survive and prosper as a species, but according to this line of argument, if our faculties regularly misled us about our surroundings, we would not have survived, much less prospered. Natural selection thus provides assurances that our cognitive faculties are generally reliable and our beliefs for the most part accurate.

16   For a contrary view, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, and Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Locke's view was that God has provided us with the cognitive faculties needed for that inquiry "which is most suited to our natural capacities, and carries in it our greatest interest, i.e., the condition of our eternal state." The contemporary view, by contrast, is that the processes of natural selection have provided us with cognitive systems that are well designed for survival, and these systems would not be well designed for survival unless they were generally reliable.[17] In other words, the contemporary view has evolution playing a role in epistemology analogous to the role played by God in Locke's epistemology. Why is it important for us to have accurate beliefs? The answer is not salvation but survival. And, how can we be assured that our beliefs are in fact generally accurate? The answer is not natural theology but natural selection. Whereas Locke says that God has provided us with faculties suitable for our intellectual inquiries, the contemporary view is that natural selection has provided us with faculties suitable for our intellectual inquiries. It is evolution, rather than God, which provide the grounds for intellectual optimism.

Unfortunately, arguments from natural selection are no more capable than arguments from natural theology of providing guarantees that our opinions are accurate. The most obvious problem is that such arguments inevitably beg the question. The theory of natural selection is used to argue that our intellectual faculties and procedures are trustworthy, but the theory itself, and the implications drawn from it, are themselves the products of our intellectual faculties and procedures and, hence, are trustworthy only if these faculties and procedures are trustworthy.

On the other hand, naturalized epistemologists, who are often the most enthusiastic advocates of the above argument, tend to be unimpressed by the charge that they may be begging the question. They reject a priori epistemology and urge instead that epistemology be thought of as continuous with science. Thus, in making use of the theory of natural selection for epistemological purposes, they claim simply to be following their own advice.[18]

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17 "There is some encouragement in Darwin. If people's innate spacing of qualities is a gene-linked trait, then the spacing that has made for the most successful inductions will have tended to predominate through natural selection. Creatures inveterately wrong in their inductions have a pathetic but praiseworthy tendency to die before reproducing their kind." W. V. O. Quine, "Natural Kinds," in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 114–38. See also Nicholas Rescher, *A Useful Inheritance* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1989).

18 For a further discussion of this claim, see Richard Foley, "Quine and Naturalized Episte-

An objection that is less easy to shrug off, however, is that the theory of natural selection does not have the implications it needs to have for the above argument to succeed. First, nothing in the theory implies that evolution is only caused by natural selection. Other factors, for example, random genetic drift, can also lead to changes in gene frequency, and these other factors need not exert pressure in the direction of well-designed systems. Second, nothing in the theory implies that the set of genetic options available for natural selection to choose among will be large and varied enough to include ones that will produce well-designed cognitive systems. The fact that humans have survived, and even prospered, for a relatively brief period of time is not in itself an adequate argument. Third, nothing in the theory implies that all, or even the majority, of our intellectual procedures, methods, and dispositions are products of biological evolution at all. They may instead be social and cultural products. Fourth, even if it is assumed that our most characteristic intellectual procedures, methods, and dispositions are the products of evolution, nothing in the theory implies that these procedures are well designed to generate accurate opinions in our current environment. At best the theory implies that they were well designed to enhance prospects for survival in the late Pleistocene, which, according to the best evidence, is when humans evolved, but what constitutes a good design for survival need not also be a good design for having accurate opinions.[19] A fortiori what constitutes a good design for survival in the Pleistocene need not be a good design for having accurate opinions in the twenty-first century.[20]

The moral is that despite the undeniable power of the theory of natural selection, appeals to it cannot provide ironclad assurances that our beliefs are for the most part accurate.

mology," in French, Uehling, and Wettstein, eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 243–60.

19 "[T]he selection pressures felt by organisms are dependent on the costs and benefits of various consequences. We think of hominids on the savannah as requiring an accurate way to discriminate leopards and conclude that parts of ancestral schemes of representation, having evolved under strong selection, must accurately depict the environment. Yet, where selection is intense the way it is here, the penalties are only severe for failures to recognize present predators. The hominid representation can be quite at odds with natural regularities, lumping together all kinds of harmless things with potential dangers, provided that the false positives are evolutionarily inconsequential and provided that the representation always cues the dangers." Philip Kitcher, *The Advancement of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3000.

20 For a discussion of these and related issues, see Stephen Stich, *The Fragmentation of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 55–74.

I have been expressing qualms about some trends in contemporary epistemology, but not out of nostalgia for classical foundationalism. Its day has come and gone. Had classical foundationalists been able to accomplish what they set out to do, which is nothing less than the discovery of methods and rules that would provide guarantees that our beliefs are generally accurate, it would have been a remarkable achievement. They were not able to do so, of course, and not from a lack of effort or intelligence, but rather because their project cannot be done.

However, epistemologists have found it difficult to acknowledge the full implications of the demise of classical foundationalism. One of these implications is that self-trust is an important and unavoidable element in all our intellectual projects. The above mentioned trends in contemporary epistemology mask the importance of intellectual self-trust.

Some epistemologists, for example, insist that skeptical worries are not to be taken seriously. As a result they tend not to concern themselves with whether a basic trust in the overall reliability of our most fundamental cognitive faculties and procedures is a necessary ingredient of our intellectual lives. They say that skeptical hypotheses are unnatural, or that they are self-refuting, or that they are metaphysically impossible or incompatible with what we know about the workings of natural selection. However, none of these positions is convincing.

There are deep, uncomfortable lessons to be learned from the failures of classical foundationalism. Among the most important of these lessons is that it is not unnatural to worry that our most fundamental faculties and methods might not be well suited to discover truths. Try as we may, we cannot entirely discredit this worry. In everyday contexts, entertaining general skeptical doubts is peculiar, because it requires distancing oneself from ordinary concerns. If your computer has just crashed for the third time in a week, you will not be disposed, even if you are a philosopher, to wonder whether your memories of its repeated breakdowns might be completely mistaken. A fortiori you will not discuss with the technician, except perhaps as a joke, whether there are convincing reasons for thinking that the computer really exists.[21] On the other hand, in the context of an inquiry into our role as inquirers, especially if the inquiry is a philosophical one that takes as little for

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21   Compare with Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*.

granted as possible, skeptical worries arise naturally. We worry whether our cognitive equipment and our ways of employing this equipment are well suited to produce accurate beliefs about our environment.

The proper reaction to such worries is to admit that they are unavoidable rather than to try to legislate against them. The ability that makes epistemology possible also makes skeptical concerns and questions inevitable; this is, namely, the ability to turn our methods of inquiry and the opinions they generate into objects of inquiry and to do so while taking as little for granted as possible. Within the context of such an inquiry, the worry that our beliefs might be widely mistaken is as natural as it is ineradicable. We want to defend our faculties and methods, but the only way to do so is by making use of these same faculties and methods, which means that we will never succeed in altogether ruling out the possibility that our beliefs might be broadly and deeply mistaken.

Moreover, it does not help to retreat to the claim that what is being sought are not so much assurances that our opinions are generally accurate but rather assurances that it is probable that our opinions are generally accurate, where 'probable' is given an objective interpretation, for instance, as a frequency or propensity of some sort. The retreat to probabilities leaves us in exactly the same predicament. The only way to argue that our most fundamental faculties, methods, and opinions are probably reliable is to make use of these same faculties, methods, and opinions. Just as there can be no non–question-begging guarantees that our opinions are true, and no non–question-begging guarantees that they are largely reliable, so too there can be no non–question-begging guarantees of its being probable that they are largely reliable.

This predicament is an extension of the familiar Cartesian circle, and it is a circle from which we can no more escape than could Descartes or Locke. Appeals to special methods, or to theories of belief, truth, or reference, or to the workings of natural selection are no more capable of helping us to break out of this circle than were the favored methods and theologies of Descartes and Locke.

Skeptical worries are inescapable, and the appropriate reaction to this fact about our intellectual lives is acceptance, not denial. Our lack of non–question-begging guarantees of our reliability is not a failing that needs to be corrected. It is a reality that needs to be acknowledged.[22] We must acknowledge our vulnerability to error, and acknowledge also

22   Ernest Sosa, "Philosophical Scepticism and Externalist Epistemology," *Proceedings of Aristotelian Society* (1994), 263–90.

that inquiry always involves a substantial element of trust in our own intellectual faculties and in the opinions they generate, the need for which cannot be eliminated by further inquiry. Significant inquiry requires an equally significant leap of intellectual faith. The faith need not, and should not, be unlimited; that is the path to dogmatism and irrationalism. But there does need to be such faith. The pressing questions for epistemologists are ones about its limits. How much trust is it appropriate for us to have in our faculties, especially our most fundamental faculties? Are there conditions under which this trust in the general reliability of our most basic faculties can be legitimately undermined? If so, what are they?

These questions are underappreciated in epistemology, in part because epistemologists have found it difficult to accept the conclusion that there are no non–question-begging assurances of our overall reliability.[23] This in turn has discouraged them from focusing upon the idea that our intellectual projects always require an element of intellectual faith and that among the most important questions in epistemology are ones about the limits of such faith. Instead, the tendency has been to look for ways of doing epistemology that bypass such questions.

This tendency has been encouraged by the unfortunate methodological assumption discussed in §1.3, namely, the assumption that the properties that make a belief rational (or justified) are by definition such that when a true belief has these properties, it is a good candidate to be an instance of knowledge, with some other condition added to handle Gettier-style counterexamples. I call this assumption 'unfortunate' because it is overly constraining. It places the theory of rational (justified) belief in service to the theory of knowledge. If it is assumed that the properties that make a belief rational must also be the very same properties that turn true belief into a good candidate for knowledge, then an account of rational belief is adequate only if it contributes to a successful account of knowledge. It is this assumption that has tempted reliabilists to stretch their proposed accounts of knowledge into accounts of epistemic justification, and that likewise has coaxed coherentists, modest foundationalists, and other internalists to regard these reliabilist accounts as competitors to their own accounts.

The remedy is for epistemologists of all persuasions, at least at the

23   Keith Lehrer is a notable exception. See Lehrer, *Self-Trust* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

beginning of the enterprise, to be wary of the idea that knowledge can be adequately understood in terms of rational (justified) true belief plus some fillip to handle Gettier problems, and, correspondingly, to be wary also of the idea that there is a simple, necessary tie between the theory of rational belief and the theory of knowledge. Divorcing the theory of rational belief from the theory of knowledge is liberating for both partners. It leaves open the possibility that a belief need not be rational, in at least one important sense, to count as an instance of knowledge, and it thereby creates space for a theory of rational belief whose principal aim is to explore not what is needed for one to stand in a relation of knowledge to one's environment but rather what is required for one to have beliefs that are defensible from one's own perspective. Simultaneously, it frees the theory of knowledge from an overly intellectual conception of knowledge, thus smoothing the way for accounts that give due recognition to the fact that most people cannot provide adequate intellectual defenses for much of what they know. Such accounts can be introduced without embarrassment and without the need for awkward attempts to force back into the account some duly externalized notion of rational belief, because the definition of knowledge is thought to require it.[24]

The assumption that the conditions which make a belief rational are by definition conditions that turn a true belief into a good candidate for knowledge is needlessly limiting. It discourages the idea that there are different, equally legitimate projects for epistemologists to pursue. One project is to investigate what has to be the case in order to have knowledge. An externalist approach is well suited to this project. A distinct project, also important, is concerned with what is required to put one's own intellectual house in order. It is within this latter project that issues of intellectual self-trust most naturally arise.

The inescapability of skeptical worries is one way of illustrating the centrality of issues of intellectual self-trust, but there are more indirect ways of doing so, as well. Consider the view that one of the aims of epistemology is to improve intellectual performance. It would not have occurred to Descartes or Locke to question this assumption, but one

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24 Compare with Hilary Kornblith, "Distrusting Reason," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 22 (1998): "[T]he ability to form one's belief in a way which is responsive to evidence is not at all the same as the ability to present reasons for one's beliefs, either to others or to oneself."

implication of the failure of classical foundationalism is that epistemologists do not have a privileged role to play in handing out intellectual advice.

Neither Descartes nor Locke would have claimed that epistemologists are well positioned to give less than fundamental intellectual advice. The relevant experts, whether they be statisticians, medical doctors, or astronomers, are best placed to provide guidance on the issues within a given field, because they have the requisite specialized knowledge. Nor would have Descartes and Locke claimed that it is the role of epistemologists to formulate non–field-specific, intellectual rules of thumb. Such informal rules are best produced by reflection on as wide a range of data as possible. One can potentially use anything in fashioning these rules, from studies in cognitive psychology about our tendencies to make mistakes of statistical reasoning to mnemonic devices and other intellectual tricks, for example, carrying nines. Epistemologists can make contributions to the project of fashioning these rules of thumb, but qua epistemologists they are not in a specially privileged position.

On the other hand, classical foundationalists did think that they were in a special position to give useful advice about the most basic matters of inquiry. They were wrong, however. Epistemologists can provide interesting and revealing insights about the conditions of rational belief and knowledge, but it is a mistake to think that these conditions will provide us with useful guidance concerning the most basic matters of intellectual inquiry.

The lack of such guidance is a familiar complaint about externalist accounts of rational belief. For example, if an externalist account tell us that a necessary condition of being rational is that we use reliable methods, we will want to know how to determine which methods are reliable and which ones are not, but the proposed reliabilist account does not provide us with advice about how to make these determinations. What is insufficiently appreciated is that internalist accounts of rational belief are unable to do any better. Classical foundationalists thought otherwise, of course. For example, Descartes claimed that his method of doubt provides advice to inquirers that is both useful and fundamental. His recommended method is notorious for being overly demanding and, moreover, it fails to accomplish what he most wanted it to accomplish, which is a way of conducting inquiry that provides guarantees of truth. But for present purposes, it is another point that I am making. Namely, even if the method had been otherwise defensible, it would not have provided us with useful, fundamental advice. Descartes tells us to believe

only those propositions whose truth we cannot doubt when we bring them clearly to mind. However, it is not always immediately obvious whether a proposition is in fact indubitable for us. Nor is it always immediately obvious whether we have succeeded in bringing a proposition clearly to mind. Thus, we can have questions about that which Descartes says is fundamental to our being rational, and these are questions that his account does not help us answer.

The proposals of coherentists, modest foundationalists, and other internalists fare no better. Coherentists, for example, say that our beliefs should cohere with one another. Suppose we grant that this is advice worth following. Then, we have to determine when our opinions are coherent and when they are not. However, the proposed conditions do not provide us with advice about how to make these determinations. Moreover, this is not an insignificant problem. It is not a simple matter to determine whether a set of beliefs is coherent, especially when the set is large.

The only way to avoid problems of this sort is to embrace an especially extreme version of foundationalism, one that insists that the conditions of rational belief are conditions to which we always have immediate and unproblematic access. Bertrand Russell defended such a view. He claimed that we are directly acquainted with certain truths and that these truths make various other propositions probable. If this kind of epistemology is to provide us with fundamental and useful intellectual advice, we must be capable of determining immediately and unproblematically when we are directly acquainted with something and when we are not. Likewise, we must be capable of determining immediately and unproblematically when a proposition is made probable by truths with which we are directly acquainted. Otherwise we will want advice as to how to make these determinations. According to Russell, we in fact do have these capabilities. We can be directly acquainted with the fact that we are directly acquainted with something. Similarly, we can be directly acquainted with the fact that one thing makes another probable.[25]

An epistemology of direct acquaintance or something closely resembling it is our only alternative if we expect the conditions of rational belief to provide us with useful advice about those matters that the conditions themselves imply are most fundamental to our being rational.

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25   See Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1959. See also Richard Fumerton, *Metaphysical and Epistemological Problems of Perception*, especially 57–8.

It is also the kind of epistemology that few epistemologists are willing to take seriously anymore. But if we give up on this kind of epistemology, we must also give up the idea that epistemology is in the business of providing advice about the most fundamental matters of inquiry.

Correspondingly, and this returns to the main point I have been making, we must accept the idea that trust in our most basic cognitive faculties is a central part of our intellectual lives. In Russell's extreme version of foundationalism, there is no need for, indeed no room for, intellectual trust. Nothing whatsoever need be taken on trust or should be taken on trust. Once we give up on such an epistemology, we have no choice but to acknowledge that significant intellectual projects require correspondingly significant leaps of intellectual faith. The relevant question for epistemology thus becomes one of the proper limits of such faith.