

Knowledge Ascriptions. Edited by JESSICA BROWN and MIKKEL GERKEN. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. 312. Price £46.99.)

Recent epistemology has focused as much on knowledge ascriptions as it has on knowledge. As one would expect from the title, this collection of essays continues the trend. These essays not only advance existing work on the semantics, cognitive bases and social roles of knowledge ascriptions, they offer an insight into why epistemologists think that we can learn something about knowledge by looking at knowledge ascriptions in general, and their semantics, cognitive bases and social roles in particular. Thus, this collection will be of great use not only to those who want to get a taste of recent work in epistemology, but also to those who want to understand why epistemologists regard the semantics, cognitive bases and social roles of knowledge ascriptions as worthy objects of study.

In this review I summarise each contribution, and make a few remarks along the way. I close with two mildly critical observations.

In their introduction Jessica Brown and Mikkel Gerken do a nice job of introducing and explaining three ‘turns’ in recent epistemology: the linguistic, cognitive and social. Put roughly, the linguistic turn investigates the semantics and pragmatics of knowledge ascriptions, the cognitive turn investigates psychological explanations of the making of knowledge ascriptions and the social turn investigates the roles that knowledge ascriptions play in our day-to-day lives. The essays that follow can largely be divided according to which of the turns they focus on.

Brown carefully argues that there is no reason to think that data about knowledge *ascriptions* are irrelevant to theorising about *knowledge*. Perhaps the most interesting part of her paper is the discussion of Hilary Kornblith’s brand of naturalized epistemology (§2.5). Brown argues that, while Kornblith’s view poses a threat, it is independently implausible because it is potentially extremely revolutionary. Of course, this objection won’t move someone who is happy with revolutionary epistemology.

Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath defend pragmatic encroachment by arguing against an overly restricted view of what the linguistic turn involves. While many think of the debate over pragmatic encroachment purely in terms of intuitions about bank cases and the like, Fantl and McGrath also think of it as a debate about what principles govern knowledge. In their view, two central principles are the principle that knowledge grounds rational action and the principle that knowledge is fallible. It is a short step from these principles to pragmatic encroachment. But, as they freely admit, the principles themselves are in large part supported by linguistic intuitions - intuitions about what it would and would not be right to say in various cases, such as bank cases and the like.

Brian Weatherson’s contribution focuses on the sorts of cases prominent in the linguistic turn, but he considers these cases from the perspective of decision theory. His central contentions are that something should be written onto a decision table iff the decision maker knows it to be true, and that something should be left off iff she knows it to be false. When reading his paper one wonders whether Weatherson needs to worry much about convincing the reader that his verdicts about the cases he discusses are ‘intuitive’. One obvious benefit of his proposal is its theoretical utility.

Michael Blome-Tillmann’s contribution improves on his own previous work in developing a brand of contextualism inspired by David Lewis. Blome-Tillmann has proposed replacing Lewis’s *Rule of Attention*, on which an error-possibility is properly ignored in a context *c* if it isn’t attended to by those in *c*, with a rule to the effect that an error-possibility is properly ignored in *c* if it is incompatible with the pragmatic presuppositions in *c*. In his paper Blome-Tillmann proposes adding an additional rule to deal with certain problem cases. While the new rule deals with the problem it is designed to solve, one worries whether the proposed rule is independently motivated.

Ephraim Glick's contribution marshals an array of linguistic data in support of the thesis that there is a sort of learning that requires the acquisition of ability, and he suggests that we think of that sort of learning as know-how. Glick's use of linguistic data in support of his anti-intellectualist thesis is largely in keeping with the broader debate over know-how, and demonstrates that the linguistic turn isn't restricted to debate over propositional knowledge ascriptions.

The next three contributions illustrate the cognitive turn. Gerken's contribution provides a systematic and sophisticated account of the conditions under which we are willing to ascribe knowledge that is consistent with a traditional non-sceptical invariantist account of knowledge. While I can't adequately summarise the account here, the basic idea is that judgements that subjects don't know in 'high standards' cases are 'false negatives' produced by a normally reliable cognitive mechanism. Gerken's contribution illustrates the widespread assumption that, if the relevant data can be explained by an invariantist account of knowledge, we have little reason to abandon invariantism (see also Rysiew's contribution). While this assumption seems well-motivated - invariantism is the orthodox view - it points to a limitation of focusing on knowledge ascriptions rather than knowledge.

Jennifer Nagel's contribution poses an important question. Empirical evidence suggests that it is just as intuitive that the subject in a sceptical scenario doesn't know as it is that the subject in a Gettier case doesn't know, and our best accounts of the cognitive bases for epistemic evaluations in Gettier cases and sceptical scenarios advert to the same underlying psychological mechanisms. So what justifies the standard epistemological assumption that our evaluations in Gettier cases are to be taken at face value whereas our evaluations in sceptical scenarios are to be discarded? Nagel's discussion of this question is subtle and complex, and I can't do justice to it here. But one gets the impression that ultimately she thinks the difference is that we lack any prior reason to take our intuitions about sceptical scenarios seriously.

Ángel Pinillos' contribution argues that experimental evidence provides some support for thinking that folk knowledge ascriptions are sensitive to the practical situation of the subject of the ascription, and thus for thinking that pragmatic encroachment in epistemology is true. At the time of writing this was the only experimental evidence supporting pragmatic encroachment, although that is no longer the case. While the experimental evidence is important, one shortcoming of Pinillos' approach is that it is hard to see why the experimental evidence speaks to the concern that folk judgements about knowledge systematically ignore the distinction between semantics and pragmatics (for more on this see Rysiew's contribution).

The final three contributions move towards the social turn, although James Beebe's contribution has elements of the cognitive turn, and Patrick Rysiew's has elements of the linguistic. Beebe cites psychological and experimental support for the view that knowledge ascriptions have the function of identifying blameworthy behaviour. I have little to say about this contribution other than that it is a model for how two of our turns can complement each other.

Jennifer Lackey's contribution investigates group knowledge through a study of group knowledge ascriptions. She argues that Edward Craig's proposal about the function of *individual* knowledge ascriptions, on which they serve to identify good informants, is unsuited to *group* knowledge ascriptions, which have the function of identifying good sources of information. Lackey takes this to undermine Craig's own proposal, on the grounds that we would expect individual and group knowledge ascriptions to serve the same function. But one wonders why Craig couldn't respond by saying that the differences between individual and group knowledge ascriptions that Lackey draws out in her paper are exactly why we shouldn't expect individual and group knowledge ascriptions to serve the same function.

Rysiew's contribution argues that a traditional invariantist account of knowledge is consistent with thinking one function of knowledge ascription is to certify information as suitable for use in theoretical and practical deliberation. The thought is that, while the requirements for a piece of information being suitable for use in deliberation may vary with the practical environment or

broader context, this is a matter of the pragmatics of knowledge ascriptions. While Rysiew's manoeuvre here - arguing that what some think is relevant to semantics is really relevant to pragmatics - is familiar from discussion of bank cases and the like, the key point here is that it can also be applied to debates about the function of knowledge ascriptions.

In closing, I would like to make two observations. First, in their introduction Brown *and* Gerken talk about the 'linguistic', 'cognitive' and 'social' *turns* (§1.2-4). But this choice of words is misleading. When we think of famous turns in philosophy, we think of proposals to radically change our approach to some question or area (think of Kant's 'Copernican turn'). But, as many of the contributions illustrate (e.g. Beebe's), the proposed methodology is a sort of broad pluralism: when investigating knowledge and knowledge ascriptions, we should take a wide range of considerations into account, including their semantics, cognitive bases and social roles.

Secondly, one wonders whether all of these considerations are on a par. Is it more important to give an adequate account of linguistic data or social roles? What about social roles and cognitive bases? Ideally, we'll arrive at an account that is adequate across the board. However, as the disagreement amongst the contributors to this volume indicates, we're not there yet. This leaves the reader unsure as to how to choose between the various views defended in the volume. But perhaps this is also a testament to the strength of the individual contributions.

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