Special issue of EuJAP: Free Will and Epistemology

Guest editors:

László Bernáth
Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Eötvös Loránd University

András Szigeti
Linköping University

Timothy O'Connor
Indiana University

Preface to this Special Issue on Free Will and Epistemology by Robert Lockie (University of West London)

Let me begin by recording my gratitude to the editors of, and contributors to, this special issue. This volume follows on from two wonderful conferences on my 2018 monograph *Free Will and Epistemology* – one held in Budapest, one in London[1]. I wish to express my appreciation to all who contributed to these events, and to the institutions which hosted them – in particular, albeit with a heavy heart, the Central European University: subsequently all but driven out of Budapest by the calculatingly malicious actions of the present government of Hungary. As regards individuals, two of the editors of this volume (András Szigeti and László Bernáth) organised the former conference, whilst Tim O'Connor's paper grew out of his contribution to the latter. My deep and sincere appreciation to all.

Because of the compressed deadline for this preface, I have, at the point of writing, only had access to the abstracts of these papers, and, beyond recording my gratitude to the authors, must therefore largely refrain from introducing them further – I shall be reading them with great care subsequently and hope to respond to them in later work. Some of the papers

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[1] My thanks to the Central European University (Budapest); The Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA); the Lund Gothenburg Responsibility Project; the Institute of Philosophy at the School of Advanced Study (University of London); the Mind Association; the Aristotelian Society; the University of West London; and especially to András Szigeti, László Bernáth and Tim O'Connor.

found herein are more addressed to the specific arguments found in my monograph, while others are more concerned with the titular issues shared by that book and this special issue. I wish here to situate these papers within the framework of this topic area as a whole – to motivate this area (free will and epistemology) as one of great and enduring importance to philosophy – and, if I may be permitted, of flagging a few of my own contributions in doing so.

Normative Epistemology and Free Will

There are numbers of recent works in the areas of free will or epistemology considered separately – both are of course currently flourishing research areas. Piecemeal connections between these two areas are widely acknowledged, and debates surrounding these issues are widely joined with regard to a number of distinct topics (e.g. engagement with the 'doxastic voluntarism' debates, the 'epistemic deontologism' debates, the 'reasons-responsiveness' debates, the 'does reflection presuppose open choice' debates). However, relatively little recent work exists which is at once an uncompromising contribution to both fields – work that is squarely situated within both sub-disciplines, as opposed to being situated in one sub-discipline and borrowing from, or making excursus to, the other. In particular very little book-length work exists which does this. I have argued that a historically and currently important position in normative epistemology (deontic internalism) has critical conceptual connections with an important position in the free will debates (libertarianism). Bluntly: that to be *epistemically justified* one must have *freedom of thought* – where this latter involves a strong notion of freedom, and the former involves a normative authority that is essential for reflexive epistemic justification. The work therefore requires participants in the free will / responsibility debates to effect serious engagement with epistemology – and vice versa. I am grateful to the editors of, and contributors to, this special edition for doing just that.

The Transcendental Arguments

One of the great metaphilosophical traditions is that of transcendental argument (*peritrope*, 'self-undermining' argument). Like all metaphilosophical traditions, this one is controversial. My book defends two, connected, transcendental arguments: one for a deontic conception of epistemic internalism (Part One) and the other for a strong notion of free will (Part Two) – with the latter argument relying in part upon the former. The latter is one of the great, famous, philosophical arguments – from Epicurus to

Kant to Popper. The second part of the book is an extended defence of this argument. In this special issue both Nadine Elzein and Toumas Pernu's co-authored paper and Simon-Pierre Chevarie-Cossette's paper assess instances of these transcendental arguments for free will – including my version – while Amit Pundik's paper argues that the transcendentally established notion of free will is so strong metaphysically that it implies the unpredictability of free actions.

The book argues that many determinist and some indeterminist accounts of free will are indefensible on the ground that they must withhold from their proponents the reflexive epistemic justification that these accounts themselves require. It likewise argues that certain epistemic views (radically externalist views – views constituting a 'totalising' externalism) are indefensible on the ground that they withhold from their proponents the reflexive epistemic justification needed to maintain these epistemic positions. The book recommends from this that we develop accounts in these areas that are reflexively defensible, and advances an account of epistemic justification ('thin deontological internalism') and an account of free will (self-determinism) which are just that. Relatedly, in this contribution, Luca Zanetti's paper investigates in detail whether this transcendental argument against externalism is successful after all. Andrew James Lantham and Timothy O'Connor map other novel ways to establish epistemic justification for believing in free will. Lantham argues that the careful analysis of the concept of free will will do the work; while O'Connor claims that one should consider the belief in free will as a belief that is justified a priori.

The "Thin Deontological" Account of Epistemic Justification

Part One of my book defends a currently rather unfashionable account of epistemic justification, one which was of extraordinary historical importance but has now partly fallen into desuetude. This strongly deontic notion of internalism was engaged with by Plantinga, Foley and Alston; and, going back further than these figures, has its roots in Clifford, Descartes, Locke, and much of the early-modern epistemological enlightenment. In this work, this is baptised as a 'thin deontological' notion of internalism, though Alston (1985) from the standpoint of a (guarded, partial) opponent, abbreviated this notion as 'J_{di}' – which stands for *deontic, internalist, justification*. Plantinga just calls this same notion 'internalism', but when pushed, *classical deontological internalism* – and deprecates those pure accessibilist internalists who depart from what he (an externalist) nevertheless identifies as its "deep integrity" (Plantinga 1993, 28). A version of this conception of epistemic justification has

become known as 'Foley Rationality' (cf. e.g. Foley 1993), while Bergmann (2006) entitles it 'subjective deontological justification' or 'epistemic blamelessness'. Other major figures (Chisholm, BonJour, Goldman) played major roles engaging with this notion throughout the 1980's. Although epistemic deontology per se is currently quite well represented in recent epistemology, its defenders tend to be insufficiently rooted in the ethical literature, and tend to fail to follow through the 'ought' implies 'can' *ethics of belief* entailments of said view to their logical, perspectival, conclusions. They also tend to be insufficiently 'metaphilosophical' in their epistemological purview – and thereby insufficiently reflexive in their practice. It is regrettable that this highly motivated and carefully thought-through variant of epistemic deontology per se, with its deep historical provenance and elegant connections with the ethical literature, appears to have been substantially marginalised or eclipsed; and (apart from Foley's ongoing work) has rather wanted for recent defences. I defend and deploy this subjective, perspectival, deontically internalist notion of epistemic justification – adverting as it does to a deep, neo-Cartesian 'ethics of belief' tradition – whereby justification is taken to involve the discharge of one's *epistemic responsibilities*, as *dutiful thought*, as *reasoning as one ought*.

Resisting Transcendental Arguments

One of the first points to make – or rather concede – is that, at a superficial level, it is very easy to resist transcendental arguments of the kind I advance in my work. For instance, if one wishes to claim (as I do) that we cannot be justified in abandoning deontic epistemic internalism because the 'last ought' is the ought which urges us to abandon all oughts – or, more prosaically, that one cannot abandon an *oughts*-based epistemology *tout court*, since one would have to claim that one *ought* thus to abandon said epistemology – the obvious response would be to contend that this is question-begging. One merely embraces an alternative, non-oughts-based notion of justification and uses this to effect the abandonment. Were the counter really that obvious, why advance such a transcendental argument at all?

However, in the face of such 'question-begging' objections, a number of issues arise. One question is whether there is such a notion as that to which these objections make appeal: that is, a notion genuinely of *justification* ('our concept', justification itself, the *Echt* notion thereof, and not some other, more-or-less *Ersatz*, more-or-less revisionary thing). Is this justificatory notion *radically* (wholly, at every level, without remainder or

concealed indebtedness) non-deontic?[2] May we take one such *purely* non-deontic yet *genuinely* justificatory notion 'off the shelf', as it were? Has the proponent of this 'question-begging' counter appreciated deeply enough that it is *wholesale* ('totalising') replacement that needs defending here? Of course, there are non-deontic notions in epistemology – I defend and employ such notions in my book. Of course, they are of great importance in epistemology. But they function in an epistemology in which they are seen as not the *only* normative kinds. The question is whether we can be reflexively justified given the wholesale, *totalising* abandonment of any notion of epistemic 'ought' – or, put another way, whether we can avail ourselves of these other notions (of truth, reliability, access, mentalism, 'objective' rationality, etc.) to do *all* the work our former notions did, without *at any point* needing to make appeal to *reasoning as we ought*. That is, (as for the case for *Meno* road-to-Larissa cases of truth simpliciter) without merely ceasing to do epistemology – or at least, the epistemology of epistemology, epistemology where this concerns terminus issues of justification and not some other thing. Where do we repair to if we thus abandon said (deontic) notion of justification *tout court*? That is, *reflexively*, at every level, how do we effect the tasks which formerly were effected by this deontic notion – now, supposedly, to be replaced?

As an example of how dismissive such 'question-begging' counters can be, consider the attempt to respond to a transcendental argument in a different area (eliminativism) by Paul Churchland (I responded to, and quoted this passage, in Lockie 2003). Having urged that we abandon no less than *beliefs, desires, consciousness, truth, reference, rationality, sentences, logic, language*, Churchland responds to *peritrope* objections (e.g. from Lynne Rudder Baker, that this would constitute an act of 'cognitive suicide') in the following terms:

> Let us concede then, or even insist, that current [folk psychology] permits no tension-free denial of itself within its own theoretical vocabulary. [...] [A] *new* psychological framework [...] need have no such limitation [...] we need only construct it, and move in. We can then express criticisms [...] that are entirely free of internal conflicts. This was the aim of [eliminativism] in the first place. (Churchland 1993, 214).

"We need only construct it, and move in" – well, that's rather breezy is it not? Did we really "construct" our previous framework? And is our new

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[2] Or is it, rather, putatively 'deontic' yet seen as devoid of 'ought' implies 'can' entailments which had hitherto appeared *internal to the concept* of deontology itself and as such?

home available to order as a development, "off plan", as it were? Can we live in these (envisioned, advertised) new premises – are they habitable, for creatures like us? What are their specifications? Will our new dwelling offer us all the qualities of our previous living space? Presumably not – that was the point of the replacement, was it not? But then, is there an overarching perspective affording a view which permits of normative comparison between the properties of our former (actual, extant) normative framework and some envisaged, not-yet-in-existence *Philosophie der Zukunft*? Problems both of incommensurability and an inherent tension between "view from nowhere" and "there is no view from nowhere" commitments ineluctably bedevil any such philosophy of wholesale vast normative replacement: problems that do not suggest such a blasé response would be by any means easy to defend.

Eliminations of great normative frameworks require a great deal more than simply pointing to an existing framework and saying, as it were, from outside of it, or sideways on to it: "I have decided to abandon *that*!" Serious philosophical and metaphilosophical work is needed to establish whether any such abandonment is possible, or even conceivable, much less feasible; and what would follow were this so – which of our practices could be preserved, which would need revision (and to what extent) and which would have to be abandoned. Serious work would also be needed to consider the knock-on, holistic chasing-through of the unintended and unforeseen consequences of said revisions and abandonments. The avowed presence of existing *piecemeal* alternatives to a given normative philosophical account (e.g. epistemic externalism vis à vis deontic internalism) *given that one is not seeking a wholesale, 'totalising' elimination, with inevitable commitments at the reflexive, metaphilosophical level*, does not establish the viability of said wholesale, totalising, elimination. This is a point well appreciated in the Lucretian continuation of the Epicurean tradition of *peritrope* argumentation within epistemology: one may claim one can doubt any one thing without thereby establishing one can doubt everything (Lucretius 1947, Bk 4, 469–521).

In my monograph I pushed back against this sweeping "replace the framework since it is question-begging" response throughout, but especially, and in great detail, in Chapters 5, 7, and 10. In Chapter 5 I quoted Goldman (1967) in his paper famously advancing the very first modern *externalism* (the causal theory of knowledge) as someone whom I may nevertheless read as tacitly supportive of my position rather than, say, his more-radical erstwhile philosophical ally, Hilary Kornblith. The last sentence of that famous paper is where Goldman precisely notes that his new externalist epistemology offers us a less-than-totalising, less-than-eliminativist world-view – an epistemology that is *irreflexive*:

> I think my analysis shows that the question of whether someone knows a certain proposition is, in part, a causal question, although, of course, the question of what the correct analysis is of 'S knows that *p*' is not a causal question (Goldman 1967, 372).

Of course? An irreflexive theory cannot be *reflexively incoherent* of course, but if an implicit awareness of the threat of this kind of *peritrope* was not behind the otherwise stipulative limit early Goldman placed on his theory one is left wondering what was. What Goldman, I suggest, realised, was that to generalise from a piecemeal alternative theory of knowledge to an entire, overarching normative epistemic framework (including *justification*, *rationality*, the *reflexive status of the philosopher advancing and evaluating said theory*…) needs a lot more philosophical and metaphilosophical work than is gestured towards or acknowledged by "only construct it, and move in".

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