**To the Best of Our Knowledge: Social Expectations and Epistemic Normativity**

By S. C. GOLDBERG

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In *To the Best of Our Knowledge* Sandford Goldberg takes on a formidable set of tasks: to develop an account of epistemic justification which combines elements of internalism, externalism, foundationalism, and coherentism, to establish that the epistemic permission to rely on basic capacities is interpersonal, to develop an account of normative defeat that can explain the role of absent evidence, and to give a reductive account of epistemic normativity in terms of social expectations.

The basic building block of Goldberg’s approach is the notion of a *social expectation*. Most accounts of epistemic normativity explain our social expectations by appealing to epistemic norms. For example, the knowledge norm of assertion is meant to explain the social expectation that assertions express knowledge. Goldberg reverses this direction of explanation, claiming that our epistemic standards are explained by our social expectations (147-9). One way to read the book is as engaged in the project of explaining the contours of our epistemic evaluations in terms of purely social expectations.

According to Goldberg, social expectations have a hybrid structure, involving both *core criteria*, and *general expectations* (48-68). Core criteria are explicit standards evaluation which can speak for or against someone meeting a standard, whereas general expectations are implicit background criteria which can disqualify someone from meeting a standard when they are not met. The judges in a brass competition might have a number of core expectations articulated on their score sheet—lyricism, beautiful tone, emotional resonance—along with a number of tacit general expectations—being in tune, playing on a western 12-tone scale, playing a piece in the classical repertoire—which only play a role when they are not satisfied. Someone who fulfils the general expectations in a domain without fulfilling any core expectations doesn’t receive a positive evaluation (you expect a prize for playing in tune?), but failing to fulfil general expectations can undermine the positive status achieved by fulfilling core criteria (sure, you played beautifully, but you can’t win a prize for playing *Run the World (Girls)* in a classical brass competition!).

Goldberg is concerned with spelling out the distinctively epistemic conditions for knowledge, calling a belief that fulfils these conditions *epistemically proper*. In chapter 1, he argues that epistemic propriety is equivalent to epistemic justification, meaning that by his lights this is equivalent to offering an account of epistemic justification. Goldberg argues that epistemically proper belief displays the hybrid structure of core criteria and general expectations. He labels beliefs that fulfil the core criteria, *prima facie* epistemically proper, and those which fulfil the general expectations, *ultima facie* epistemically proper. (Note that Goldberg’s use of this terminology is non-standard (114-17): the structure of hybrid expectations means that a failure of ultima facie epistemic propriety defeats prima facie epistemic propriety, and merely meeting general epistemic expectations does not suffice for any kind of propriety.)

The book is structured around the project of developing an account of how this hybrid evaluative structure works out in the epistemic case, and how it is grounded in our social expectations. Chapters 3 and 4 develop our core epistemic expectations that can make sense of reliabilist evaluation (with a minimal responsibilist condition), and chapters 5 and 6 develop an account of our general epistemic expectations that can make sense of responsibilist evaluation, including an account of normative defeat. Let’s take these two elements of the account in turn considering why we expect one another to be reliable and responsible.

Why do we expect each other to have reliable beliefs? According to Goldberg, it is basic feature of our social lives that we aim to form true beliefs, and that we must rely on one another to share information and act together. He argues that the expectation that we each form our beliefs in a minimally reliably way is presupposed by these basic practices. This allows him to make a constitutivist argument that we are entitled to expect one another to be reliable, because of the kinds of social beings that we are (141-4, 149-59). This general expectation has two upshots.

First, the expectation of reliability motivates a response to the problem of the criterion, according to which we have an unearnt privilege to employ belief-forming processes that fulfil what Goldberg calls the *Reliabilist Rationale* (82-3). Goldberg argues that the Reliabilist Rationale holds in a subject-neural way: we all expect *everyone* to form their beliefs in a reliable way. This means that the reliabilist rationale applies to all members of an epistemic community, with the striking consequence that we all enjoy unearnt privileges to the outputs of any suitably reliable process, including those that take place in other peoples’ heads and are only transmitted to us via testimony (91-108).

Secondly, the expectation of reliability grounds an account of the core criteria of epistemic evaluation. Goldberg’s account of the core criteria for epistemic assess is what he calls *Coherence-Infused Reliabilism* (120-41). This view claims that a belief is prima facie proper when it the product of a reliable product, and the content of the belief has successfully passed through a properly functioning coherence-monitoring filter. This view combines an externalist element (reliability) with a minimal responsibility condition (coherence-checking), and when combined with Goldberg’s picture of unearnt privilege combines foundationalism with a coherence requirements on justified belief.

Why do we expect each other to have evidence? Whereas the core criteria are supposed to hold of us qua epistemic agents, according to Goldberg our general expectations are community-relative, emerging piecemeal from our social practices, social roles, and interpersonal relationships. Goldberg’s view is not a simple relativist one: it is only legitimate practices which can generate an entitlement to have epistemic expectations. A legitimate practice must be ongoing, with widely acknowledged standards, have no open questions about its propriety (66, 165), be reliability-boosting (169-75), and be fair and moral (247).

When a legitimate practice involves an epistemic expectation—such as the expectation that GPs promptly read every copy of the British Medical Journal from cover to cover—failing to fulfil that expectation can undermine the propriety of a subject’s beliefs. This idea is key to Goldberg’s account of normative defeat (chapter 6): when a general expectation means that a subject should have known something, and that having that knowledge would have made some belief improper, then that belief is in fact improper, because of knowledge that the subject didn’t have.

Goldberg advertises his project as part of a larger project of reaching a rapprochement between analytic epistemology and science and technology studies (9-10). Once we are clear on how social expectations affect epistemic normativity in the abstract, we can turn to consider empirical questions about our actual social expectations, and how they affect our knowledge-producing practices. I would welcome such a rapprochement, I worried about whether Goldberg’s account, with its focus on clear standards, unconflicted expectations, and legitimate practices, will be able to say much about our real-life epistemic practices. I take it that our actual epistemic practices often involve conflicting and underspecified standards (see 246-55), and are both unfair and immoral. It would be instructive to think how Goldberg’s ideal picture of epistemic expectations might be de-idealized to think about the role of social expectations in (for example) interdisciplinary science, public debate, and epistemic practices characterized by white ignorance.

Weaving these topics into a unified approach of epistemic normativity is a considerable achievement, and epistemologists working on any of these topics will get a lot out of Goldberg’s novel approaches to these questions. The breadth of the topics covered means that Goldberg focuses on developing his own approach to epistemic normativity, and there is another volume to be written comparing this approach to other accounts of knowledge, justification, testimony, epistemic normativity, and defeat.

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