Mark MᶜBride, *Basic Knowledge and Conditions on Knowledge*, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017, 228 pp., £16.95 (Paperback), ISBN 978-1-78374-283-7.

Basic Knowledge and Conditions on Knowledge is organized around two main axes (corresponding to two parts of the book). The first one is, roughly, an exploration of the possibility of basic knowledge and immediate justification in the light of transmission of justification/knowledge through inferential reasoning. The second axis is an investigation into modal constraints (conceived as necessary conditions) on knowledge. An introductory chapter, an interim review, and a (brief) conclusion present an effort to put these diverse issues into a common perspective. The book contains a great amount of useful clarifications of these quite complex debates, a number of intriguing discussions and careful arguments. In this review I will not be able to pay due attention to all of the author points that merit independent discussion. One difficulty here is that, apart from the introduction and the conclusion, the book is a collection of previously published stand-alone articles that all display a level of sophistication and do not always build on conclusions that have been reached in antecedent chapters. In order to respect the format of a book review, I will hence limit myself in what follows only to (1) a brief overview of the main claims of the nine chapters, (2) a somewhat more substantial comment on an alternative way of thinking about basic knowledge (with particular attention to the argument in chapter 5), and (3) some more general remarks about the book.

1. Brief overview

Chapter 1 focuses on Moore so-called proof of an external world, i.e. the pattern of reasoning where the subject has a visual experience of having hands and then infers from the premise "I have hands", and the premise "If I have hands, an external world exists", the conclusion "an external world exists". In particular, the chapter focuses on the popular view according to which those who claim that Moorean reasoning fails to transmit warrant (i.e. justification), which is a plausible admission since the Moore-proof reasoning doesn't appear to be a way of furthering

one knowledge, have an advantage over *dogmatists* (cf. Pryor 2000) who predict that, while Moore proof is dialectically problematic, it transmits warrant nonetheless. Dogmatists are those who accept the possibility of basic knowledge and immediate justification. Basic knowledge is understood here as knowledge that one can have without knowing that the relevant source of knowledge is reliable. And immediate justification for *p* is such that it doesn't depend on "any justification for believing other supporting propositions" (p. 4). The main point of this chapter is a defence of the claim that, given some further assumptions that proponents of transmission failure (in particular, Wright 2004) have to make, there is also a sort of transmission problem for them.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the so-called problem of easy knowledge more generally. It seems that we cannot come to know a local anti-sceptical conclusion, say, that a given table is not white with red lights shining on it, merely by an inference from the premises "The table is red" and "If the table is red, then it is not white with red lights shining on it", given that we have a visual experience of the table looking red. Coming to know this anti-sceptical conclusion in such a way would be too easy a manner in which to acquire new knowledge. However, the dogmatist seems to be committed to this sort of inference transmitting knowledge (and justification) in this sort of situation, given that the dogmatist is committed to the claim that one can have basic knowledge (and immediate justification) for the claim that the table is red. This chapter examines in some detail Zalabardo (2005) response to the problem of easy knowledge, and argues against his claim that transmission of warrant presupposes the failure of a variant of the closure principle for warrant (namely, the principle that if p is warranted for S and S knows that p entails q, then q is warranted for S). McBride provides a detailed discussion of what exactly is entailed by (the best version of) Zalabardo argument, and why his proposal is ultimately untenable.

Chapter 3 contains a more positive proposal. It presents the author own view with respect to the problem of easy knowledge. In defending his proposal, that the easy knowledge problem is not a problem for dogmatists after all, McBride relies on a distinction from Martin Davies (2004) according to which we should distinguish two epistemic projects: the project of settling a question, and a project of deciding what to believe. Once the distinction is made (and improved), the author suggests, there is no longer a problem of easy knowledge for the dogmatist.

Chapter 4 contains an argument to the conclusion that the problem of transmission of warrant (in apparently problematic inferences) is not a problem only for some specific conception of evidence.

Chapter 5 represents a change in the author overall dialectic. Here the author presents not a defence, but rather a new puzzle for the dogmatist position. The core of the puzzle (that refers to a proposal from White 2006) relies on an application of standard probabilistic reasoning to a case of reasoning from appearances such that

by having a mere visual experience, the probability of some local anti-sceptical hypothesis decreases for the subject in question. This is problematic for dogmatism because it allegedly demonstrates that the ability of experience to provide justification to an initial premise is dependent on whether one has justification for the anti-sceptical conclusion (p. 121).

Chapter 6 concerns the view according to which r is a conclusive reason for p just in case r would not be true unless p were true (p. 147). According to Fred Dretske (2005), having conclusive reasons is a necessary condition for having knowledge. In this chapter McBride considers John Hawthorne challenge to Dretske approach (cf. Hawthorne 2005). He proposes a way to improve the conclusive-reasons view in a way that is immune to Hawthorne challenge.

Chapter 7 introduces the view that sensitivity is a necessary condition for knowledge (roughly, if S knows that p, then were p false, S would not believe that p; cf. p. 160). In a way the discussion in this chapter is a more general version of the discussion from the antecedent chapter. Again, a challenge from Hawthorne is considered, a challenge that aims to show that the rejection of a plausible closure principle is more problematic than proponents of the sensitivity view have initially thought. McBride argues that Hawthorne challenge can be met if one updates the sensitivity view. Nevertheless, he also recognizes that the modified sensitivity approach seems to have other potentially problematic theoretical costs.

Chapter 8 is an intriguing and in-depth discussion of a safety condition on knowledge (where, roughly, one belief that p is safe just in case one would not believe that p on the same basis without p being the case; cf. p. 182 and further references therein). In particular, in this chapter McBride examines and replies to an objection to the safety views based on a counterexample from Juan Comesaña 'Halloween party' case (Comesaña 2005). McBride suggests that the best safety principle should integrate the idea that some *conditions* (cf. p. 186ff) can be relevantly safe (and that this matters with respect to knowing).

Chapter 9 is a discussion of an application of a safety view to legal knowledge. In particular, McBride develops an argument here, based on an example similar to the Halloween party example from Comesaña, against one version of the safety view of legal knowledge.

2. An alternative way of thinking about basic knowledge

My somewhat more substantial comment concerns issues raised in Chapter 5. Let me begin with the observation that dogmatism appears appealing in the first place in that it rejects the implausible view that we cannot know things without knowing that the relevant source of knowledge is reliable and, connectedly, because we don't want to accept an infinite regress (neither for knowledge nor for

justification). Now, McBride presents a problem in Chapter 5 that *seems* to rely on some general probabilistic conception of confirmation. However, on a more attentive look, we see that the puzzle (in Chapter 5) is set up within the specifically subjective Bayesian framework. For it relies on the idea that *experiences* play a crucial role in rational updating of credences – subjective probabilities. However, subjective Bayesianism is not the only relevant alternative on the market. There are other probabilistic views about confirmation, conditionalisation, and evidential support that still respect standard probability axioms. One such alternative is a knowledge-first approach to evidential probability (cf. Williamson 2000, 209–237). The idea here is that all of one evidence is all of what one knows and that conditionalisation is always conditionalisation on what one knows. So, in a typical easy-knowledge-style scenario, having a *mere* visual experience has no bearing on the posterior probability of a hypothesis (that is, in the present terminology – on evidential probability instead of updated credences). It is only given that one sees that *p* (and assuming that seeing that *p* is a species of knowing that *p*), that *p* becomes part of one evidence and is used in updating one evidential probability of hypotheses. Also, on this view the prior probability is a unique prior probability function that captures, roughly, something like commonsense plausibility (of a proposition). The prior probability function is contextually informed.[1]

Of course, one may still want to maintain within this setting that there are evidential interconnections among known propositions (and that evidential relations are not merely obliterated when one comes to know the relevant propositions). With respect to this point, Williamson knowledge-first project proposes to distinguish the question of evidence possession (what is it to have evidence?) and the question of evidential support (when is an *e* evidence, or a piece of evidence, for hypothesis *h*?).[2] Hence, returning to the 'easy-knowledge' scenarios, a proponent of the knowledge-first epistemology might say that it is one thing to integrate the knowledge that the table is red into one overall evidential probability distribution (and updating one evidential probability of the hypothesis), and it is quite a different thing to account for the support relations that hold (independently of the evidence possession) among propositions within one evidence set (i.e. the set of the propositions one knows). Of course, more needs to be said about this

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[1] More precisely: "[It is] an initial probability distribution P. P does not represent actual or hypothetical credences. Rather, P measures something like the intrinsic plausibility of hypotheses prior to investigation; this notion of intrinsic plausibility can vary in extension between contexts. […] P(*p*) is taken to be defined for all propositions" (Williamson 2000, 211). Also, "The distribution P is conceptually rather than temporally prior; it need not coincide with P*α* for any case *α* in which some subject is at some time, for P is not a distribution of credences, and the subject may have non-trivial evidence at every time" (Williamson 2000, 220).

[2] There might be some further unexpected and possibly problematic implications of this distinction for Williamson's overall argumentative strategy, though; see Logins (2016).

knowledge-first-style treatment of the puzzle from Chapter 5, but I think it represents an argumentative route worth exploring for friends of basic knowledge. By adapting this approach, one still has to deal with the connected issue of apparent symmetry in evidential support (i.e. given that e supports h, h will support e), which is intuitively an implausible condition on evidential support.[3] But if there is a theoretically well-motivated way to reject the symmetry in evidential support relations, then the knowledge-first project might well represent an alternative way to maintain basic knowledge that is immune to the objection from Chapter 5, and hence preserve the most attractive part of dogmatism.

3. General remarks

In a more general vein, the book is inspiring and well written and contains a number of very careful and suggestive arguments. However, one thing that I didn't find in the book, but would have loved to see, is an assessment of the easy knowledge problem and dogmatism in general, and in a wider theoretical context. McBride goes into considerable detail when describing and debating the views of specific authors, and in doing so often proceeds in an extremely precautious way, putting forward conditional claims and hedged theses. I would love to see the author taking a bolder stance and presenting (at crucial points) the material in a way that appeals to a wider audience.

In conclusion, this book is a valuable contribution to these somewhat narrow debates that will be especially appreciated by advanced specialists, and as such it is a very fine example of contemporary analytic epistemology at its best, demonstrating argumentative rigour and intellectual honesty.

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[3] Williamson himself suggests that the issue of evidential symmetry might be dealt with by focus on 'independent' evidence, where e is independent evidence for h for S "only if S's belief in e does not essentially depend on inference from h" (Williamson 2000, 204).

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