

## JUSTIFIED BELIEF AS RESPONSIBLE BELIEF

Richard Foley

The concepts of justified, warranted, and epistemically rational belief, along with the notion of knowledge, form the core subject matter of epistemology. Despite their centrality, these concepts are used in the literature in strikingly different ways and often with little regard for how they interrelate.

In what follows, I will be making recommendations for how to understand and distinguish these three concepts. The account I will be developing situates the concept of epistemically rational belief into a well-integrated and philosophically respectable general theory of rationality; it links the concept of warranted belief with the theory of knowledge; and it insists that the concept of justified belief should be relevant to the assessments of each other's beliefs that we are most interested in making in our everyday lives, namely, assessments where the focus is not so much on whether one has fulfilled all the prerequisites of knowledge but rather on whether one has been a responsible believer.

These are the conclusions I will be moving towards, but the place to begin is with a quick history of recent epistemology. In his influential 1963 article, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?",<sup>1</sup> Edmund Gettier designed a pair of counterexamples to show that knowledge cannot be defined as justified true belief. Gettier pointed out that one can be justified in believing a falsehood from which one deduces a truth, in which case one has a justified true belief but does not have knowledge. His article started a search for a fourth condition of knowledge, which could be added to justification, truth, and belief to produce an adequate analysis of knowledge.

Various fourth conditions were proposed, many of which were variants of the idea that knowledge requires one's justification to be either non-defective or indefeasible. However, a different kind of response to Gettier's counterexamples was to wonder whether something less intellectual than justification, traditionally understood, is better suited for understanding knowledge. Justification had been traditionally associated with having or at least being able to produce an argument in defense of one's beliefs, but critics pointed out that we are often inclined to say that someone knows something even when the person is not in a position to defend what he or she believes. This observation prompted these epistemologists, in their attempts to understand knowledge, to shift their focus away from questions of one's being able to justify one's beliefs intellectually and towards questions of one's being in an appropriate causal or causal-like relation with one's external environment. The philosophical task, according to this way of thinking about knowledge, is to identify the precise character of this relation.

This shift in focus led to reliability theories of knowledge. According to reliabilists,

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1 . Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis*, XXV (1963), 121-3.

the processes, faculties, and methods that produce or sustain a belief must be highly reliable for the belief to count as an instance of knowledge. In turn, reliability theories of knowledge led to externalist accounts of epistemic justification. 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. If knowledge is reliably produced true belief and if justification is by definition that which has to be added to true belief to get knowledge, then epistemic justification must also be a matter of one's beliefs having been produced and sustained by reliable cognitive processes.

There is now an enormous literature arguing the pro's and con's of externalism and internalism in epistemology.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, the literature assumes that the two approaches are rivals, but an alternative and more charitable interpretation is that externalists and internalists have different interests. Externalists are principally interested in understanding what knowledge is, but in the process of developing an account of knowledge, many externalists feel compelled also to propose an account of justified belief, because they assume that by definition knowledge is justified true belief (again, with some fourth condition added to handle Gettier cases). Internalists, by contrast, are principally interested in explicating a sense of justification that captures what is involved in having beliefs that are defensible from one's own 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. For internalists, the primary desideratum for an account of epistemic justification is that it provide an explication of internally defensible believing, and it is a secondary benefit that it also capture what has to be added to true belief in order to get a good candidate for knowledge, whereas for externalists that primary desideratum and secondary benefit are reversed.

This confusing state of affairs is the direct result of both sides accepting as the methodological assumption that the properties which make a belief justified are by definition such that when a true belief has those properties, it is a good candidate to be an instance of knowledge. This assumption has the effect of placing the theory of justified belief in service to the theory of

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see William Alston, *Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), especially chapters 8 and 9; 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. V (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 53-71; Richard Fumerton, "The Internalism-Externalism Controversy," in J Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 2 (Atascadero: 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*, 225-244.

knowledge; a proposed account of justified belief is adequate only if it contributes to a successful theory of knowledge. The theory of justified belief is thereby divorced from our everyday assessment of each other's opinions, which tend to emphasize whether we have been responsible in forming our beliefs rather on whether we have satisfied the prerequisites of knowledge.

The assumption has equally unhappy consequences for the theory of knowledge. To give due recognition to the fact that most people cannot provide adequate intellectual defenses for much of what they know, the assumption forces the theory of knowledge into awkward attempts to read back into the account of knowledge some duly externalized notion of justified belief.

And to make matter worse, the assumption also does damage to the theory of rational belief. The concepts of rational belief and justified belief ought to be closely linked, but if justified belief is closely linked with knowledge, then so too will rational belief. But the more closely the concept of rational belief is connected with the prerequisites of knowledge, the more the concept will be cordoned off from our ways of understanding the rationality of actions, decisions, strategies, plans, and other phenomena whose rationality we regularly assess. The regrettable implication is that the conditions that make a belief rational have little to do with the conditions that make an action, decision, strategy, plan, etc. rational. I say "regrettable" because it ought to be possible to understand the rationality in a way that closely parallels our understanding of the rationality of actions, decisions, strategies, and plans.

The remedy is to jettison the idea that knowledge can be adequately understood in terms of rational or justified true belief plus some condition to handle Gettier problems, and, correspondingly, to jettison also the idea that there is a simple, necessary tie between either the theory of justified belief or the theory of rational belief and the theory of knowledge. Discarding these assumptions constitutes a first step towards an epistemology that is both theoretically respectable and relevant to the assessments of each other's beliefs that we actually make in our everyday lives.

A second important step is to recognize that rationality is a goal oriented notion. Whether the question is one about the rationality of beliefs, decisions, intentions, plans, or strategies, what is at issue is the effective pursuit of goals. Questions about the rationality of a decision, for example, are in the first instance questions about how effectively the decision seems to satisfy some presupposed set of goals. I say "seems" because it is too stringent to insist that a decision is rational only if it in fact satisfies the goals. Rational decisions can turn out badly. Likewise, it is too stringent to insist that a decision is rational only if it is probable that the plan will satisfy one's goals, because it may be that no one could be reasonably expected to believe that the decision was likely to have unwelcome consequences. Considerations such as these suggest a general schema of rationality: A decision (plan, action, strategy, belief, etc.) is rational for an individual if it is rational to believe that it will satisfy his or her goals.

An obvious drawback of this schema, however, is that it makes reference to the notion of rational belief, thus leaving us within the circle of notions we wish to understand and, hence, without an adequate general account of rationality. I will return to this problem shortly, but I want first to look at some other issues about the schema.

One such issue is whether for a decision, plan, strategy, etc. to be rational, it must be rational to believe that it does a better job of achieving one's goals than any of the alternatives, or whether something less than the very best do? As I will be using the terms, "reasonability" admits of degrees whereas "rationality" does not. In particular, reasonability varies with the strengths of one's reasons, and the rational is that which is sufficiently reasonable. This usage leaves open the possibility that several options might be rational for an individual even though there are reasons to prefer some of these options over the others. A decision, plan, strategy, etc. is rational if it is rational to believe that it will do an acceptably good job of achieving one's goals.

To say that a decision, plan, strategy, etc. will do "an acceptably good job of achieving one's goals" is to say its estimated desirability is sufficiently high, where estimated desirability is a matter of what it is rational to believe about its probable effectiveness in promoting one's goals and the relative value of these goals. More precisely, a decision, plan, strategy, etc. is rational if its estimated desirability is acceptably high given the context, where the context is determined by the relative desirability of the alternatives and their relative accessibility. The fewer alternatives there are with greater estimated desirabilities, the more likely it is that the decision in question is rational. Moreover, if these alternatives are only marginally superior or are not easy to implement, then it is all the more likely that the decision, plan, or strategy is rational. It will be rational because it is good enough, given the context.

Another important issue is that the set of goals we take into account when evaluating a decision, plan, strategy, etc. can vary with the context. We are sometimes interested in assessing what it is rational for an individual to do, all things considered, and we thus take into consideration all of the individual's goals. In other contexts, however we take into consideration only a subset of his goals, because we are interested in a specific type of rationality. For example, we may want to evaluate someone's actions with respect to goals that concern his or her economic well being. If we judge that doing A would be an effective means of promoting this subset of goals, we can say that A is rational, in an economic sense, for the individual. We can say this even if, with respect to all the person's goals, both economic and non-economic, it is not rational to do A.

Thus, the above general schema of rationality can be refined: A decision (plan, strategy, etc.) is rational in sense X for an individual if it is rational for him or her to believe that the decision (plan, strategy, etc.) will do an acceptably good job of satisfying his or her goals of type X.

This distinction among different types of rationality is especially important for epistemology. When assessing each other's beliefs, we are typically not interested in the total

constellation of our goals. Rather, our interest typically is in only those goals that are distinctly intellectual. For example, as a rule, in assessing what it is rational for you to believe, we would regard as irrelevant the fact (if it is one) that were you to believe P, it would make you feel more secure. More notoriously, in assessing whether it might be rational for you to believe in God, we are unlikely to join Pascal in regarding as relevant the possibility that you might increase your chances of salvation by being a theist.

But why is it that in our discussions and deliberations about what it is rational to believe, the working assumption seems to be that the practical benefits of belief are not even relevant to the issue of what it is rational for us to believe? On the face of the matter, this working assumption seems puzzling. After all, beliefs have consequences for the quality of our lives and the lives of those around us. Why shouldn't such consequences be taken into account in deliberations about what it is rational to believe? Yet, our intellectual practice is to regard these consequences as irrelevant to the rationality of our beliefs.

In what follows, I will be proposing a general theory of rationality, and within the context of this theory providing a resolution to this puzzle. But first, I need to distinguish among various kinds of intellectual goals. In evaluating the rationality of beliefs, epistemologists have traditionally been concerned with not just any intellectual goal, but rather a very specific goal, that of now having beliefs that are both accurate and comprehensive. Notice that the goal is not to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs at some future time but rather to have such beliefs now. To understand the significance of characterizing the goal in this way, imagine that one's prospects for having accurate and comprehensive beliefs in a year's time would be enhanced by believing something for which one now lacks adequate evidence. For example, suppose a proposition P involves a more favorable assessment of my intellectual talents than the evidence warrants, but suppose also that believing P would make me more intellectually confident than I would be otherwise, which would make me a more dedicated inquirer, which in turn would enhance my long-term prospects of having an accurate and comprehensive belief system. Despite these long-term benefits, there is an important sense of rational belief, indeed the very sense that traditionally has been of the most interest to epistemologists, in which it is not rational for me to believe P. Moreover, the point of this example is not affected by shortening the time period in which the benefits are forthcoming. It would not be rational, in this sense, for me to believe P if we were instead to imagine that believing P would somehow improve my prospects for having accurate and comprehensive beliefs in the next few weeks, or in the next few hours, or even in the next few minutes. The precise way of making this point is to say that in such a situation, it is not rational in a purely epistemic sense for me to believe P, where this purely epistemic sense is to be understood in terms of the present tense goal of now having accurate and comprehensive beliefs.

Foundationalists, coherentists, reliabilists, and others have different views about what properties a belief must have in order to be epistemically rational. I am not going to try to adjudicate among these various views, because what matters for my purposes here is not so much their differences but rather something that they have in common. In particular, each of these accounts explicates the concept of epistemically rational belief without reference to any other

concept of rationality. For example, foundationalists understand epistemic rationality in terms of a notion of basic belief and a set of deductive and probabilistic support relations by which other beliefs are supported by the basic ones, and they would view it a defect if they had to make use of some other notion of rationality (or a related notion, such as reasonability) in characterizing basicity or the support relations. Coherentists try to provide an explication of epistemic rationality in terms of a set of deductive and probabilistic relations among beliefs and properties such as simplicity, conservativeness, and explanatory power, but they too would view it a defect if their explication smuggled in any reference to a concept of rationality or a related concept. And the same is true of other accounts of epistemically rational belief.

This point is of relevance for the above general schema of rationality, because it provides the schema with an escape route from circularity. In particular, if we substitute the concept of epistemic rationality into the schema, the schema becomes: A plan, decision, action, strategy, etc. is rational in sense X for an individual just in case it is *epistemically rational* for the individual to believe that the plan, decision, action, strategy, etc. will do an acceptably good job of satisfying goals of kind X. Because accounts of epistemically rational belief do not make use of any other notion of rationality or any of its close cognates, the schema is now theoretically respectable. It makes no non-eliminable reference to a concept of rationality or any of its close cognates.

The revised schema thus allows the concept of epistemically rational belief to serve as a theoretical anchor for other concepts of rationality. Moreover, the schema is perfectly general. The rationality of plans, decisions, strategies, etc. can all be understood in accordance with the schema, and in addition different kinds of rationality (economic rationality, rationality all things considered, and so on) can all be understood in accordance with the schema. Most relevant for my present purposes, the rationality of belief is itself an instance of the schema. Let me explain.

According to schema, a decision, plan, strategy, etc. is rational in sense X if it is epistemically rational for one to believe it will do an acceptably good job of satisfying goals of kind X. Recall, however, that “X” can refer to all of one’s goals or only a subset of them. This creates a risk of confusion. If we take into consideration only economic goals, for instance, we may judge that it is rational (in an economic sense) for one to do X, but if we take into consideration all of one’s goals, both economic and non-economic, we may well conclude that it is not rational (all things considered) for one to do X.

These same possibilities for confusion arise when it is the rationality of beliefs at issue. Beliefs can be assessed in terms how well they promote the epistemic goal, but there is nothing in principle wrong with assessing them in terms of how well they promote the total constellation of one’s goals. If it is epistemically rational for an individual to believe that believing a proposition P would effectively promote her overall constellation of goals, then it is rational for her to believe P, all things considered. There are two notions of rational belief at work here. The first is the notion of epistemic rationality, which is defined in terms of the purely epistemic goal. The second is a derivative notion, which is defined in terms of the concept of epistemically rational belief and one’s total constellation of goals.

The puzzle that I raised above is why we so rarely evaluate beliefs in terms of this second notion if there is really nothing improper about doing so. In thinking about this puzzle, it is important to keep in mind that many of our discussions and debates concerning what it is rational to believe take place in a context of trying to convince some person, perhaps even ourselves, to believe some proposition. In an effort to persuade, we point out the reasons there are to believe the proposition in question. But notice, insofar as our aim is to get someone to believe a proposition, the citing of practical reasons is ordinarily ineffective. Suppose that you are skeptical of the claim that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, and I am trying to get you to believe it. Even if I succeed in convincing you that you have strong pragmatic reasons to believe the claim (perhaps someone will give you a million dollars if you come to believe it), this will ordinarily not be enough to make you to believe it. The prospects of the million dollars may get you to behave as if you believed that there is intelligent life elsewhere, but it will not be enough to prompt genuine belief. By contrast, if I marshal evidence and information in such a way that you become convinced that you have strong epistemic reasons in support of the claim, that is, reasons that indicate that the claim is likely to be true, this usually is sufficient to generate belief.

Thus, insofar as our concern is to persuade someone to believe a proposition, there is a straightforward explanation as to why we are normally not interested in the pragmatic reasons she may have to believe it, namely, it is normally pointless to cite them, because that they are not the kind of reasons that normally generate belief. Similarly, in our own deliberations about what to believe, we ordinarily do not consider what pragmatic reasons we might have for believing something, and the explanation is similar to the third-person case. Deliberations concerning our pragmatic reasons for belief are ordinarily inefficacious and hence pointless. Hence, our practice is to ignore them in deliberations about what to believe.

There is a second, complementary explanation for why in general we do not deliberate about the pragmatic reasons we have for believing something, namely, such deliberations are ordinarily redundant. Although we can have pragmatic reasons as well as epistemic reasons for believing propositions, ordinarily our overriding pragmatic reason with respect to our beliefs is to have and maintain a comprehensive and accurate stock. All of us are continually faced with a huge variety of decisions, but we do not know in advance in any detailed way the kinds of decisions that we will need to make, and we likewise do not know in advance the kinds of information we will need in order to make these decisions well. This might not be terribly important if, when faced with decisions, we had the opportunity to gather information and deliberate about which alternative is best, or at least the time to seek out the opinions of those who are better informed. But ordinarily, we do not. Most of the decisions we make have to be made without the luxury of extensive information gathering, consultations, or deliberations. We are instead forced to draw upon our existing resources and in particular upon our existing stock of beliefs. If that stock is either small or inaccurate, we increase the likelihood that our decisions will not be good ones.

So ordinarily, the beliefs that are likely to do the best overall job of promoting the total constellation of our goals are beliefs that are both comprehensive and accurate. Only by having such beliefs are we likely to be in a position to fashion effective strategies for achieving our various goals. But then, since by definition beliefs that are epistemically rational for us are beliefs that are rational for us insofar as our goal is to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs, it is ordinarily rational, all things considered, that is, when all of our goals are taken into account, to believe those propositions that it is also epistemically rational for us to believe. Thus, for all practical purposes, taking this phrase literally, we can usually safely ignore pragmatic reasons in our deliberations about what to believe.

To be sure, there are conceivable examples in which our epistemic reasons and our overall reasons for belief are pulled apart. Pascal famously argued that belief in God is such an example, but it is also not hard to concoct non-theistic examples as well. Suppose you are aware that a madman will kill your children unless you come to believe, and not merely act as if you believe, some proposition P which it is clearly epistemically irrational for you, that is, irrational insofar as your goal is to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs. Nonetheless, in such a situation, it is presumably rational for you to find some way of getting yourself to believe P. The importance of saving your children overrides all your other concerns.

In the vast majority of cases, however, the pragmatic benefits of belief are not so powerful. So, although it is in principle possible for what it is rational for one to believe, when all one's goals are taken into account, to be at odds with what it is epistemically rational for one to believe, in practice this tends not to happen.

However, this is not to say that pragmatic considerations do not deeply influence what it is rational for us to believe. It is only to say that they do not very often do so in the direct way that Pascal's wager envisions. They instead do so indirectly. In particular, pragmatic considerations are critical for determining the extent of evidence gathering and deliberating it is rational for us to engage in with respect to a particular issue, and in doing so, they shape what we are justified in believing, but in an indirect rather than direct way. They do so by imposing constraints on inquiry, but subject to these constraints, our goal is to determine which beliefs would be true, not which beliefs would be useful. We rarely engage in Pascalian deliberations in which weigh the pragmatic costs and benefits of believing as opposed to not believing some proposition. On the other hand, it is anything but rare for us to weigh the costs and benefits of spending additional time and resources investigating a topic.

In buying a used car, for example, I will want to investigate whether the car is in good condition, but I need to make a decision about how thoroughly to do so. Should I merely drive the car? Should I look up the frequency of repair record for the model? Should I go over the car with a mechanic, or perhaps even more than one mechanic? Similarly, if I am interested in how serious a threat global warming is, I need to decide how much time to spend investigating the issue. Should I be content with looking at the accounts given in newspapers, or should I take the time to read the piece in *Scientific American*, or should I even go to the trouble of looking up

articles in the relevant technical journals? And if it turns out that in order to understand these articles, I need to brush up on my statistics, should I do that? The reasonable answer to such questions is a function of how important the issue is and how likely it is that additional effort on my part will improve my reliability with respect to it. As the stakes of my being right go up and as the chances for improving my epistemic situation with respect to the issue goes up, it is reasonable for me to increase my efforts.

So, it is not at all unusual for pragmatic considerations to influence the rationality of our beliefs, but it is rare for them to do so in the crass, direct way that Pascal's wager envision. Instead, they determine the direction and shape of our investigative and deliberative projects and practices. When engaged in these intellectual projects and practices, we in general regard it as irrelevant whether or not believing the claim in question would be useful. The internal practice encourages us to be concerned only with the truth or likely truth of the hypothesis, but the practices themselves are thoroughly shaped by our overall needs, interests, and abilities and by the situations in which we find ourselves. They are thoroughly shaped, in other words, by pragmatic considerations.

Keeping this observation in mind, consider again the concept of epistemic rationality. To say that it is epistemically rational for an individual to believe a proposition P is to say it is rational for her to believe P insofar as her goal is to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs. But of course, no human being is a purely intellectual being. All of us have many goals. Epistemic rationality is in this sense an idealized concept and as such is not particularly well suited for our everyday evaluations of each other's beliefs. Our everyday evaluations tend to be concerned with whether one has been responsible in arriving at one's beliefs, where being responsible is in turn a function of responding appropriately to the full complexity of one's situation, including the complexity that one has to balance the costs and benefits of trying to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs about an issue against the costs and benefits of trying to satisfy one's other goals, interests, and needs. On the other hand, the idealized character of the concept of epistemic rational belief also has its advantages, one of the most important of which is that the concept is suitable to serve as a theoretical anchor for other concepts that are less idealized and, hence, potentially more relevant to our everyday intellectual concerns.

The complication, as I have been pointing out, is that the most straightforward way of introducing a derivative concept of rational belief is too crude to be of much relevance to these everyday intellectual concerns. According to the general schema, it is rational, all things considered (that is, when all of the individual's goals are taken into account), for an individual to believe P if it is epistemically rational for her to believe that the overall effects of believing P are sufficiently beneficial. But it is rare for epistemically rational belief and rational belief, all things considered, to come apart in a crass Pascalian manner. There are powerful pressures that keep the two from being in conflict with one another in all but the most unusual circumstances. So, if the concept of epistemic rationality is to be used to explicate a concept that is relevant for our everyday intellectual assessments of each other's beliefs, it will have to be employed in a more subtle way.

A first step is to note that our everyday evaluations of each other's beliefs tend to be reason-saturated. We are interested, for example, in whether someone in forming her beliefs about a topic has been *reasonably* thorough in gathering evidence and then *reasonably* thorough in deliberating over this evidence. The standards of reasonability at work in these assessments are realistic ones. They reflect the fact that all of us have non-intellectual interests, goals, and needs, which place constraints how much time and effort it is appropriate to devote to investigating and deliberating about an issue. Only a concept that is sensitive to questions of resource allocation is capable of capturing the spirit of these everyday evaluations.

I will be arguing that the concept of justified belief is just such a concept, only as I understand it, the concept is more closely associated with the everyday notion of responsible believing than it is with the notion of what is required to turn true belief, absent Gettier problems, into knowledge. Following the usage of Alvin Plantinga, I will reserve the term, "warranted belief," for what turns true belief into a serious candidate for knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

Justifiably believing a proposition is a matter of its being rational, all things considered, for one to have acquired (and subsequently retained) the belief. More precisely, one justifiably believes a proposition P if one has an epistemically rational belief that one's procedures with respect to P have been acceptable, that is, acceptable given the limitations on one's time and capacities and given all of one's goals. Thus, if an individual has an epistemically rational belief that, all things considered, she has spent an acceptable amount of time and energy in gathering evidence about P and evaluating this evidence and has used acceptable procedures in gathering and processing this evidence, it is justifiable for her to have this belief.

This explication of the concept of justified belief makes reference to a concept of rationality, but because the concept it makes reference to is that of an epistemically rational belief, which itself can be explicated without reference to any other concept of rationality or any of its cognates, the result is a theoretically respectable account of justified belief, that is, an account that make no non-eliminable use of another notion of rationality.

An important related concept is that of non-negligently believing a proposition. Whereas justifiably believing a proposition P is a matter of its being rational to have acquired (and subsequently retained) the belief, non-negligently believing P is a matter of its not being irrational to have acquired (and subsequently retained) the belief. Having this second concept in addition to the concept of justified belief is important, because we often do not have a very good idea of how it is that we came to believe what we do. We may not remember or perhaps we never knew. Consequently, with respect to many of our beliefs, we may not think that the processes which led to them were acceptable, but by the same token we may not think, and need not have evidence for

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<sup>3</sup> See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

thinking, that these processes were unacceptable either. The beliefs in question are thus not justified, but there nonetheless is something to recommend them, namely, they are non-negligent.

In particular, I shall say that one non-negligently believes a proposition P if (a) one believes P and (b) one does not believe, and it is not epistemically rational for one to believe, that one's procedures with respect to P have been unacceptable, that is, unacceptable given the limitations on time and capacities and given all of one's goals. For example, if an individual does not believe, and if it is not epistemically rational for her to believe, that all things being considered she has spent an unacceptably small amount of time in gathering evidence or evaluating this evidence, or that she has used unacceptable procedures in gathering and processing this evidence, then her belief P is non-negligent.

These concepts of justified belief and non-negligent belief are far less idealized than the concept of epistemically rational belief. They recognize that given the relative unimportance of many claims, the scarcity of time, and the pressing nature of many of our non-intellectual ends, it would be inappropriate to spend significant time and effort gathering information and thinking about these claims. A large proportion of our beliefs are acquired without much thought, and there is nothing untoward about this. I believe that there is a chair in front of me because I see it. I do not deliberate about whether or not to trust my senses. I simply believe.

Of course, some topics are important enough and complex enough that it is appropriate to devote considerable time and effort in investigating and thinking about them, but even in these investigations and deliberations we make use of an enormous number of opinions, skills, and habits, most of which we have to rely on without much thought. Even when we are being our most vigilant, as for example in scientific inquiry, the bulk of our intellectual proceedings has to be conducted in a largely automatic fashion. We have no realistic choice in this matter. Only a fraction of the various intellectual methods, practices, and faculties that we make use of in any significant intellectual project, and only a fraction of the wide range of pre-existing opinions that we bring to bear in reaching our conclusions, can be subject to scrutiny.

Similarly, every new situation that we confront in our everyday lives presents us with new intellectual challenges, if only because we will want to know the best way to react to the situation. The everyday flow of our lives thus potentially swamps us with intellectual projects and questions. Fortunately, not all are equally important. Given the total constellation of our goals, some of these projects are more significant than others, and likewise, given the scarcity of time, some are more pressing than others. These are the ones on which it is reasonable to devote time and attention.

Because of the relative unimportance of many topics and the pressing nature of many of our non-intellectual ends, we can have justified beliefs about these topics even we have spent little or no time gathering evidence about them or deliberating about them. Indeed, we can have justified beliefs about them even if we are in the possession of information which, had we reflected upon it, would have convinced us that what we believe is incorrect. This is one of the

ways in which justified belief and epistemically rational belief can come apart. Even if an individual has evidence that makes it epistemically irrational to believe P, she might nonetheless justifiably believe P, because given the unimportance of the topic, it would have been inappropriate for her to have taken the time and effort to sift through this evidence. What we believe about an unimportant topic may not meet the standards of epistemically rational belief, which are concerned with what it is rational to believe insofar as one has the goal of having accurate and comprehensive beliefs, but it nonetheless can meet the standards of justified belief, which are concerned with the level of effort it is appropriate to devote, given the full panoply of one's goals, to gathering evidence and thinking about a topic.

Having justified beliefs requires one to be a responsible believer, but being a responsible believer does not require one to go to extraordinary lengths in trying to discover the truth about an issue. More exactly, it does not require this unless the issue is itself extraordinarily important. The standards that one must meet if one's beliefs are to be justified slide up or down with the significance of the issue. If nothing much hangs on an issue, there is no point in going to great lengths to discover the truth about it. Accordingly, the standards one must meet are low. These are the kinds of cases I have been discussing up until now. On the other hand, when weighty issues are at stake, it takes more to be a responsible believer and, hence, the standards of justified belief become correspondingly higher. Indeed, they can even become more stringent than those of epistemically rational belief. The more important the issue, the more important it is to reduce the risk of error. For example, if having inaccurate opinions about a given topic would put people's lives at risk, one should conduct especially thorough investigations before settling on an opinion. If one fails to do so, the resulting beliefs will not be justified even if they are epistemically rational.

This is possible because epistemically rational belief does not require certainty, not even moral certainty, whereas moral certainty sometimes is required for one to be a responsible believer. To be epistemically rational, one needs to have evidence that reduces the risks of error to an acceptable level insofar as one's goal is to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs. But the risks might be acceptable in this theoretical sense even if one's procedures have been unacceptably sloppy, given that people's lives are hanging in the balance. If so, the beliefs in question will not be justified despite the fact that they are epistemically rational.

The concept of justified belief is also able to give expression to the way in which in our everyday assessments of each other's beliefs, the intellectual standards we expect one to meet varies not only with the importance of the topic at issue but also with one's social role. If it is your job but not mine to keep safety equipment in good working order, the intellectual demands upon you to have accurate beliefs about the equipment are more stringent than those upon me. My belief that the equipment is in good working order might be justified even if I have done little, if any, investigation of the matter. I need not have tested the equipment, for example. A cursory look might suffice for me, but this won't do for you. It would be unreasonable for you not to conduct tests of the equipment. The standards of justified belief are higher for you. You need to do more, and know more, than I in order to have a justified belief about this matter.

One's social role can be relevant even when the issue at hand is primarily of theoretical interest. For example, my justifiably believing that the principle of conservation of energy is not violated in the beta decay of atomic nuclei is a very different matter from a theoretical physicist justifiably believing this. My familiarity with the issue derives exclusively from popular discussions of it in *Scientific American* and *The New York Times* science section. This kind of information is presumably enough for me to be a responsible believer; no more can be reasonably expected of me. On the other hand, much more is reasonably expected of the authorities themselves. They are part of a community of inquirers with special knowledge and special responsibilities, and as a result they should be able to explain away the apparent violations in a relatively detailed way.

In these and other ways, non-epistemic ends help determine what one can justifiably believe, but they do not do so in the way that Pascal envisioned. The idea is not they give one good reasons to believe a proposition for which one lacks good evidence. Rather, they define the extent of evidence gathering and processing that it is reasonable to engage in with respect to a particular issue. They thus shape what it is justified for one to believe in an indirect way rather than a direct, Pascalian way. They do so by imposing constraints on inquiry, but subject to these constraints one's aim will be to determine which beliefs are true, not which beliefs are useful.

One of the significant advantages of the distinctions I have been making among epistemically rational belief, justified belief, and non-negligent belief is that they are all parts of a philosophically respectable theory of rationality. At the heart of the theory is the following schema: A decision, plan, strategy, or whatever is rational in sense X for an individual S if it is epistemically rational for S to believe that the decision, plan, strategy, etc. will do an acceptably good job of satisfying her goals of type X. This schema is perfectly general. It can be used to distinguish different kinds of rationality and reasons, for example, economic rationality and reasons can be distinguished from rationality and reasons, all things considered. And it can be used to understand the rationality of different kinds of phenomena, for example, the rationality of decisions and the rationality of strategies and plans.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Even epistemically rational belief is an instance of the schema. The concept of epistemically rational belief is concerned with what it is rational to believe insofar as one's goal is now to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs. Inserting this epistemic goal into the general schema for "goals of type X" results in the following: Believing P is rational in an epistemic sense if it is epistemically rational for one to believe that believing P would acceptably contribute to the epistemic goal of one's now having accurate and comprehensive beliefs. This instantiation of the schema is uninformative, but for the sake of the generality of schema, this uninformative nature is just what is called for. It ensures that every belief that satisfied the requirements of a proposed account of epistemically rational belief will also be an instance of the general schema, where the relevant goal is that of now having accurate and comprehensive. The schema is thus compatible with all the major theories of epistemically rational belief. For example, according to coherentism, it is epistemically rational for one to believe that believing P would acceptably

Because the concept of epistemically rational belief is explicated without reference to another concept of rationality or any of its close cognates, it serves as a theoretical anchor for introducing other, derivative concepts, including the concepts of justified and non-negligent belief. The result is a cluster of concepts that is both theoretically respectable and relevant to our actual intellectual lives. The cluster is theoretically respectable in that it is based on a perfectly general schema of rationality that can be explicated without recourse to any further notion of rationality or any of its cognates. The cluster is a relevant to our actual intellectual lives, because it is capable of giving expression to the everyday concerns we have in evaluating our own and each other's beliefs. These concerns tend not to focus on whether we have met all the prerequisites of knowledge but rather on whether we reasonably careful, reasonably cautious, and reasonably thorough in our opinions, where the standards of reasonability can vary from one situation to another and from one belief to another.<sup>5</sup>

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contribute to the epistemic goal of one's now having accurate and comprehensive beliefs only when the proposed coherentist conditions are met with respect to the proposition P, that is, only when P coheres appropriately with one's other beliefs and hence it is epistemically rational to believe that P is true; similarly for other accounts of epistemically rational belief.

<sup>5</sup> For a closely related discussion of these matters, see Richard Foley, "Conceptual Diversity in Epistemology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. P. Moser. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

## RESPONSE TO WOLTERSTORFF

Although Nicholas Wolterstorff and I have our differences, we are in agreement that a notion such as entitlement (his preferred notion) or responsible belief (my preferred notion) is much more important for our everyday evaluations of each other's beliefs than whether or not a belief is an instance of knowledge. On this fundamental point, which stands in opposition to most of the recent tradition in epistemology, Wolterstorff and I are in deep agreement. But there are significant differences as well.

One complaint that Wolterstorff makes against my account is that it says nothing about irresponsible ignorance. I agree that this is an omission which a full blown account would need to rectify, but the general approach I take to issues of irresponsible belief can be readily extended to provide an account of irresponsible ignorance as well. A first step is to recognize that irresponsible ignorance is often simply the flip side of irresponsible belief. If it is your job to keep the safety equipment in working order but you have not conducted tests of the equipment and hence have not discovered the loose valve, then your belief that the safety equipment is in working order is irresponsible, and so is your ignorance of the loose valve. On the other hand, irresponsible ignorance is not always associated with a corresponding irresponsible belief. I may have no opinions one way or the other about an issue that is so pressing that I should have opinions about it. My account, however, can be easily enough adapted to cover such cases. In particular, if I do not have beliefs one way or the other about P, but it is epistemically rational for me to believe that I have not expended enough time and effort in arriving at an opinion about P, given its importance, then my ignorance is irresponsible. Of course, sometimes ignorance is irresponsible and sometimes it is not, and my account is also readily able to explain the difference. I have no beliefs one way or the other about whether the number of grains of salt in the shaker in front of me is odd or even. I could have taken the time to count them but have not done so. Nevertheless, my ignorance is not irresponsible. Why not? Because it is not epistemically rational for me to believe that in light of all my goals and the limitations on my time and capacities, it is worth the effort to have an accurate belief about this issue.

My position on justified belief, expressed loosely, is that S justifiably believes P if S responsibly believes P, where S responsibly believes P if S believes P and also has an epistemically rational belief---call it belief P\*---that her treatment of P has been acceptable in light of the relative importance of having accurate beliefs about P, that is, given the relative importance of P, she has been acceptably thorough in gathering evidence, acceptably careful in evaluating the evidence, and so on. But Wolterstorff raises an intriguing question about the belief P\*. Suppose S was irresponsibly sloppy in arriving at belief P\*. Wouldn't this also contaminate her belief P, making it irresponsible as well?

The answer is not necessarily. To see why, consider a pair of cases. In each case it is the month of April and S believes P. In each case S began investigating P in January; and in each case she had evidence in January that she was inappropriately dealing with P, but she ignored this evidence. As a result, in each case she in January irresponsibly acquired the belief P\* (the belief

that she used acceptable procedures with respect to P), and in each case she still has this belief P\* in April.

Let's now stipulate that the two cases differ in the following respect: In Case 1 she in April still has evidence that her data gathering and processing in January was inappropriate, whereas in Case 2 she in April no longer has any evidence that anything she did in January was inappropriate. In Case 1 her April belief P is irresponsible, and it is irresponsible for precisely the reason implied by my account. Although she believes P and also believes P\*, this latter belief is not epistemically rational, because she still has evidence that her past methods with respect to P were unacceptable. By contrast, in case 2 her April belief P is not irresponsible, and again my account explains why. She no longer has evidence to the effect that there were any improprieties in January. To be sure, she had such evidence in January and thus it may well be that she should have taken corrective actions in January. It also may be true that had she done so, she would not believe P in April. But this mistake is in the past. At the current moment in April, there is (by hypothesis) nothing in her current situation that provides her with any reason to be suspicious of the way she acquired her belief P. Hence, it is no longer irresponsible of her to believe P.

One of the lessons to be learned from such cases is that responsibly believing a proposition is not equivalent to having responsibly acquired the belief. If at the time I acquired a belief I had evidence that my procedures with respect to it were unacceptably sloppy but I ignored or in some way downplayed the significance of this evidence, then I acquired the belief in an irresponsible manner. Still, my current situation may be such that I can no longer be reasonably expected to be aware or remember that these procedures were unreasonably sloppy. If so, it can be responsible for me to go on believing the proposition even though my belief was originally acquired irresponsibly. This can be the case because the evidence of the original sloppiness has been lost with time, but it can also be the case---and this is an interesting and often overlooked point---that my overall treatment of the issue has begun to look less inadequate with time. Even if I was sloppy in acquiring a belief, if the belief leads to no significant practical difficulties or theoretical anomalies, the relevance of the original sloppy treatment may be diluted over time, not because I have done anything concrete to correct the original sloppiness but simply because the original sloppiness seems less and less problematic when viewed in the context of my overall history with the belief. Like people, irresponsible beliefs tend to become respectable with age as long as they don't cause serious problems.

Often enough there is even a self-fulfilling mechanism at work in these cases. The belief that was originally irresponsible may itself help generate other opinions that help undermine the suspicions about it. This isn't an especially unusual phenomenon, however. Whenever issues of rationality and related notions are at stake, phenomena of this kind tend to occur. Even if you have irrationally chosen some course of action over others that would have been better alternatives, this course of action can become rational for you at a later time just by virtue of your having stuck with it. It originally may have been rational for you to drive to New York rather than California, but if the irrational decision has already been made and you are now two-thirds of the way to California, it may very well be rational for you to continue on your way to California

rather than turn around. Actions can have snowballing effects; they can engender subsequent actions that create momentum which make it increasingly unreasonable to reconsider the original ill-chosen course of action. So too beliefs can have snowballing effects; they can engender other beliefs, the collective weight of which may make it increasingly unreasonable to reconsider your original belief, even if it was sloppily acquired.

Snowballing is by no means inevitable. Often the shortcomings of the original decision or original belief continue to dominate over the costs of reconsideration. When this is so, it is irresponsible not to reconsider. The point here is simply that this is not always and everywhere the case; sometimes beliefs as well as actions can produce such snowballing effects. And the more general point is that irresponsible actions do not necessarily contaminate everything that follows from those actions, and neither do irresponsible beliefs. Sloppy evidence gathering decades earlier in your life does not necessarily imply that all of your subsequent beliefs are also irresponsible, even if it is true that these subsequent beliefs would have been different had you been a more responsible believer decades ago. There is a statute of limitations on irresponsibility.

An even more fundamental difference between Wolterstorff and me concerns whether it is even possible to provide a philosophically respectable account of responsible believing, “philosophically respectable” in the sense that the account makes no use of notions that are as much in need of explication as the notion being explicated. Wolterstorff maintains that any attempt to explicate the notion of responsible (or entitled belief) without making use of the notion of what the person ought to have done or believed (what he calls the “deontological ought”) is doomed to failure. Responsible believing is, he says, radically deontological; it is deontological all the way down.

This position starkly contrasts with my own. I have not tried here to defend a specific theory of epistemically rational belief, although I have done so elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Rather, I have pointed out that despite their many differences, foundationalists, coherentists, reliabilists, and others are all engaged in the project of trying to explicate the concept of epistemically rational belief without reference to any other concept of rationality or any of its cognates. I further point out that this is a feasible project only because the concept of epistemically rational belief is so narrowly defined; it is concerned only with the goal of having accurate and comprehensive beliefs whereas all of us have many other goals and needs as well. Because it is so narrowly defined, the concept of epistemically rational belief is not directly relevant to our everyday evaluations of each other’s beliefs. On the other hand, because it is explicated without reference to another concept of rationality or any of its close cognates, the concept of epistemically rational belief can potentially serve as a theoretical anchor for introducing other, derivative concepts, including the concepts of justified and non-negligent belief, which are relevant to our everyday intellectual lives. The result is a cluster of concepts that are both theoretically respectable and relevant to the assessments of each other’s opinions that we need to make in our everyday lives. Or at least so I argue.

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<sup>6</sup> Most recently, in *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), especially Chapters 1 and 2.

Who is correct on this point? Wolterstorff or me? The jury is still out. A negative claim such as Wolterstorff's can be decisively refuted only by actually generating an account of responsible believing that is both philosophically respectable and stands the test of the time, and it is far too early to make any such claim for my account. On the other hand, I am comfortable in stating that the working hypothesis for epistemologists ought to be, *contra* Wolterstorff, that it is indeed possible to develop an account of responsible believing that is both relevant to our everyday assessments of each other's beliefs and philosophically respectable. If in the end this project turns out to be impossible, as Wolterstorff suggests, then so be it. But whether in science or philosophy or any other intellectual endeavor, progress is often the result of adopting a working hypothesis and seeing how far one can progress in defending that hypothesis.