

Relying on Others: An Essay in Epistemology, by Sanford C. Goldberg, New York: Oxford University Press, Pp. x + 218, \$55/£30.

Goldberg's principal ambition, in *Relying on Others (RO)*, is to articulate and defend a version of process reliabilism that's less 'individualistic in orientation' than he perceives traditional versions of that theory to be: a version on which the reliability (or not) of processes in others' minds can affect whether a belief constitutes knowledge—and, more contentiously, whether it's *justified*. Much of the book is taken up by a discussion of the epistemology of testimony; that's as it should be, since Goldberg's main arguments turn on certain novel and controversial claims about the nature of testimonial belief-formation and testimonial justification.

A subsidiary ambition, pursued towards the end of the book, is to draw a 'more explicit connection' between reliabilist and social epistemology, and to (thereby) strengthen the case for the "interest and legitimacy of 'the project of social epistemology: the project of characterizing the epistemic significance of our social arrangements and institutions'" (*RO*, 6). On this, let me just note that readers whose skepticism about that project concerns its putative *philosophical* interest, are unlikely to be moved by the considerations Goldberg gives. (Readers with certain other worries about the project might find his take on it helpful.)

Although the scope of the overall discussion is quite narrow—this is a book by a process reliabilist for others of the same, general conviction—it certainly touches on numerous issues that are of wider interest; in particular, perhaps, to epistemologists of testimony and memory, and to those of us that puzzle over the relevance of the psychological and the social to the epistemic. Ultimately, however, the treatment of these issues doesn't go particularly deep—not even on its own terms (that is, granting the reliabilist framework). To the present reader, at least, it seems that the problematic could and should have been pushed further at several points. This review will focus on some of these points.

Goldberg defines his target—*Orthodox Reliabilism*—as the conjunction of *Process Reliabilism*, "according to which what makes for doxastic justification and knowledge has to do with the reliability of the type of process ... through which a belief is formed or sustained" (*RO*, 12) and *Process Individualism*, "according to which the cognitive processes implicated in the formation or sustainment of a subject's beliefs all take place within *that subject's* own mind/brain" (*RO*, 36, italics in original). Put this way, and on a natural reading of 'implicated', Process Individualism would seem to be a non-starter, since no doubt the formation or sustenance of many of our actual and possible beliefs—including, but not limited to, beliefs based on others' testimony—are caused and explained at least in part by cognitive processes in other people's minds (or brains).

It soon transpires, however, that what really is at issue is (something like) the following principle: the *epistemically significant* cognitive processes—those that figure in the explanation of the epistemic status of a given belief—all take place within the epistemic agent's own mind. (It's also clear, from the ensuing dialectic, that the principle is supposed to have some modal force: to be metaphysically, or perhaps conceptually,

necessary.) In the hands of the Process Reliabilist, this gets further precisified as the claim that the cognitive processes whose reliability properties explain (or fix or constitute) the relevant reliability properties of a belief, all take place within the agent's own mind—where the 'relevant' reliability properties of the belief are those that explain (or fix or constitute) its epistemic status. (In what follows I'll sometimes distinguish between 'justification-relevant' and 'knowledge-relevant' reliability, depending on which status is at issue.) This is the core claim that Goldberg is up against.

Against it he argues, first, that there are cases where a true testimonial belief fails to constitute knowledge due to the unreliability of certain processes in the informant's mind. (Perhaps she's a notorious liar who inadvertently testifies a truth, just once. And in all other relevant respects, the case is just like one in which the hearer knows; *RO*, 14–7.) The Orthodox Reliabilist can coherently accept the possibility of cases like that—what I'll call 'type (i) cases'—but, Goldberg argues, only if she assimilates them to (other) *Gettier*-cases, and diagnoses them in the way that she diagnoses *Gettier*-cases in general: with appeal to the distinction between *local* and *global* reliability. (It's not entirely clear why this is the only diagnosis Goldberg considers—even an Orthodox Reliabilist has options here—but let's bypass this question for now. More on it later.)

On the suggested diagnosis, what goes on in type (i) cases is that the operative belief-forming process is locally unreliable—roughly: unreliable in situations relevantly like the one at hand—and this prevents it from yielding knowledge. But it's globally reliable—roughly, reliable across the total range of situations in which the process is 'ordinarily' used—and that ensures that the testimonial belief is still justified (*RO*, 38–9, 50–5).

The stage is now set for Goldberg's next, and crucial, move: here, he argues that a treatment of type (i) cases in terms of the local/global distinction comes with a 'costly commitment': an overall picture on which processes in others' minds *at most* form part of the epistemic agent's local, external environment (*RO*, 56–7). That picture is mistaken since, in testimony cases, certain processes in the informant's mind—processes involved in the production of her testimony—are "*part of the very cognitive process by which the testimonial belief [is] formed*" (*RO*, 58, italics in original). Goldberg calls this claim the 'extendedness hypothesis'. But note that it's not a version of the 'extended mind hypothesis'—he wants to stay neutral on that (*RO* 127–32). Rather, what's at issue is, once again, the correct demarcation of the range of processes that fix the relevant reliability of the given belief—specifically, this time round: its *justification*-relevant reliability. The extendedness hypothesis is the hypothesis that, in testimony cases, certain processes in the informant's mind are part of the total process the (global) reliability of which determines whether the belief is justified, and if so to what degree.

To clarify: Goldberg agrees with the Orthodox Reliabilist that the part—the *only* part—of the entire causal history of a belief that bears on its justificatory status is the *cognitive* part: the part that consists in the manipulation of information by the 'cognitive faculties'. The Orthodox Reliabilist, however, imposes a further restriction: the cognitive faculties that count are exclusively those of the epistemic agent herself. Witness Goldman (1979, quoted in *RO* 46, 59): "[j]ustifiedness seems to be a function of how a cognizer deals

with his environmental input, i.e. with the goodness or badness of the operations that register and transform the stimulation that reaches him.” Goldberg is taking issue with the further (‘individualistic’) restriction: in testimony cases, he argues, the cognitive processes whose ‘goodness or badness’ can make a difference to the justificatory status of the hearer’s belief—that is, the total process whose reliability determines its justification-relevant reliability—includes certain processes in the informant’s mind.

How does he argue this? First, we’re told that (a) the individualistic restriction is *unmotivated*—in particular for the Process Reliabilist who agrees that the *knowledge*-relevant reliability of a belief can depend on the reliability of processes in others’ minds (RO, 59–62). Second, he argues that (b) testimonial belief-formation is a belief-dependent—or, as it’s eventually phrased: ‘*quasi*-belief-dependent’—process, ‘whose input is the testimony itself’ (RO, 64–78). How this supports the extendedness hypothesis will be made clear below. Third, and last, he argues that (c) there are cases where a true testimonial belief fails to be knowledge because certain processes in the informant’s mind are almost *but not quite* reliable enough—her testimony expresses a belief that’s “just below the threshold of reliability needed for [the informant to have] doxastic justification and knowledge” (RO, 99). Importantly, these cases—henceforth ‘type (ii) cases’—can’t be accommodated by appeal to the local/global distinction, or for that matter any other Gettier-problem diagnostic: they simply aren’t Gettier-cases. If that’s right, they must be cases where the hearer lacks (doxastic) *justification*—as a result of the all-but-sufficient reliability of processes in her informant’s mind (RO, 97–104).

Let’s examine these considerations in turn.

On (a), I just want to note that the passage from Goldman that Goldberg quotes appears to already contain a perfectly fine, intuitive motivation for the individualistic restriction. (Recall: “[j]ustifiedness seems to be a function of how a cognizer deals with his environmental input...”) By my lights, there’s indeed some intuitive force to Goldman’s programmatic suggestion, considered *as a whole*: as a claim about the behavior of the specific ‘cognizer’ whose belief is under evaluation. It’s not implausible that the justificatory status of a belief is a (complicated) function of how the epistemic agent deals with certain incoming stimuli—in some hard-to-pin-down sense of ‘deals’ that’s tied to rational agency, cognitive capacities and performance. But the intuitive force doesn’t detach: it doesn’t apply to the corresponding claim about any *other* agent, or agents—how *they* deal with *their* input—including those agents that, in testimony cases, serve as her informants.

How to sharpen the programmatic suggestion is a different (and difficult) question—one that may or may not be best addressed within the framework of Process Reliabilism. But at least there’s an intuitive consideration here: a consideration that Goldman’s, more demanding, constraint can be seen as part of an attempt to capture. It’s much less clear what questions, if any, are addressed—and what intuitive considerations, if any, are captured—by Goldberg’s proposed alternative. It would have been good to see a more thorough discussion of the competing restrictions: of their relative merits, and possible deeper rationales.

It would also have been good to see it clarified why, with respect to the demarcation of the process, we should think of justification and knowledge as relevantly similar. Goldberg writes as though the pressure is increased, on his opponent to give up the individualistic restriction, by her (anticipated) concession that the unreliability of processes in the informant's mind explains the hearer's lack of knowledge in type (i) cases (*RO*, 60–1). But it's unclear why it should. Knowledge is arguably a different beast from justification in precisely this regard: it depends on the smooth functioning of all kinds of processes and mechanisms that, by pretty much anyone's light, are external to the epistemic agent's mind and body.

Relatedly, it's worth noting that type (i) cases are indeed very naturally classified as Gettier-cases—whatever the correct solution, or solutions, to the Gettier-problem might be. We'll get back to this. (Here and throughout I use 'Gettier-case' for the more inclusive of the two categories distinguished by Goldberg; *RO*, 86–7.)

Turning, next, to (b): the claim that testimonial belief-formation is a (quasi-) belief-dependent process. The original distinction, between belief-dependent and belief-independent processes, is meant to give the Process Reliabilist a principled way to discriminate between beliefs whose justificatory status only depends on the operative process' global reliability—paradigmatically: perceptual beliefs—and beliefs whose justificatory status also depends on the reliability of the states that serve as *inputs* to the process—paradigmatically: inferential and memory-based beliefs. Suppose the distinction is viable (and that the standard verdicts on perception, memory and inference are correct). Suppose, as well, that testimonial belief-formation is indeed belief-dependent. How does that further Goldberg's cause? By itself it doesn't. What's needed, in the first instance, is that it's a belief-dependent—or, more broadly, 'input-dependent'—process whose inputs depend for their reliability on the reliability of certain processes *in the informant's mind*. And that's what Goldberg proceeds to show.

On the face of it, however, this is still not enough: what's needed, more specifically, is that testimonial belief-formation is an input-dependent process whose input states depend, for their *justification-relevant* reliability, on the reliability of processes in the informant's mind. For that to be the case, in turn, the inputs must of course be suitable bearers of justification-relevant reliability in the first place; in other words: they must be capable of being epistemically justified (and unjustified). But the inputs that Goldberg settles on aren't.

Note that it's *independently* plausible that this condition is met, in the case of inference and (certain kinds of) memory—here, the inputs are beliefs, and beliefs are capable of being justified—and independently plausible that it's violated in the case of perception. And it wouldn't be surprising if this contrast explains the face-value appeal that the standard verdicts on these process types have. The underlying thought might just be that, if a given belief-forming mechanism operates on states that themselves have (or, perhaps, that once had) a certain justificatory status, for the agent, then the justificatory status of the mechanism's output states partly depends on the status of the states it takes as inputs. This seems quite a reasonable thought to have (whether or not one is a Process

Reliabilist). But if that—or something even roughly like it—is what drives the standard verdicts on the paradigms, then Goldberg’s ‘liberalization’ of the notion of belief-dependence, and his application of it to testimonial belief-formation, is misguided.

Goldberg quickly—too quickly, by this reader’s lights—rejects the idea that the distinctive input, of testimonial belief-formation, is a certain belief of the hearer’s; likewise for the idea, more congenial to his aims, that it’s a belief of the informant’s. Rather, he argues, it’s a (piece of) *testimony* (*RO*, 68–73). We’re not told how exactly he conceives of testimonies: perhaps as assertions, assertions of a certain kind, or as communicative acts or states of some broader variety. But we *are* told that, just like beliefs, testimonies are assessable for (what I’ll call) ‘process-derived’ reliability: reliability as a function of the reliability of the process type by which they’re produced. We’re also told that—at least for the purpose of this assessment—the best way to understand the process type by which testimonies are produced is as a cognitive process in the informant’s mind (*RO*, 22–35).

All of that granted, however, it remains an open question whether testimonies can have justification-relevant reliability. And there’s little independent plausibility to the claim: whatever exactly testimonies are, they don’t seem capable of being epistemically justified (or unjustified)—for either informant or hearer. The question whether there are epistemic norms on assertion is a red herring here; such norms, if there are any, don’t strictly speaking govern *assertion* (or any other communicative act or state)—they govern a certain attitude of the speaker: the belief that her assertion purports to express.

It’s also important to note that, if the category of the belief-dependent is expanded in the way Goldberg’s proposal requires—and that, indeed, he goes on to endorse in full generality—then the original distinction all but vanishes: any process of belief-formation that take inputs with process-derived reliability, and whose outputs depend for their reliability on the process-derived reliability of those inputs, falls on the same side as inference and memory. (Cf. the official criteria for quasi-belief-dependence, *RO* 72–3, and for ‘epistemic reliance’, *RO* 91–2, 172–3.) But, on widespread assumptions, that includes *perceptual* belief-formation: the reliability of our perceptual beliefs arguably depends on the reliability with which certain sub-personal representational states are generated by processes in the (early) perceptual system. (Similar considerations apply to the formation of many other so-called ‘basic’ beliefs.) I don’t think this is a consequence Goldberg would want.

His proposal threatens to over-extend in another respect as well. To illustrate: suppose I see someone running at a furious pace from the beach, and, partly on that basis, I believe that there’s a tsunami coming. The reliability of my belief would seem to depend on the process-derived reliability of certain representational states of the running person—but that person isn’t my *informant*. (Indeed, my belief isn’t testimonial at all.) Or suppose an archeologist finds evidence of an elaborate tunnel-system under the remains of tribe X’s village, and, partly on that basis, she believes that X was sometimes attacked by neighboring tribes. The reliability of her belief plausibly depends on the process-derived reliability of various representational states of the members of X—but her belief isn’t based on their testimony. Last, suppose my future grandson receives certain news reports,

some sixty years from now, and, partly on that basis, he believes that upcoming event E will have disastrous impact on the environment. Suppose furthermore that his *selection* of news sources—which sources he trust, on this issue and in general—and his methods of screening for error and noise, are heavily influenced by advice that I gave him, back in the day when I taught him some everyday applied epistemology. Then, it seems, the reliability of his belief about E may well depend on the process-derived reliability of various states of mine—most notably, the beliefs that were expressed in my advice. But my grandson’s belief isn’t based on my testimony.

It’s unclear why, in cases like these, the process whose reliability fixes the justificatory status of the target belief, doesn’t ‘extend’ into the minds of other people—people who *don’t* play the role of informants. (The considerations that allegedly motivate a different treatment of ‘coverage-supported’ beliefs don’t seem applicable here; cf. *RO*, 154–83.) Perhaps there’s a way to refine Goldberg’s overall view, on which these cases are ruled out, but it’s not obvious what such a refinement would look like. It’s particularly hard to see what it would look like, given his (self-imposed) constraint that it “not depend on any particular solution to the generality problem” (*RO*, 83).

If what I’ve argued so far is correct, then Goldberg’s case for the extendedness hypothesis stands or falls with (c): the possibility of type (ii) cases—cases where a true testimonial belief fails to be knowledge because it’s based on testimony whose process-derived reliability is all-but-sufficient. In the specific example he outlines, “the testimony expresses a would-be recognition-based belief formed through a momentary glance at what appeared to the subject to be a familiar object, but where the object in question was slightly obscured to the subject, at a bit of a distance from her, under non-ideal lighting conditions” (*RO*, 98). With respect to all other relevant features, the case is just like one where the hearer knows. But, here, she doesn’t—and *not* because her belief has been ‘Gettiered’. Or so Goldberg argues.

It’s no doubt an interesting problem case—in support of an interesting hypothesis—but it’s not clear that the Orthodox Reliabilist lacks the resources to accommodate it. Goldberg considers and rejects two attempts on her behalf: an appeal to the local/global distinction, and an appeal to epistemic luck (*RO*, 99–104). The discussion here is, however, remarkably swift. For one thing, the consideration he levels against a luck-based diagnosis seems to apply equally well against the corresponding diagnosis of the ‘Nogot/Haveit-case’ (which is used to introduce the relevant notion of luck; *RO*, 102). For another, and as Goldberg in effect acknowledges, there are many other diagnoses available—other putative solutions to the Gettier-problem—and a full treatment of the issue would have to take at least the best of those into account as well (*RO*, 100). Third, the classification of the type (ii) case as one where the hearer lacks knowledge may not even be mandatory—especially not once it’s been elaborated to ensure the absence of any relevant local unreliability (*RO*, 103–4). At any rate this reader must confess to lacking stable intuitions about it. (I’m bracketing my intuitions regarding justification, since Goldberg’s use of the case doesn’t require initial agreement on that.)

At best, then, it seems that Goldberg has put the burden of proof on the Orthodox Reliabilist—to give an account of the type (ii) case that’s consistent with the

individualistic restriction. But I'll leave that to her. And I want to end by pointing out a complication with Goldberg's own account of the case.

Goldberg attributes the hearer's lack of knowledge to her lack of justification, and that, in turn, to the all-but-sufficient reliability of the process (in the informant's mind) by which the testimony is produced. If that's right, and if the case is possible, the extendedness hypothesis has been vindicated. But note that this treatment of the type (ii) case mandates the same treatment of all cases of type (i): cases where the process-derived reliability of the relevant testimony is way below the threshold. (How would one motivate treating the latter as Gettier-cases—specifically, as cases where the target belief is *justified*—while treating type (ii) cases, where the reliability of the testimony is *close* to the threshold, as cases where that belief is *unjustified*?) And that's unfortunate, since the classification of type (i) cases—certainly the most *compelling* type (i) cases—as Gettier-cases seems a natural starting-point indeed (see e.g. *RO*, 14). Perhaps the point is most evident with respect to type (i) cases where the testimony is unreliable because the belief it expresses has itself been Gettiered (in some familiar way). I suspect that Goldberg would want to, at least, give a standard treatment of cases like that. But it doesn't look like he can.*

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* Thanks to Sanford Goldberg for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this review. Thanks also to Kent Bach, Mikkel Gerken, and Michael Raven.