

Knowledge and Reality: Essays in Honor of Alvin Plantinga

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Knowledge and Reality: Essays in Honor of Alvin Plantinga

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According to the *Philosophical Lexicon*, to 'planting' is to 'use twentieth-century fertilizer to encourage new shoots from eleventh-century ideas which everyone thought had gone to seed.' Although the prominent US philosopher Alvin Plantinga cannot be said to use medieval ideas in any historically informed sense, he has certainly fertilized contemporary metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of religion. His philosophy was given a comprehensive and systematic analysis already in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Tomberlin (1985), and to this wide-ranging Festschrift under review colleagues and former students contribute. For reasons of space, this review focuses on themes and theses.

The book begins with a posthumous paper by James Tomberlin. 'Actualism and Presentism' contains a twofold argument to the conclusion that there exist objects that are not actual nor present. First, deontic logic yields a *reductio* for the view that only present and actual objects exist. Second, the logic of intentional verbs challenges actualism and presentism. This previously published essay sharpens Tomberlin's earlier papers against actualism and presentism. They all rely on the questionable assumption that modern predicate logic and semantics are reliable guides to metaphysics.

'Properties' by Peter van Inwagen is also a previously published paper (though shortened). He promotes a Quinean meta-ontology (that is, he endorses Quine's doctrine on quantification and ontological commitment for the meaning of 'being'), and argues for the existence of properties along the lines of the so-called Quine-Putnam indispensability argument for mathematical realism, namely that we cannot dispense with quantification over properties. This results in a 'Very nearly vacuous' (26) theory of properties, according to which a property is what must play the role in our discourse of 'thing that can be said of something.' (27) This account seems indeed rather vacuous in light of the history of philosophy.

In 'So You Think You Exist?' Jenann Ismael and John Pollock argue for 'nolipsism', the view that there are no selves. (Cf. Strawson's 'no-subject views'.) They question post-Cartesian philosophy of mind that something substantial can be inferred from self-consciousness, namely that human beings are something non-physical from the description of ourselves. First, they draw upon the literature

from Casteñada, Perry and onwards, and investigate the logical role of words that point to ourselves such as 'I', 'here' and 'now' (reflexive designators) in practical reasoning. They argue that reflexive designators are necessary to formulate ends, reasons and means of action, and that therefore we describe ourselves in temporal, spatial, and personal terms. Second, Ismael and Pollock entertain but do not endorse the view associated with Wittgenstein and Anscombe that there are no selves. For the logic of reflexive designators makes it impossible for *us* to say that nolipsism is true. But reflexive designators could be built into a robot and function in the requisite way without pointing to anything. This paper contains a very clear argument, but the phrase 'epistemic norms' is used throughout without definition and would seem to assume a deontological epistemology. Perhaps the authors use it merely for the logic of reflexive designators (cf. 'the logical structure of rational cognition dictate the need for reflexive designators in sophisticated agents.' (60)). But since deontological epistemology is generally considered implausible, Ismael and Pollock had done well in developing the meaning of 'epistemic norms' in this otherwise fine piece.

In 'Substance and Artifact in Aquinas's Metaphysics' Eleonore Stump examines Aquinas's theory of material substances and its implications for his theory of artifacts. She surveys Aquinas's views on matter, form, substance, artefact, identity, composition and change. But there is, according to Stump, no non-circular distinction between substance and artefact in Aquinas, so she suggests, first, a distinction that would be consistent if Aquinas would grant that products of contemporary technology (such as styrofoam) are substances and not artifacts. Second, Stump argues that Aquinas holds that constitution is not identity, since a whole is not identical to the parts that constitute it and the matter of a thing is not a thing in itself when it is part of a constituent whole. Third, she argues that the identity of a substance does not change with a change of components but the identity of an artefact changes with a change of components, because substances inform sheer materiality or potentiality and artifacts inform substances. The material of this paper is found in a less truncated form in the first chapter of her book *Aquinas*.

William Alston displays his meticulous analytical skills in 'Epistemology and Metaphysics'. He is concerned with 'the reciprocal epistemic dependence of epistemology and metaphysics' (p. 103). By the term 'metaphysics' Alston means the 'factual knowledge' (p. 82) or 'factual assumptions' (p. 89) of epistemology, and so the issue is sadly framed by the empiricist prejudice that every consideration which transcends the 'empirical' is 'metaphysical'. Alston evaluates the objection that the claim that epistemology is rightly based on factual knowledge is viciously circular, namely that epistemological claims are warranted only if factual claims are warranted, and that factual claims are warranted only if epistemological claims are warranted. He attempts to solve this circularity problem in three stages. First, in order to make the dependence of epistemology on factual knowledge clearer, he distinguishes between epistemological theses regarding (1) general conditions of warrant, (2) specific conditions of warrant and (3) the warrant of particular judgements. The dependence of epistemology on factual knowledge is, of course,

stronger for (2) and (3) than for (1). Second, in order to show that there need not be a vicious circle, Alston differentiates between a weaker and a stronger dependency claim. The weaker claim is conditional in meaning, namely epistemological claims are warranted *only if* some factual claims are warranted. The stronger claim is categorical in meaning, namely epistemological claims are warranted *because* some factual claims are warranted. It is only the stronger claim and not the weaker one that results in a vicious circle. For the categorical thesis makes a claim about the warrant of factual claims, but the conditional thesis does not make any claims about the warrant of factual claims. Third, Alston infers a level distinction between being warranted and showing that one is warranted, namely the warrant of first order claims and second order claims about the warrant of first order claims. As long as we assume that the factual claims on which epistemological claims depend for their warrant are themselves warranted, we can avoid any reciprocal epistemic dependence of factual knowledge on epistemology. But as soon as we require that the warrant of those factual claims has to be shown, we get into a mutual epistemic dependence of epistemological claims and factual claims. According to Alston's rich paper, then, factual claims can be used to settle epistemological claims, and epistemological claims, *inter alia*, to settle factual claims. For there is no practical alternative to using whatever we take ourselves to have in settling whatever intellectual questions concern us.' (103)

In 'Historicizing the Belief-Forming Self' Nicholas Wolterstorff maintains that Plantinga's account of warrant is either mistaken or misleading. The account is mistaken if Plantinga denies that our powers to form judgements are designed to be historically adapted, or it is misleading as he occasionally grants that our power of judgement is designed to be historically adapted. In this paper Wolterstorff aims to identify some of the main ways our powers of judgement are designed to be historically acquired, modified and triggered. However, the argument is not very clear. First, Wolterstorff argues that, contrary to appearance, Gadamer presupposes that, but does not discuss how, the power of judgement is historically determined, and that therefore he still maintains the a-historicism of the Enlightenment. Second, he gleans from Hume and Reid that the power of judging inductively is a product of one's personal history. Third, we are told that, according to Locke, the power of judgement may not be working properly due to one's personal history. Wolterstorff concludes then that 'Plantinga's account be amplified by adding the concept of *doxastic* programming' (133) of one's personal history, although Wolterstorff 'do[es] not for a moment believe that the human mind *is in fact* a computer.' (126) It seems that this paper could have been formulated in a more simple, precise and concentrated way.

In the very clear and carefully argued paper 'A Dilemma for Internalism', Michael Bergmann develops an objection to generic internalism in epistemology, namely an argument against the view that the necessary condition which contributes to justification is the awareness of a normal adult human. Such awareness is either conceptual or not. However, to require awareness that the application of a concept contributes to justification leads, according to Bergmann, either to an infinite regress of awarenesses or a regress of increasingly complex aware-

nesses. For such a concept of justification requires a higher level of awareness for each lower level of awareness. The alternative is for the internalist to claim that non-conceptual awareness confers justification, but one could, according to Bergmann, be aware of an experience without conceiving of it as contributing to justification and then internalism is subject to precisely the objection that it commonly uses against externalism. Bergmann further specifies his arguments with how prominent internalists handle the regress problems in relation to examples from perception and consciousness. In short, he argues that the excessive requirement and its sceptical implications makes internalism untenable. He also suggests that internalism and externalism are not the only two positions in epistemology.

In 'Epistemic Internalism, Philosophical Assurance and the Sceptical Predicament' Richard Fumerton revises his earlier argument against epistemological externalism in *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* (1996). He argues that in 'a philosophically satisfying understanding of knowledge' (181) lower-level justification of memory and perception requires higher-level justification. This is not because higher-level justification is a general requirement (and Fumerton devotes more space opposing such a form of internalism than opposing generic externalism), but because facts about what we are caused to believe by memory or perception are by themselves, according to him, insufficient for an adequate theory of justification. Facts about what we are acquainted with are, though, by themselves sufficient for an adequate theory of justification and do not require higher-level justification. We are 'directly aware', 'conscious' or 'assured' in the case of acquaintance, but not so in cases of memory and perception. Since awareness, consciousness or assurance are internal states, internalism provides, according to Fumerton, the 'philosophically satisfying' theory of justification. It is not clear how this is a *reductio* against externalism (181). Nor why externalists should grant Fumerton's understanding of what is 'philosophically satisfying', especially when 'scepticism [...] is difficult to avoid given [Fumerton's] constraints' (182) and scepticism can be rebutted by other means.

In 'Scientific Naturalism and the Value of Knowledge' Jonathan Kvanvig argues that it is difficult to account for the value of knowledge 'by employing only those concepts that are already needed in a scientific description of the world.' (195). He first contends that the requirement of natural science is too restrictive to allow for pure naturalistic epistemologies. For such theories attempt to explain knowledge in terms of factors that are outside consciousness, but 'defeaters' (or grounds for doubt) can only be explained in terms of conscious factors and thus not in terms of 'scientifically respectable concepts'. Kvanvig continues to argue that commitment to the methods of natural science pushes the philosopher either towards virtue epistemology (where the analogy of internal causes of action and judgement accounts for the value of knowledge) or epistemological expressivism (where knowledge claims cannot have truth-value but only express attitudes). Expressivism will be the alternative for scientism, since defeaters can then be explained as something that is sour to most people and knowledge as something that is sweet to most people. But expressivism cannot, contends Kvanvig, be argued for, since such an argument would presuppose the truth of epistemic norms and

principles. In short, theories that explain knowledge only in terms of natural science undercut the value of knowledge and any epistemology that undermines the value of knowledge is inadequate. So this paper goes beyond much of the ordinary discussion in contemporary epistemology. It is, though, surprising that Kvanvig claims that the 'the history of knowledge contains little discussion of the question of the value of knowledge.' (204) (This is of course true if one's philosophical diet contains a huge gap between Plato's *Meno* and analytical epistemology.) For it would seem that from Aristotle up until the philosophical tragedy of Descartes that many philosophers argued for the value of knowledge in terms of its utmost actualisation of the power of cognition. But powers, abilities, dispositions or propensities are of course things that are beyond the merely empirical, and would require an argument that the methods of natural science are not identical with those of philosophy. Such an argument had strengthened Kvanvig's fine paper.

In the clear paper 'Naturalism and Moral Realism' Michael Rea contends that only theists and not 'naturalists' can reasonably endorse moral realism. He argues for this sharp conclusion in two steps. He argues, first, that any justification from natural science will claim that the existence of objective moral facts is the simplest explanation of empirical phenomena, and, second, that appeals to simplicity can ground moral realism only if theism is true. (Is 'a necessarily existing rational community' (237) more 'close' to theism than to polytheism?) However, the suggestion that 'someone or something in the universe is somehow benevolently guaranteeing that' simplicity will indicate truth (231), would just seem to beg the question. Besides, this argument assumes, of course, that the only kind of moral naturalism is an empirical or empiricist one, and then infers that God is the only basis for moral realism, since empirical naturalism is problematic. There is, of course, in addition teleological or dispositional moral naturalism (e.g. Aristotle, Aquinas, Foot et alia), and there are the standard problems of essential goodness and deontological arbitrariness for supernaturalism or theological voluntarism in ethics.

Richard Otte ('A Problem with Bayesian Conditionalization') argues closely against Bayesianism's contention that conditionalization should be used to manage our beliefs or judgements. The Bayesian school of statistics claim that every rational judgment is changed on condition of other judgements. Such conditionalization is, according to Bayesianism, a requirement of ideal rationality (whatever that means). But Otte counters conditionalization by examples that we can be rational in our mistaken judgements. We can be rational in spite of not conditionalizing in situations where conditionalization is applicable, and thus the requirement of conditionalization is not necessary for rationality. In addition Otte points out that Bayesianism must admit that a judgement may be rationally changed either in response to experience or in response to other judgements (and not merely in response to other judgements). For unless judgements could be based and changed on account of experience, there would be no judgment to apply the requirement of conditionalization to. However, we can only use conditionalization to manage our beliefs, if we know to which category our particular judgements belong. For the requirement of conditionalization does not apply to judgements that are (at

least partly) based on experience, but only to such as are based strictly on other judgements. Commonly we cannot, though, know whether a judgment is based on experience alone or on other judgements alone, and thus we cannot know if the requirement of conditionalization applies to any our judgements. Hence conditionalization cannot be used to manage our judgements. This problem arises, Otte contends, because Bayesianism is a theory of rationality and rationality is about conscious or internally accessible features of judgements. (Bayesians commonly require reflection and coherence for being rational.) But conditionalization requires access to the basis of our judgements, and that is an external requirement. Internalist reconstructions of the requirement of conditionalization are, moreover, empty, have counterexamples or face regress problems.

In 'Materialism and Post-Mortem Survival' Keith Yandell laments that 'a number of Christian philosophers [...] have embraced one or another variety of materialism and [have] argued that their doing so is perfectly compatible with their belief that they will survive bodily death.' (258) But unfortunately the philosophical issue gets lost in the innumerable formalizations of the simple into the complex (e.g. the 'definition of the possibility of fission', 265), and the reduction of necessity to logical necessity. And are we seriously to take C. S. Lewis *Mere Christianity* (cf. 258) and Cartesian dualism for measures of Christian orthodoxy?

In 'Split Brains and the Godhead', Trenton Merricks aims to defend the Christian doctrine of the Trinity from the charge of contradiction. He examines and rejects defences in terms of relative identity and in terms of social relations. According to the defence in terms of relative identity, the Father's being the same God as the Son and the Spirit does not entail that the Father is identical with the Son or the Spirit. However, alleged relative identity relations are, according to Merricks, unintelligible and there is arguably absolute identity. But a more modest or attenuated version of relative identity may claim that identity is relative only with respect to the Trinity. Yet, this makes the unintelligibility charge even more compelling and the most natural understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is that it claims absolute identity. Merricks turns to defences of the doctrine of the Trinity in terms of social relations. Although a claim that social relations exhaust the unity of the three divine person renders the doctrine of the Trinity non-contradictory, it is tritheistic since the relata are separate. Merricks argues instead by analogy of distinct spheres of consciousness that there can be three persons in God. But this Cartesian argument ends up (contra Merricks) in the Sabellian heresy that there are 'three distinct centres of consciousness.' (318)

So this Festschrift covers a lot of ground and contains several very interesting papers. But it is very hard to find one theme to discuss in these thirteen papers—not even the reception or evaluation of Plantinga. For, oddly, interaction with the one that is honoured by this volume is very rare. On the few occasions that Plantinga's views are discussed, it is by philosophers of his own generation; his former students seem just to go along with his ideas. Another thing that is striking with these papers is that the problems and the frame of reference inherited from Descartes and Locke, or even Carnap and Quine, are simply taken for granted. (There is of course an exception that confirms the rule.) This is surpris-

ing, since Plantinga is often perceived as questioning the assumptions of modern philosophy. Like most analytical philosophers the contributors use 'traditional' and 'traditionally' for how philosophy has been practiced in the English language during the twentieth century or perhaps since Descartes and Locke. Most of the papers in this book exemplify the rigour and thoroughness that analytical philosophy is rightly known for and to which Plantinga has contributed, but I (for one) thought we had left the modern paradigm of philosophy.