To his credit, Nowell Smith is explicit in the final chapter that Heidegger's reflections on poetry are often fraught with internal contradictions. Nowell Smith "reads Heidegger against himself" in the context of several poems about which Heidegger offers remarks, such as George's "In stillste ruh." These contradictions call attention to the fact that poetry remains beyond the limits of thought and thus is deeply resistant to conclusive philosophical analysis. Most importantly, they constitute a compelling defense of Nowell Smith's primary thesis that poetic form engages thought—specifically, the thought of Heidegger—as its other. In the end, Nowell Smith's work holds together as an attempt to bring thought to an encounter with its own limit so as to prepare it for a listening to a first that sounds in silence.

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EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY: A THEORY OF TRUST, AUTHORITY, AND AUTONOMY IN BELIEF. By Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xii + 279. Hard Cover $45.00, ISBN: 978-0-199-93647-2.

In her most recent book, *Epistemic Authority*, Linda Zagzebski provides a way of thinking about rationality, trust, and authority that many communities—both religious and non-religious, but especially Catholics—will find fits naturally with their considered commitments. It's worth your time to give it a careful read.

The roots of *Epistemic Authority* reach down into Enlightenment debates about intellectual autonomy, self-reliance, and egalitarianism, and more recently the work of William Alston and Richard Foley on intellectual trust in oneself and others. Zagzebski retraces those debates in the first two chapters, but she intends to offer us something new as the book's "trunk": a model of rationality and a novel argument for intellectual self-trust to rescue us from the maelstrom of epistemic circularity (chapter 2), and an argument to extend that trust to others (chapter 3). The remaining chapters are the "branches" of the tree: extensions and developments of her core arguments into fruitful discussions of trust in emotions (chapter 4), trust in authority (chapter 5), the authority of testimony (chapter 6), authority in communities (chapter 7), moral authority (chapter 8), religious authority (chapter 9), and the epistemology of disagreement (chapter 10).

Let's take a closer look at that trunk. Here, Zagzebski puts great weight on the *dissonance* we feel when our beliefs, emotions, desires, and decisions conflict with one another. This is an indicator of irrationality, she says. Her example: I believe that I turned off the watering system, but then I hear the sprinklers go on. *Conflict. Unease*. And yet harmony is naturally and automatically restored by giving up that belief. She says:

"What we do automatically gives us our initial standard of rationality, a standard for what it is to make the

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adjustment in the self correctly. The criterion works only if there is a close connection between the way the self naturally operates and what the self ought to do . . . between the natural and the normative . . . between the self as it naturally operates and the way it should operate" (32).

This initial standard of rationality would feel at home in any virtue epistemology. As for a final standard, Zagzebski proposes *conscientious self-reflection*: "Our second model of rationality is what we do when dissonance is not resolved and we reflect on it. When I do that, I will attempt to target the belief that should be given up, and to that end I will ask myself which beliefs are more likely to satisfy my future self-reflection" (217). On her view, that connection between the natural and the normative is tightened further when we're conscientious. And, so, we arrive at this final standard of rationality, which serves as the cornerstone premise in all the main arguments of Zagzebski's book:

"Rationality Is Natural." In any case of cognitive dissonance, so long as I resolve the conflict in favor of what I trust when I am being epistemically conscientious—when I do a better, more conscientious job of what I do naturally, automatically—then I have resolved the conflict rationally.

It's fairly clear how the argument for the rationality of self-trust goes from here. The problem is that we cannot know that our faculties are reliable without using them (to check their reliability), and we cannot reasonably use them (says the skeptic) until we know they are reliable. And so we're seemingly caught in a loop, with no rational escape. By way of solution, Zagzebski says: "Reflective self-trust resolves the dissonance we have when we discover epistemic circularity, and that seems to me to be rational" (43). Contra the skeptic, it *is* rational to trust our faculties, Zagzebski thinks, even without independent evidence of their reliability. For self-trust is something we do naturally and conscientiously. So, by the Rationality is Natural principle, self-trust is rational. Furthermore, "it is natural to believe what other people tell me" (38); that too I do when I am being epistemically conscientious. From there via Rationality is Natural we could directly reach the conclusion that trust in others is rational as well. (Though, instead of using these resources already at hand, Zagzebski extends self-trust to trust in others via a "treat like cases alike" premise. We're not sure why she added this epicycle.)

Much of the rest of the book is devoted to pointing out other things we do naturally in order to show—leaning more each time on Rationality is Natural—that those things are also rational. For example, trust in emotions, testimony, authority (including moral and religious authorities), and the occasional steadfast self-trust even in the face of peer disagreement. This, in a sketch, is Zagzebski's project in *Epistemic Authority*. We'll now offer some friendly concerns about its prospects.

First, Rationality is Natural brings to mind Aristotle's function argument for virtue ethics, and all its problems. Aristotle's jump from proper function *oughts* to moral *oughts* is perilous, and we believe similar perils await those who wish to move from what's natural to what's rational. For couldn't there be irrational resolutions of dissonance, resolutions that come naturally to us even when we're being conscientious?

Surely there are. Consider well-known cognitive biases, for example the gambler's fallacy: we expect a fair coin to come up heads only 50 percent of the time, but we observe five heads in a row. *Dissonance*. Humans—even conscientious humans—often naturally (but irrationally) conclude that the next flip is less than 50 percent likely to come up heads. Also, humans are ingenious at post-hoc rationalization, for example rationalization after an expensive purchase. Our commitment conflicts with all the contrary considerations. *Tension*. We naturally (and irrationally) silence those contrary considerations, amplify the considerations in favor of our commitment, and misjudge the well-groundedness of our commitment. (And notice that post-hoc *rationalization* requires that we be conscientious and self-reflective.) Often, despite our best efforts, our conscientious self-reflection leads us into irrationality. We have many cognitive blind spots. This, obviously, is a problem for Rationality is Natural. And that principle, recall, is a crucial premise in all of Zagzebski's main arguments in *Epistemic Authority*. (Though Zagzebski discusses cognitive biases in chapter 11, she lumps them in with attempts to debunk self-trust, and does not consider them as potential counterexamples to Rationality is Natural.)

Our second concern is that Rationality is Natural has implausible implications for the epistemology of disagreement. The debate there turns on the puzzle of contrary intuitions in apparently analogous cases. In some cases we think conciliation is obviously called for, e.g., when you think your share of the bill is $38 but your dinner companion thinks it's $42, you ought to lower your confidence in your initial answer. In others, we think steadfastness is obviously called for: most of us maintain confidence in our cherished political, moral, religious, and philosophical beliefs even in the face of disagreement. In order to avoid treating all these apparently similar cases similarly—thereby recommending implausible steadfastness in cases like the restaurant check or unpalatable spinelessness in the others—we must find some relevant dissimilarity, a *principled reason* to treat these cases differently.

But, with her project built around Rationality is Natural, Zagzebski can provide us with no such principle to steer between the Scylla of spineless skepticism and the Charybdis of dogmatic steadfastness. In fact, her view of rationality manages to run us into both, by licensing *any* response to disagreement so long as it's a result of an agent's conscientious self-reflection. She writes: "Disagreement with people we conscientiously judge to be conscientious should be handled . . . in a way that we conscientiously judge will survive conscientious self-reflection" (215). And later: "I am reasonable when I resolve the conflict in favor of what I trust the most when I am being epistemically conscientious" (219). In slogan form: *Try your best, get a trophy.*

This is a consistent application of Rationality is Natural to the epistemology of disagreement. But the results are ruinous, as illustrated by this story: Smith, Brown, and Jones are locked in a disagreement. Smith is a marvel at math, Brown is mediocre, and Jones is terrible. Smith and Jones know all this, but Brown mistakenly thinks they're all peers at math. They disagree over how to

split their restaurant check into thirds, arriving at three moderately different answers. They share their answers and their justifications with one another. Though she's a math wizard (and, indeed, arrives at the correct answer), Smith is inordinately cautious. She sees the errors in Brown's and Jones's reasoning processes, but she second-guesses herself and conscientiously chooses to be conciliatory toward their answers, substantially lowering her confidence in her own (correct) answer, perhaps settling on the average of all three answers. (Maybe you worry that Smith, seeing Brown's and Jones's errors, could not lower her confidence because that's psychologically impossible. But one may well see something and doubt that he does, if for example he thinks he's the victim of hallucination or illusion. If you admit Smith *psychologically* can be conciliatory here but insist that she cannot do so *conscientiously* since that's clearly irrational, recall that Zagzebski means to analyze rationality in terms of conscientiousness—to explain the normative in terms of the natural—and not vice versa on pain of circularity.) Though Jones is terrible at math and knows it, she makes up for that shortcoming with a self-confident, cavalier attitude. She conscientiously chooses steadfastness, disregarding Smith's and Brown's answers though she can't find fault with them. By contrast, Brown trusts her answer, but she also trusts Smith and Jones, sees that they disagree with her, and can find no fault with their proofs. *Dissonance*. She tries her best but can't resolve the dissonance. She's stuck, vacillating among various credences, unsure where to land.

Now here's the point of that story. We find it obvious that Smith—the self-recognized expert—was irrational to be conciliatory. And we find it obvious that Jones—the self-recognized mathematical lightweight—was irrational to be steadfast. Brown is the best of the bunch; her performance was the most rational response to this disagreement. But Zagzebski disagrees on all three points. On Zagzebski's view, Smith and Jones are both *rational*, since they conscientiously resolved the conflict (Smith, by discounting her own reasoning and averaging her answer with her friends'; Jones, by disregarding her friends' answers). Yet Brown does not come out as rational on Zagzebski's view, since Brown failed to harmonize the dissonance. Worse, since Zagzebski says dissonance is an indicator of irrationality, Brown's unresolved dissonance indicates irrationality, on her view. And, so, we conclude that Zagzebski's contribution to the epistemology of disagreement gives us three wrong results, results that easily could be multiplied. We find no principle here by which we might defuse those apparently conflicting intuitions that form the central puzzle of the epistemology of disagreement. Indeed, the principle on offer in *Epistemic Authority* makes that puzzle worse.

Nevertheless, *Epistemic Authority* is an excellent foundation for anyone who wishes to become acquainted with the history of these puzzles, and a valuable contribution to the literature that deserves our conscientious reflection. Go read it.

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