WHAT'S WRONG WITH RELIABILISM?
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WHAT'S WRONG WITH RELIABILISM?

I

An increasing number of epistemeologists claim that having beliefs which are reliable is a prerequisite of having epistemically rational beliefs. Alvin Goldman, for instance, defends a view he calls "historical reliabilism." According to Goldman, a person S rationally believes a proposition p only if his belief is caused by a reliable cognitive process. Goldman adds that a proposition p is epistemically rational for S, whether or not it is believed by him, only if there is available to S a reliable cognitive process which if used would result in S's believing p. Likewise, Marshall Swain, Ernest Sosa, and William Alston all claim that reliability is a prerequisite of epistemic rationality. Swain claims that S rationally believes only if he has reasons for which are reliable indicators that p is true. Sosa says S rationally believes p only if the belief is the product of an intellectual virtue, where intellectual virtues are stable dispositions to acquire truths. And, Alston says that S rationally believes p only if the belief is acquired or held in such a way that beliefs held in that way are reliable, i.e., mostly true.

Each of these philosophers is suggesting that there is some sort of logical, or conceptual, tie between epistemic rationality and truth. The exact nature of this tie depends on what it means for a cognitive process, or a reason, or an intellectual virtue, to be reliable. But, at least for the moment, let us set aside this question. I will return to it shortly. In particular, let us simply assume that each of the above positions suggests (even if each doesn't strictly imply) the thesis that if one gathered into a set all the propositions it is epistemically rational for a person S to believe it would be impossible for the set to contain more falsehoods than truths. Or short of this, let us assume that each suggests the thesis that if one gathered into a set all the propositions which both are epistemically rational for S and are believed by him, it would be impossible for the set to contain more falsehoods than truths.

Since this amounts to saying that what a person rationally believes, or what it is rational for him to believe, must be a reliable indicator of what is true, any position which implies such a thesis can be regarded as a version of reliabilism.

This is somewhat broader than the usual use of the term "reliabilism". With respect to accounts of rational belief (I will discuss reliabilist accounts
of knowledge later), the term often is reserved for accounts which require that a belief be *caused*, or *causally sustained*, by a reliable cognitive process. But, for purposes here I want to distinguish between the causal component of such accounts and the reliability component. The causal component requires a belief to have an appropriate causal ancestry in order to be rational. The reliability component requires a belief to have an appropriate relation to truth in order to be rational; in particular, on the present interpretation of reliability, it requires that more of a person's rational beliefs be true than false.

The advantage of isolating these components is that it makes obvious the possibility of endorsing a reliability requirement for rationality without endorsing a causal requirement, and vice-versa. It is possible, for example, to endorse noncausal versions of reliabilism. Consider a foundationalist position which implies that $S$ rationally believes $p$ only if either his belief $p$ is incorrigible for him or propositions which are incorrigibly believed by him support $p$ in a way which guarantees that most propositions so supported are true. A position of this sort is plausibly regarded as a reliabilist position, since it implies that a person's rational beliefs must be mostly true. It implies, in other words, that the set of such beliefs is a reliable indicator of what is true. Yet, it is not a causal position. It does not insist that $S$'s belief $p$ be caused or causally sustained in an appropriate way in order to be rational.

So, in my broad sense of "reliabilism" both causal and noncausal accounts of rational belief can be versions of reliabilism. Indeed in my broad sense, Hume and Descartes might be plausibly interpreted as reliabilists.

My use of "reliabilism" is weak in one other way. It requires only that there be a very loose connection between epistemic rationality and truth. In order for an account to be a version of reliabilism, it need not guarantee that a huge percentage of the propositions a person $S$ rationally believes are true. It need only guarantee that one more such proposition is true than is false.

Unfortunately, even when reliabilism is understood in this very weak way, it is too strong; it is possible for more propositions which $S$ rationally believes to be false than true. Consider how this might be so. Consider a world in which $S$ believes, seems to remember, experiences, etc., just what he in this world believes, seems to remember, experiences, etc., but in which his beliefs are often false. Suppose further that in this other world the confidence with which he believes, and the clarity with which he seems to remember, and the intensity with which he experiences is identical with the actual world. Suppose even that what he would believe on reflection (about, e.g., what arguments are likely to be truth preserving) is identical with what he would believe on reflection in this world. So, if $S$ somehow were to be
switched instantaneously from his actual situation to the corresponding situation in this other world, he would not distinguish any difference, regardless of how hard he tried. To use the familiar example, suppose that a demon insures that this is the case. Call such a demon world "\( w \)" and then consider this question: Could some of the propositions which a person \( S \) believes in \( w \) be epistemically rational for him? For example, could some of the propositions which \( S \) perceptually believes be epistemically rational? The answer is "yes". If we are willing to grant that in our world some of the propositions \( S \) perceptually believes are epistemically rational, then these same propositions would be epistemically rational for \( S \) in \( w \) as well. After all, world \( w \) by hypothesis is one which from \( S \)'s viewpoint is indistinguishable from this world. So, if given \( S \)'s situation in this world his perceptual belief \( p \) is rational, his belief would be rational in \( w \) as well.

In one sense this is not a particularly surprising result, but in another sense it can seem somewhat surprising. Notice that the possibility of there being such a world \( w \) follows from the fact that our being in the epistemic situation we are is compatible with our world being \( w \). This in no way shows that it is not epistemically rational for us to believe what we do. But, and this is what might seem somewhat surprising, if the mere possibility of our world being a demon world is not sufficient to defeat the epistemic rationality of our believing what we do, then neither should the actuality. Even if, contrary to what we believe, our world is world \( w \), it still can be epistemically rational for us to believe many of the propositions we do, since the epistemic situation in world \( w \) is indistinguishable from the epistemic situation in a world which has the characteristics we take our world to have.

The point here is a simple one. In effect, I am asking you: aren't some of the propositions you believe epistemically rational for you to believe? And wouldn't whatever it is that make those propositions epistemically rational for you also be present in a world where these propositions are regularly false, but where a demon hid this from you by making the world from your viewpoint indistinguishable from this world (so that what you believed, and what you would believe on reflection, and what you seemed to remember, and what you experienced were identical to this world)?

I think that the answer to each of these questions is "yes" and I think you do too. But, a "yes" answer to these questions suggests that the real lesson illustrated by the possibility of demon worlds is not a skeptical lesson as is sometimes thought, but rather an anti-reliabilist lesson. It suggests, in other words, that the demon by his deceits may cause us to have false beliefs, but he does not thereby automatically cause us to be irrational. And so, the possibility of such demon worlds illustrates that it is possible for
more of what we rationally believe to be false than to be true, and it also illustrates that it is possible for more of what it is epistemically rational for us to believe (regardless of what we do in fact believe) to be false than to be true. Correspondingly, it illustrates that any version of reliabilism which implies that these are not genuine possibilities ought to be rejected.

Indeed, in one sense the claim that it is possible for more of what we rationally believe to be false than to be true is not even very controversial. It is but an extension of the claim that it is possible to rationally believe a falsehood. For if we admit that there are situations in which the conditions making a proposition epistemically rational are present but the conditions making it true are not, we will be hard-pressed to avoid the conclusion that it is possible for this to happen frequently. To put the matter metaphorically, if we allow the possibility of a crack developing between epistemic rationality and truth, such that some of what is epistemically rational can be false, we will be hard-pressed to avoid at least the possibility of a chasm developing, such that more of what is epistemically rational can be false than true. This is the lesson of demon examples, brain-in-the-vat examples, etc.

Moreover, examples of this sort also can be used to illustrate the implausibility of variations of what I have defined as reliabilism. Consider a version of reliabilism which implies not that more of S's current rational beliefs must be true than false but rather that more of S's current and past rational beliefs must be true than false. Perhaps, for example, one might try arguing for such a version of reliabilism with the help of a causal thesis which implies that S's belief p is rational only if it is the product of a reliable cognitive process, where a reliable cognitive process is one which is and has produced mostly true beliefs for S.6

It is not difficult to extend the demon example in order to illustrate the inadequacy of this version of reliabilism. Simply imagine a world which both is and has been indistinguishable from the actual world given S's viewpoint. Then, imagine that in this world a demon arranges things so that what S believes and has believed is regularly false. In particular, imagine that more of the propositions which he rationally believes in the actual world are false than are true in this demon world. Despite this, what he rationally believes in the actual world he also rationally believes in the demon world, since the two worlds from his viewpoint are indistinguishable in every way.

Consider other variations of reliabilism. Suppose it is claimed that more of S's rational beliefs have to be true than false in the long-run, or suppose it is claimed that the total set of rational beliefs in the long-run—S's as well as everyone else's rational beliefs—must contain more truths
than falsehoods. Suppose, for instance, one tried defending this kind of reliabilism with the help of a causal thesis which implies that a person S's belief p is rational only if it is produced by a cognitive process which in the long-run will produce more true beliefs than false beliefs.7

To illustrate the inadequacy of this version of reliabilism, imagine a world which is and has been from our viewpoint indistinguishable from our world. Imagine even that in this second world the percentage of truths which we have believed up until now or are now believing is about the same as in this world. But then, imagine that in the second world there is a demon who unbeknownst to us insures that our cognitive processes in the long-run give rise to more false beliefs than true beliefs.

Or, consider counterfactual versions of reliabilism, which imply that more of the rational beliefs S would have in appropriate counterfactual situations must be true than false if S's actual belief p is to be rational. One might try to defend this version with the help of the causal thesis which implies that S's belief p is rational only if it is the product of a cognitive process which in close counterfactual situations would produce mostly true beliefs for S.

For this kind of reliabilism, again imagine a world which from S's viewpoint is indistinguishable from the actual world. Only now imagine that in this world there is an anti-reliabilist demon—one who does not interfere with S but who was and is prepared to do so were things to be even a little different than they in fact are.

The problem with all these versions of reliabilism is essentially the same. They all assume that in the demon worlds described it would be impossible for us to have rational beliefs. The assumption, in other words, is that the deceiving activities of the demon no matter how cleverly they are carried out—even if we have no indication that we are (or have been, or will be, or would be) so deceived—preclude even the possibility of our beliefs being epistemically rational. So, the mere fact that we do have, or have had, or will have, or would have false beliefs, implies that we cannot be epistemically rational.

But, to make such an assumption is counterintuitive. In everyday situations we do not regard deception as precluding rationality. Likewise, we do not regard the fact that we have been deceived, or will be deceived, or would be deceived, as precluding rationality. Suppose I play an elaborate practical joke on you in order to get you to believe that I have left town. I tell you I am leaving town, I leave my car with you, I have someone send you a postcard signed by me, etc. My deceits may get you to believe the false proposition that I have left town, but from this it does not follow that the proposition is not rational for you to believe. And one way to emphasize this
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Point is to imagine (as I have done with the demon cases) a situation in which you have not been deceived and which in addition from your viewpoint is indistinguishable from the situation in which you have been deceived. In other words, imagine an ordinary situation. If in this ordinary situation it is possible for you to rationally believe that I have left town, it also is possible for you to rationally believe this in the situation in which I have deceived you. Everyone who allows rational beliefs to be false should agree to this. But then, it is natural to wonder why, if relatively modest deceits of this sort need not preclude the possibility of your having rational beliefs, more elaborate deceits of the sort a demon engages in should preclude you from having rational beliefs?

The intuitive answer is that they should not. The demon by his deceits may get you to have mostly false beliefs but this need not indicate that these beliefs also are irrational. This answer, moreover, illustrates something about the way we think of rationality. Namely, we think that what it is rational for a person to believe is a function of what is appropriate for him to believe given his perspective. More exactly, it is a function of what it is appropriate for him to believe given his perspective and insofar as his goal is to believe truths and not to believe falsehoods.

Precisely what makes reliabilist account of rational belief unacceptable is that they underemphasize this perspectival element. They imply that it is impossible for our beliefs to be rational if they are not in an appropriate sense reliable indicators of truths. And they imply that this is so regardless of what our perspective might be—even if, for example, if it indistinguishable from current perspective.

Can reliabilist accounts of rational belief be made acceptable by including some such perspectival element in them? Alvin Goldman, for one, hints that he might be willing to include such an element in his account. Goldman’s willingness to consider such an element is motivated by his recognizing that it is possible for there to be a benevolent being who, although lazy until now, will shortly start arranging things so that our wishes come true. If there were such a benevolent demon, wishful thinking would be a reliable cognitive process in the long-run, and then given Goldman’s account it might seem as if the beliefs produced by such wishful thinking would be rational. Goldman, however, rejects this consequence, saying that what matters “is what we believe about wishful thinking, not what is true (in the long run) about wishful thinking.” What matters if a belief is to be rational, Goldman seems to be suggesting, is not that the belief be produced a process which in fact is reliable in the long-run; what matters is that it be produced by a process which we take to be reliable in the long-run.
If this suggestion is taken seriously, however, it represents not a way of amending reliabilism but rather a way of abandoning it. Any account of rational belief which incorporates such a suggestion will not be an account which requires that the set of rational beliefs be reliable indicators of what is true. It only will require that we believe this of them.

But if so, so be it; reliabilist accounts of rational belief ought to be abandoned. Reliability is not in any plausible sense a necessary condition of epistemic rationality. In order for S's belief $p$ to be rational, it neither is necessary for most rational beliefs of all people everywhere to be true, nor for most of S's current rational beliefs to be true, nor for most of S's rational beliefs over his lifetime to be true, nor for most of the rational beliefs $S$ would have in close counterfactual situations to be true.

II

I would guess that for many philosophers (but certainly not all) the remarks I have been making about the relationship between rationality and reliability will not seem surprising. The remarks might even strike them as obvious albeit unimportant. For, they would claim that the epistemic significance of reliability has to do not with beliefs which are merely rational but rather with beliefs which are instances of knowledge. So, they would argue that even if reliability is not a prerequisite of rationality, it is a prerequisite of knowledge. Thus, Goldman, Sosa, Alston, Swain, and others with reliabilist sympathies might be willing to agree with me that there is a sense of rationality for which reliability is not a prerequisite. But, they would go on to insist either that rationality is not a prerequisite of knowledge (i.e., it is possible to know $p$ without rationally believing it) or that the kind of rational belief needed for knowledge is more restrictive than the kind with which I have been concerned. Both of these options leave room for the claim that reliability is a prerequisite of knowledge even if it is not a prerequisite of mere rational belief (or of a certain kind of rational belief).

Even so, reliabilist theses about knowledge in the end fare no better than reliabilist theses about rational belief. More exactly, significant, or nontrivial, reliabilist theses about knowledge fare no better. A reliabilist thesis is not significant if it is a thesis which almost any kind of account of knowledge would imply. Thus, suppose it is claimed that reliability is a prerequisite of knowledge in the following sense: Most beliefs which are instances of knowledge have to be true. This thesis about knowledge is true but insignificant; any account of knowledge which requires a belief to be true if it is to be an instance of knowledge implies it.
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The problem, then, is to find a true and significant reliabilist account of knowledge. I claim it cannot be done; there is no such reliabilist account of knowledge.

To see this, consider how one might try to formulate a reliabilist account of knowledge. The most common approach is by describing a requirement upon knowledge which has both a causal aspect and a reliabilist aspect. In particular, the most common approach is to insist that if S's belief is to be an instance of knowledge, it must be the product of a reliable cognitive process. But as is the case with reliabilist accounts of rational belief, it also is possible to describe noncausal, reliabilist accounts of knowledge. One might insist, for example, that S knows p only if his belief p is supported by evidence to such a degree that most of his beliefs supported to this degree are true. For convenience however, let us restrict discussion here to causal, reliabilist accounts, since they are the most common. (In any event, the remarks I make about causal accounts will apply mutatis mutandis to noncausal accounts as well.)

Given this causal approach, then, the problem facing a proponent of a reliabilist account of knowledge is to explicate the notion of a reliable cognitive process in such a way that it is both true and significant that being the product of such a process is a necessary condition of a belief being an instance of knowledge.

So, suppose that a reliable cognitive process is understood to be one which produces more true beliefs than false beliefs. The claim, then, is that S's belief p is an instance of knowledge only if it is produced (or sustained) by a process which is reliable in this sense. But, the problem with this claim is that S can know that the kind of cognitive process (say, a perceptual one) which causes him to believe p generates mostly false beliefs in other people. Indeed, S might be a deceiver who is responsible for this. If so, then S's belief p is produced by a cognitive process which is unreliable. And yet, in this situation it is at least possible for S to know p. To claim otherwise is to claim that by perceptually deceiving other people S inevitably prevents himself from having perceptual knowledge. But, why should this be so?

Suppose, then, that a reliable cognitive process is one which is relativized to persons. Suppose it is understood to be one which has produced mostly true beliefs for person S. But then, it is possible for S to know that a demon has been deceiving him perceptually but not longer is. And if S does know this, he might very well now know p perceptually even though he also knows that the perceptual process which causes him to believe p is unreliable. The fact that a demon has deceived him perceptually need not make it impossible for him now to have perceptual knowledge. Or, suppose a reliable cognitive process is thought to be one which will in the long-run
produce mostly true beliefs for S. But, it is possible for S to know that although he is not now under the control of a deceiving demon, he shortly will be. And if he does know this, he might now perceptually know \( p \) even though he also knows that the process which causes him to believe \( p \) is unreliable in this sense. For, the fact that a demon will deceive him perceptually need not make it impossible for him now to have perceptual knowledge. Or, suppose a reliable cognitive process is one which would produce mostly true beliefs in appropriately close counterfactual situations. But then, S might know that there is an anti-reliabilist demon who is not now deceiving him but is (and was) prepared to do so had the situation been even a little different. And, knowing that there is such a demon who is poised to act but who does not is compatible with now knowing \( p \). The fact that a demon is prepared to deceive him perceptually does not make it impossible for him to have perceptual knowledge.

The same general lesson even applies to a demon who is now deceiving S perceptually. But there is a wrinkle here, since it may be impossible for S to believe (and hence to know) that due to the actions of a deceiving demon more of his current perceptual beliefs are false than are true. This may be impossible because it may be impossible for S to believe a proposition \( p \) if he also genuinely believes that \( p \) is more likely to be false than true. But even if this is impossible, it nonetheless is possible for S to have adequate evidence for the claim that more of his current perceptual beliefs are false than are true (even if he does not believe it to be true) and yet for him to have perceptual knowledge \( p \). Suppose, for example, he has adequate evidence for the truth that a demon is deceiving him with respect to most objects in his visual field but not those directly in front of him and within two feet of him. If proposition \( p \) concerns an object of this latter sort, S might very well know \( p \) even though he may have adequate reasons for believing the true proposition that the visual process which causes him to believe \( p \) is unreliable—i.e., even though more of the S's current visual beliefs are false than true. The fact that a demon is deceiving him perceptually about objects not directly in front of him or not within two feet of him does not make it impossible for him to have perceptual knowledge about objects which are in front of him and within two feet of him.\(^{14}\)

It may be tempting in this last case to insist that S's belief \( p \) is the product of a reliable cognitive process—namely, \textit{a process as it operates on objects within two feet of him and directly in front of him}. In other words, it may be tempting to insist that this last case only illustrates that we must allow the notion of a reliable cognitive process to be narrowly specified. In the case here, for example, once we specify the process which causes S to believe \( p \) as a visual process as operating on objects directly in front of S
and within two feet of him, it by hypothesis is true that his belief \( p \) is caused by a reliable process. Indeed, in the case here, perhaps the only beliefs produced by this narrowly specified process are the belief that \( p \) and beliefs in other propositions implied by \( p \). And of course, by hypothesis all these propositions are true.

However, any attempt to save a reliabilist account of knowledge by this kind of maneuver is an attempt to save it by destroying it. For any reliabilist account which results from by such a rescue maneuver will be an account which is insignificant. Indeed, it will be as insignificant as a reliabilist account which insists that most beliefs which are instances of knowledge must be true, and it will be insignificant for the same reason. Namely, any proponent of any kind of account of knowledge can endorse a reliabilism of this sort. Or, at least anyone who thinks knowledge requires true belief can endorse a reliabilism of this sort. After all, on any occasion where a person \( S \) has a true belief \( p \), there will be some narrowly specified cognitive process which causes \( S \) to believe \( p \) and which in addition is reliable, if only because it is so narrowly specified that it produces only belief \( p \) and beliefs in propositions implied by \( p \). So, insofar as a reliabilist resorts to such maneuvers to defend his account, his account will lose whatever distinctive character it was intended to have.

Reliabilist accounts of knowledge, then, face a dilemma. One horn of the dilemma is to allow the notion of a reliable cognitive process to be specified so narrowly that reliabilism is no longer an interesting thesis. It becomes true but trivial, since any true belief can be construed as being the product of a reliable cognitive process. The other horn is not to allow the notion of a reliable cognitive process to be so narrowly specified, in which case it becomes susceptible to demon counterexamples and the like. In other words, it becomes an interesting but false thesis.

I have not discussed every possible reliabilist thesis concerning rational belief and knowledge. But, I have discussed a number of representative theses, and neither they nor any other reliabilist thesis I can think of can avoid the difficulties raised for them by demon situations and the like. And so, I conclude that reliability is neither a necessary condition of rational belief (i.e., it is not necessary for more of a person’s rational beliefs to be true than false) nor a necessary condition of knowledge (i.e., a belief in order to be an instance of knowledge need not be the product of a reliable cognitive process—provided “reliable” is used in a nontrivial way).
In order to avoid this conclusion, one might be tempted, I suppose, to claim that the counterexamples I have described are not really possible. In arguing against reliabilist theses of knowledge, I have imagined situations in which a person S knows that he has been deceived by a demon but no longer is, and situations in which S knows that he shortly will be deceived by a demon but is not now, and situations in which S knows that in close counterfactual situations he would be deceived by a demon even though he is not being deceived by the demon in the actual situation. Accordingly, in order to save reliabilism, one might try claiming that S cannot know such propositions.

But why not? If such propositions can be true, why might not S be in a position to know that they are true? What is it about knowledge, or about these situations, or about S which is supposed to preclude even the possibility of S's knowing such propositions? On the face of it, knowledge of such propositions would seem possible. And if it is possible, it is possible for S's belief p to be an instance of knowledge even though it is not the product of a reliable cognitive process.

But, perhaps the objection here is that it is not possible for such propositions even to be true, and thus a fortiori it is not possible for S to know them. In particular, perhaps the objection is that it is not possible for a demon to deceive us so systematically that much of what we believe is false. Several philosophers recently have at least suggested this; they have tried to defend the surprising thesis that it is not possible for most of our beliefs to be false. Both Donald Davidson and Hilary Putnam, for example, recently have defended accounts of belief which imply that this is not possible. Their accounts imply that although it may be possible for there to be evil demons or for us to be brains-in-a-vat, it is not possible for us to be in the grip of an evil demon, or for us to be brains-in-a-vat, and for us to believe what we now believe about the external world (assuming that we neither now are in the clutches of such a demon nor now are in a vat). The reason Davidson claims this (and Putnam claims it for a closely related reason) is because he thinks that the object of a belief at least in a majority of cases is the cause of the belief. So, according to Davidson, if we are brains-in-a-vat hooked up to a machine, it is not ordinary objects in the external world (such as tables, chairs, etc.) which cause our mental states. Rather, it is the inner workings of the machine which causes us to be in the mental states we are. But then, says Davidson, most of our beliefs are about these inner workings of the machine and not about tables, chairs, etc. Moreover, most of these beliefs are true.

I am not inclined to think that an account of belief of this rough sort is very plausible, but for purposes here such qualms can be put aside. For,
even if the account is plausible and even if as a result it is impossible for most of a person's beliefs to be false, this does not do the reliabilist any good. To the contrary, it makes reliabilism pointless. At the heart of reliabilist accounts of rational belief is the idea that one crucial difference between rational beliefs and other beliefs is that the former are more intimately related to truth. More of them must be true than false. And, a similar idea lies at the heart of reliabilist accounts of knowledge. Beliefs which are instances of knowledge must be reliably produced, so that most beliefs so produced are true; this supposedly is a crucial element in what distinguishes beliefs which are eligible to be instances of knowledge from those which are not. But if it is impossible for more of a person's beliefs to be false than true, all of this is beside the point. A person's beliefs regardless of what they are—whether or not any of them are instances of knowledge and whether or not any of them are rational—must be mostly true. So, contrary to what is suggested by reliabilist accounts of rational belief and knowledge, reliability is not a significant criterion which can be used to distinguish these epistemically valuable kinds of beliefs from other kinds of beliefs.

All this, however, is not to say that considerations of reliability are altogether unimportant epistemically. As I suggested earlier, epistemic rationality is best understood to be a function of what it is appropriate for a person to believe given his perspective and given the goal of his having true beliefs and not having false beliefs. So, the goal in terms of which epistemic rationality can be understood is the goal of having reliable beliefs—i.e., mostly true beliefs. But, to say that reliability is the goal in terms of which epistemic rationality is to be understood is not to say that achieving that goal is a prerequisite of being epistemically rational. If a person, given his situation, believes what it is appropriate for him to believe with respect to the goal of his having true beliefs and not having false beliefs, then his beliefs can be epistemically rational even if they are mostly false. This is the lesson of demon examples and the like.

Likewise, nothing I have said implies that reliability is not an important consideration in understanding knowledge. Indeed, I think that reliability can be a crucial part of a set of conditions sufficient for knowledge. Recall D. H. Lawrence's story of the boy who when he rides his rocking horse is able unfailingly to pick the winners at a local race track. It is plausible to think that such a boy somehow knows who the winners will be, and it is plausible to suppose this even if we also suppose that the boy has not been told that his picks are always correct. In other words, it is plausible to suppose that the boy somehow knows who the winners will be even if he lacks adequate evidence for his picks. Two lessons are suggested by such cases.
First, in order to have knowledge it is not necessary to have a rational belief as has been traditionally claimed. At the very least, this is not necessary in one important sense of rational belief—viz. one which makes rational belief a function of having adequate evidence. Second, having a true belief which is caused by a highly reliable cognitive process can be sufficient for knowledge. Or at least, it can be sufficient with the addition of a few other relatively minor conditions. The mistake reliabilists tend to make is to try to draw a third lesson from such cases. Namely, they try to conclude that a necessary condition of a person S's knowing p is that his belief p be reliably produced.

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NOTES

5. I discuss causal, reliabilist accounts of knowledge in Section II. The arguments there also will apply to causal, reliabilist accounts of rational belief. See especially footnote 14.
6. Although this causal thesis does not strictly imply that more of S's current and past rational beliefs are true than are false (since it proposes only a necessary condition of rational belief), the causal thesis might plausibly be used to support this kind of reliabilism. Think of it this way: suppose we gather into a set all of S's current and past beliefs which are the products of a reliable cognitive process and then use the other necessary conditions of rational belief to create a subset, consisting of S's current and past rational beliefs. If we assume that in creating this subset we have not lessened the percentage of true beliefs, then the subset, like the original set, will contain more true beliefs than false beliefs. So, although the causal thesis does not imply this version of reliabilism, it can be thought of as being closely related to it—i.e., close enough that the inadequacy of this version of reliabilism will suggest, even if it does not imply, the inadequacy of the causal thesis. (The discussion in Section II of causal accounts of knowledge will provide additional, and equally telling, reasons to reject causal, reliabilist theses about rational belief; see footnote 14.)
7. The causal thesis here supports this version of reliabilism in much the same way that the previous version of reliabilism is supported by the causal thesis men-
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tioned there. See n6. The remaining versions of reliabilism I discuss in this section can be supported in a corresponding way by corresponding causal theses.

8. This, of course, leaves open the question of what exactly makes it appropriate for a person S to believe a proposition given his perspective and given his goal of believing truths and not believing falsehoods.


10. It perhaps is best not to regard even Goldman himself as taking the problem here and his suggestion for how to handle it seriously. His final analysis of rational belief makes reference only to cognitive processes which in fact are reliable (and not to cognitive processes we think to be reliable).

11. This is not to say, however, that there are no problems with the above suggestion that S rationally believes p only if he believes of the process which causes his belief that it is reliable. To the contrary, it is no more plausible than causal, reliabilist theses: Just as S’s belief p can be rational and yet not be the product of a reliable cognitive process, so too S’s belief p can be rational and yet not be the product of a process which S regards as reliable. See n14, below.


13. It is worth noting that it also is possible for there to be causal accounts of knowledge which are not reliabilist accounts. Suppose, for instance, it is claimed that S knows only if the fact that causes S to believe (or only if the fact that in some appropriate sense is nomologically related to S’s believing p). See Alvin Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing,” The Journal of Philosophy, 64 (1967), pp. 355–72. This kind of thesis, as Goldman himself now admits, faces numerous difficulties; it is not a particularly plausible thesis. But, putting aside the question of its plausibility, what is of interest here is that one can endorse this thesis without endorsing any significant reliabilist thesis. (This causal thesis does imply that all beliefs which are instances of knowledge must be true, but this does not indicate that the thesis commits one to a significant reliabilist thesis since this is a consequence which almost any account of knowledge implies.)

14. Since in all of the preceding examples S can be assumed to rationally believe p (as well as to know p), the examples also can be used to illustrate the inadequacy of various theses about rational belief. For example, they illustrate that S’s believing or having adequate reason to believe that his belief p is caused by a reliable process is not a prerequisite of S’s rationally believing p. Likewise, they illustrate that S’s belief actually having been caused by a reliable process is not a prerequisite at S’s rationally believing p.


17. Perhaps, for example, it would not be plausible to say that the boy on the rocking horse knows who the winners will be if he has adequate evidence for the (false) proposition that the process which causes him to think some horse will win is
unreliable. Thus, perhaps something at last roughly resembling the following conditions are sufficient for S's knowing p: S belief p is true, it is caused by a highly reliable process R, and S does not have adequate evidence for believing R is not highly reliable.