
THIS COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BRINGS TOGETHER RECENT WORK being done in the fields of epistemology and philosophy of language concerning knowledge ascriptions—that is, ascriptions of the form, “S knows that p,” wherein S stands for a subject and p stands for a proposition. The volume contains twelve chapters, the first of which is a very well-organized and informative introduction by the editors, Jessica Brown and Mikkel Gerken. The editors state that “[t]he present anthology brings together a number of diverse strands of contemporary research that have focused on knowledge ascriptions” (1). The introduction then is structured around a discussion of three such strands, which the editors refer to as “the linguistic turn,” “the cognitive turn” and “the social turn,” respectively.

The editors acknowledge that a common use of the phrase, “the linguistic turn,” refers to a set of methodological movements that occurred in the earlier part of the 20th century; however, Brown and Gerken have something different in mind when referencing the aforementioned term. Specifically, the editors intend to make reference to a new linguistic turn, one that has affected the philosophical debate concerning knowledge-how and the meaning of knowledge-ascribing sentences. This new linguistic turn, which one can identify, in part, with a focus on the ordinary usage of ‘knows’ in everyday knowledge-ascriptions, is a pervasive part of the motivations for the contributors in this book and has a clear impact on almost all of the contributions that comprise the volume. So, the editors are certainly correct in claiming that the influence of this new ‘turn’ is present throughout the volume—although, one might have wished to see the presumed value of this ‘turn’ either defended or challenged rather than merely taken for granted, as was the case in most chapters.
The cognitive turn, as the editors point out, marks a move away from intuitions and armchair philosophy, and towards the study and usage of empirical findings. This turn combines nicely with the linguistic turn in the sense that an interest in the descriptive matter of how people use language lends itself to empirical observation. The influence of the cognitive turn is also pervasive throughout the book, but can be seen most clearly in the chapters by Gerken, Jennifer Nagel, and Ángel Pinillos. The editors note both the benefit of the opportunities for interdisciplinary research that the cognitive turn allows for, as well as the difficulty of determining how to interpret the results of many of the findings that have resulted from it.

The editors lastly discuss the social turn in epistemology—the presence of which is easily seen via the burgeoning field of social epistemology. The editors focus on Edward Craig’s *Knowledge and the State of Nature* (1990), which plays an important role in the chapters by James R. Beebe, Jennifer Lackey, and Patrick Rysiew. The introduction closes with a useful summary of the contents of the rest of the volume.

While all the chapters in this volume are worth reading and responding to, it would take far too long to address each chapter individually. Instead, I will address three chapters—one which paradigmatically exemplifies each of the turns identified by the editors. I begin with the linguistic turn by looking at Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath’s “Arguing for Shifty Epistemology.” Fantl and McGrath identify a shifty epistemologist as one who “allows that the truth value of ‘knowledge’-ascriptions can vary not merely because of [traditional epistemic] differences, but because of factors not traditionally deemed to matter whether someone knows, like salience of error possibilities and practical stakes” (55). In this article they do not focus on a particular type of shifty epistemology, such as contextualism or subject-sensitive invariantism. Rather, they argue that some form or another of shifty epistemology is correct. In addition to arguing for shifty epistemology, Fantl and McGrath advocate a manner of defending shifty epistemology which they call the
argument-from-principles strategy, in favor of the defense method they term the argument-from-instances strategy.

The argument-from-instances strategy is characterized by trying to motivate shifty epistemology via particular scenarios (like DeRose’s bank cases). And the argument-from-principles strategy is characterized by trying to motivate shifty epistemology as a consequence of other epistemic principles, which support or entail shifty epistemology. There is certainly something meritorious about using an argument-from-principles strategy. After all, it can help one avoid the tedious back-and-forth of setting forth particular instances that appear to indicate shifty epistemology and then responding to specific criticisms about why those particular instances might fail to lend support to shifty epistemology. However, the particular form of the argument-from-principles strategy, which Fantl and McGrath advocate, does not seem to avoid the kinds of problems they associate with the arguments-from-instances strategy. This is because the principles from which they argue for shifty epistemology are fallibilism and what they call actionability. Fantl and McGrath explain actionability by the following principle: “[y]ou can know that \( p \) only if \( p \) is actionable for you,” where \( p \) is actionable for you when you can rely on \( p \) as a basis for action (65). The problem is that actionability is a nearly, if not more controversial thesis than shiftness, and the motivations that Fantl and McGrath offer in favor of actionability seem best described as instances of the argument-from-instances strategy. Thus, the particular form of the arguments-from-principles strategy, on which they seek to base their case for shifty epistemology, seems ultimately to rely on the arguments-from-instances strategy. That being said, this does not mean the particular manner of defense for shifty epistemology that Fantl and McGrath put forward could not succeed, nor does this mean that there may not be another way to motivate shifty epistemology via the argument-from-principles strategy, which does not bottom out in an argument-from-instances.

As an example of the cognitive turn, I turn to Jennifer Nagel’s “Mindreading in Gettier Cases and Skeptical Pressure Cases.”
Nagel’s paper is an example both of how experimental philosophy can provide us with new philosophical questions and how familiarity with the research performed in the social sciences can provide one with the tools to address philosophical questions. In this chapter, Nagel reports the finding of several surveys. According to Nagel, there was little or no difference between the percentage of participants who denied that a subject had knowledge when that subject was in a Gettier case (i.e., a scenario in which one has a true belief which is justified on accidental or lucky grounds) as when a subject was in a skeptical pressure case (i.e., a situation in which a skeptical alternative was made salient although the skeptical alternative did not obtain). Given that many epistemologists want to deny that the subject in the Gettier case has knowledge, but also affirm that the subject in the skeptical pressure case has knowledge, the question these findings raise is how one can justify this asymmetrical conclusion in light of the propensity of people to deny knowledge in Gettier cases and skeptical pressure cases with roughly equal likelihood. The solution that Nagel offers is that while both Gettier cases and skeptical pressure cases push us to assess the situation in a more complex way, this complex way of reasoning is an appropriate way to reason about Gettier cases but an inappropriate way to reason about skeptical pressure cases—thus giving an explanation for the data from the surveys as well as a reason to continue to affirm knowledge in skeptical pressure cases but not in Gettier cases.

The final chapter of the volume, Rysiew’s “Epistemic Scorekeeping,” is a clear example of the social turn. In this chapter Rysiew argues for two claims. The first is what he calls the “certification view,” which is the view that “to a first approximation, ‘knows’ plays a special role in signaling an appropriate end to particular lines of inquiry” (270). This view is the result of the embrace of the Edward Craig-inspired task to ask “what knowledge does for us, what its role in our life might be” (270). The second claim Rysiew argues for is that the certification view is compatible with an invariantist semantics about ‘knowledge.’ Rysiew’s piece is clear and well-argued, but perhaps the most beneficial move Rysiew makes is
moving away from Craig’s question of what is the (single) role of knowledge to a more pluralistic model in which one acknowledges that knowledge may have many roles, such that an argument for one particular role of knowledge (like certification) is not an argument against knowledge having other roles (like flagging reliable informants). Rysiew’s chapter provides a strong ending to a strong volume.

*Knowledge Ascriptions* is a must-read for anyone working on the philosophy of knowledge ascriptions and is a valuable read for anyone interested in epistemology, philosophy of language or the relationship between more traditional philosophical inquiry and experimental philosophy.

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