First Person Epistemology

LESLIE STEVENSON

I propose that if we distinguish the first-person present-tense application of epistemic terms from their use in other contexts, new light is thrown on crucial issues in epistemology. These include the relations between justification, knowledge and truth, the debate between externalism and internalism, and the method of reflective equilibrium. I suggest that to focus on third-person questions about knowledge or justification (as so much analytic work has done) is to risk missing one of the main points of doing epistemology, namely to help us (individually or collectively) make reflective judgments about what to believe.

I. First-person present and other-directed contexts

Philosophers have always accepted that 'x knows that p' entails p, but according to the conception of justification which has become standard in epistemology, being justified in believing p does *not* entail that p is true. One person A can thus allow that B's belief that p is justified by the evidence which B has, even if A knows better about p (or thinks she does)—A may judge that p is false, or that B's grounds for p are undermined or defeated by information not available to B. A similar 'distancing' effect can occur for a single person over time: A can say that she herself *was* justified in believing p at a previous time, even if she now judges p to be false, or to be unjustified by the totality of evidence presently available to her.

In explaining and excusing our beliefs and actions to each other, whether in everyday life or more formally in the lawcourts, we often need to make such claims about the justification of another's belief, or of a belief we have ourselves held in the past. Blame for actions or omissions can depend on person- and time-relative assessments of the available evidence for relevant beliefs. Legal questions of responsibility (e.g. for negligence) typically depend on whether the beliefs someone formed and acted upon were 'reasonable' in the circumstances.

There is thus a clear distinction between what I will call *other-directed* epistemological contexts (including under this label *both* the evaluation of another person's justification and of one's own previous justification)—and *first-person present contexts* in which someone considers the reasons for belief he or she currently has. In the former, the assessment of the justification possessed by person x at

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

time t for believing p is two-way independent of the judgment of truth-value of p, for there are two standpoints involved—that of x at t, and that of the person now making the assessment. But in first-person present contexts, there is only one standpoint—that of the subject who is considering the truth-value of p, and his or her current reasons for or against belief in p. In other-directed contexts one is evaluating not so much the truth of the relevant proposition, but the rationality of someone's believing it: one is applying epistemic norms to a person's holding of a propositional attitude (including one's own past attitudes). But in first-person present contexts one is primarily concerned with the truth-value of the relevant proposition, i.e. with deciding whether to believe it.

There are also first-person *plural* contexts, when a group of people ask each other 'What are we justified in believing about p?' An epistemic 'we', a collective group involved in some project of inquiry, can be defined by their commitment to sharing all relevant information and evidence in the interests of arriving at the best-justified view about the topics that concern them (and hence, in practical cases, of deciding on the best action towards achieving their goals). This is what happens in the ideal family, committee, department meeting, boardroom, or scientific discipline—but not in adversarial contexts such as war, commercial competition, factional infighting, political campaigning, answering parliamentary questions, or when personal relationships break down. In these latter types of situation we tend to find secrecy, lies, and what has notoriously been described as 'economy with the truth'.

There are first-person plural present-tense contexts ('What is it reasonable for us to believe about p?)' and third-person plural present-tense contexts ('What are they justified in believing about p?'). First-person plural questions about *past* justification ('Were we justified in believing p, at that stage of our inquiry?') can be treated as a subclass of plural other-directed contexts. For convenience I will concentrate on the singular formulations in what follows, but what I say should be equally applicable to the plural cases.

But before I proceed, let me address a suggestion that the plural contexts might be the more fundamental ones for philosophers to consider when doing epistemology. Popper argued that the most important form in which to ask questions about knowledge or rationality is in the impersonal locution 'It is known that p'.[1] He thereby wanted to reject what he saw as the misleading obsession with individual justification which has characterized most epistemology since Descartes, and replace it by his own conception of 'objective

[1] See especially K. R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge* Oxford University Press, 1972), Ch. 3 'Epistemology without a Knowing Subject'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

knowledge'. This may be a healthy corrective to excessive individualism in epistemology, but there is surely a valid place in everyday life, and in the law, for the evaluation of particular people's justification for their beliefs, as noted above. And if we are doing the philosophy of science rather than its history or its sociology, and epistemology rather than psychology, cognitive science, or anthropology, we surely need to ask normative questions about what individuals should believe, or should have believed, or (in Popper's own terms) take as a theory worth investigating further, or worth relying on in practice. We can use the term 'justification' for this fundamental norm: it is an approximate synonym for 'rational' or 'reasonable'. Philosophy in general, and epistemology in particular, surely cannot do without some such notion.

In its logical grammar—at least on the surface—truth is a different kind of concept from knowledge and justification (or warrant), for these epistemological concepts are obviously relative to person and time. There is a parallel to this in the anti-realist notion of assertibility which Dummett has made famous: 'p is (warrantedly) assertible for A' is two-way independent of 'p is true'—and so is 'p was assertible for me at time t'; whereas 'p is now assertible for me' is not applicable independently of 'p is true'.[2] Knowledge, justification and assertibility must all be construed as three-place relations involving propositions, subjects and times, whereas truth would appear to be a simple property of propositions. Of course, a sentence-type involving indexicals, such as 'I am in the bathroom', is true only for certain individuals at certain times—but the proposition expressed by a particular token utterance or inscription of that type is usually thought of as impersonally and timelessly true. There may be deeper philosophical issues about our entitlement to use a tenseless concept of truth (and a corresponding tenseless notion of proposition or propositional content), but we must recognize this *prima facie* contrast between the relativity of knowledge and justification and the corresponding absoluteness of our ordinary conception of truth.[3] The rational application of the concept of truth may coincide with justification or warranted assertibility in first-person present contexts—as I am about to argue—but that does not mean that these concepts can be identified.[4]

[2] 'Assertible' and 'true' thus express different norms, although they coincide in the first-person present. See C. J. G. Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), Chs 1 and 2.

[3] C. J. G. Wright, *Realism, Meaning and Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), Ch. 5 'Anti-realism and Timeless Truth'.

[4] Could this be the beginning of the diagnosis of the ever-recurring oscillation between realism and various forms of idealism or anti-realism?

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

II. The coincidence of justification, belief and truth in first-person present contexts

I will now argue that questions about one's own present belief in, or justification for, a given proposition p coalesce or coincide with the question of the truth of p, in a rather subtle way which I will try to make clear. In other-directed contexts the questions of belief, justification and truth are clearly distinct, as we have seen. One is there judging justification relative to the evidence one takes it that someone else has, or that one had oneself at some previous time. But in the first person present, the requirement of total evidence applies: in making one's best estimate of the truth about p, one must, to be rational, take into account all the information relevant to p that has come to one's attention. So I suggest that in first-person present contexts one cannot *reasonably* believe (or assert) any of the following, without believing the others (or being prepared to assert them):

p
I believe p
I am justified in believing p

What we have here are extensions of G. E. Moore's famous 'paradox' about belief.[5] Moore noticed a kind of incoherence about asserting[6]

1a I do not believe p, yet p is true
1b I believe p, but p is false

There is in these combinations a sort of self-undermining or self-stultification (Moore called them 'absurd' or 'nonsensical'). But it is not a matter of logical self-contradiction. This comes out when non-actual possibilities are considered. One can quite reasonably say: 'I believe p, though I may be wrong' or 'I do not believe p, yet p may be true'. These statements are logically consistent, for the claim that about a certain person that they believe p does not entail that p is true, and the fact that someone does not believe p does not entail that p is false. But although there is no entailment either way,

[5] G. E. Moore, *Selected Writings*, T. Baldwin (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1993), Ch. 12 'Moore's Paradox'.

[6] The current penchant for saying 'I don't believe this is happening' in situations where it is quite obviously manifest to the speaker that the relevant event is exactly what is happening, does not, I submit, involve any counter-example to Moore's claim. Such uses of the demonstrative pronoun imply that *this* (whatever it is) is indeed happening, and I submit that the claim 'I don't believe it' is therefore not to be taken literally. The usage is merely a fashionable way of expressing shock, dismay, or just mild surprise.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

there is something strongly irrational, indeed unintelligible, about *representing oneself* either as believing something while simultaneously asserting it to be false, or as not believing something while asserting it as true.

To make the extension from Moore's cases, consider the following combinations involving the concept of justification:

2a p, but I am not justified in believing p
2b I am justified in believing p, but p is false

3a I believe p, although I am not justified in believing it
3b I am justified in believing p, but I do not believe it

In each of these cases there is still some sort of tension between the two components, although it is somewhat weaker than that in 1a and 1b. There is surely some irrationality in asserting or believing anything of these forms, if the justification referred to is that which depends on the *total* evidence relevant to p which the speaker has at the time. (To be sure, one can consistently say that one has a justification for believing p which is over-ridden by stronger evidence against p—and the total evidence may justify the belief that p is false.) 2a and 3a sound like expressions of a guess or hunch, a belief based on 'intuition' or an 'act of faith'—the making of a doxastic commitment beyond what one acknowledges the evidence to justify. 2b and 3b express a converse unwillingness to accept what one admits the total available evidence does justify.

It would be foolhardy to claim that such doxastic *akrasia* is impossible. Indeed, examples of it seem familiar enough—the would-be clairvoyant, the mother who cannot accept her son's guilt despite his conviction in court, or the religious fideist who proclaims his belief in God's goodness, omniscience and omnipotence despite the evil and suffering in the world. None of these involve logical contradictions, and it seems too strong to describe them as incoherent, for they do not have quite the self-stultifying character of 1a and 1b. It is not *unintelligible* to make an assertion and thereby express a belief, while admitting in the same breath that one has no justification for it. People do sometimes make claims based on nothing but intuition, 'feeling something in one's bones', supposed extra-sensory perception, or 'faith'. Such beliefs may be called irrational or 'epistemically irresponsible', but the combinations in 2a–3b are not unintelligible.

Yet there is infelicity of some sort here. There is a tension in 2a–3b which invites a charge of irrationality, for they involve an explicit admission that in the present case the speaker is not following the epistemic norms which he or she accepts. Now failure to live

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

up to one's own standards is of course a familiar feature of the human condition. *Self-confessed* failure may be rather less common, but it is not unknown, nor is it self-contradictory, or unintelligible. There can be parallel cases of self-conscious *akrasia* about action, e.g. 'I'm going to resume smoking, although I know it's not good for me', or 'I'm going to enjoy this relationship, though I know it's morally wrong', or 'I cannot bring myself to break off with her, although I accept that that would be the best thing for me to do, all things considered'. These combinations of speech-acts are intelligible: the second element in each pair does not take away all force from the first. But they explicitly admit irrationality. 'Self-confessed failure to live up to one's own epistemic or practical norms' is the most accurate description, but it is rather too long as a handy label. I suggest that we call these cases of '*Austinian implication*', remembering that Austin wrote 'When we make an assertion ... there is a sense in which we imply that we are sure of it or know it ... though what we imply, in a similar sense and more strictly, is only that we believe it.'[7] I want to pick up his idea that there are related but distinguishable sorts of implication. In my suggested terminology, to state that p is to imply in the Moorean sense that one believes p, and to imply in the Austinian sense that one is justified in believing it.

The infelicities or tensions in cases 1–3 involve implication relations which are not logical entailments. Truth, belief and justification remain distinct concepts in our intellectual repertoire, for the application of any one of them does not logically entail any of the others, and one can readily distinguish them by their behaviour under negation, the past tense, and modal operators. But there are many other sorts of implication than logical entailment—e.g. Moorean, Austinian, Gricean, etc., and their variety deserves our attention.[8] We can sum up our results so far by saying that *in any first-person present context it is not reasonable to assert or believe that any one of the concepts of truth, belief or justification applies unless one is also prepared to apply the others.*

III. Knowledge in the first-person present

Can we extend these conclusions to first-person uses of the concept of *knowledge*? Consider the following combinations:

[7] J. L. Austin, 'Other Minds', *Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society*, supplementary Volume **XX** (1946); reprinted in *Logic and Language*, Second Series, A. Flew (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953). My quotation is from the second page of Austin's paper.

[8] I attempt a bird's eye view of this wider field in 'Towards a General Theory of Infelicities and Implications', forthcoming in *Philosophical Inquiry*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

4a p, but I do not know that p
4b I know that p, but p is false

5a I believe p, but I do not know that p
5b I know that p, but I do not believe that p

6a I am justified in believing p, but I do not know that p
6b I know that p, but I am not justified in believing p

We can say straight away that 4b and 5b involve contradictions, for it is widely agreed that truth and belief are necessary for knowledge. Until the advent of externalism in epistemology, 6b might have been taken as similarly contradictory, yet there are cases where we seem willing to say that someone knows something even if she herself cannot give a justification for it (e.g. a 'clairvoyant' whom we know to have a good track-record of true predictions, or an 'idiot savant' who can reliably give the right results of certain complicated computations, apparently being able to do the relevant calculations at lightning-speed, but unconsciously). But remember that in this paper we are considering first-person present-tense contexts. In the cases just mentioned one can say 'A knows that p, although he or she can provide no justification for it', and perhaps one might say 'As a child, I knew that p, although I could not then justify it'. But our present question is whether one can rationally say that one now knows that p, while *at the very same time* admitting that one can offer absolutely nothing by way of justification for p.

Of course there are innumerable situations where we claim to know something, but not on the basis of inference from anything else—e.g. most judgments of perception or memory, or about simple logical entailments. But in such cases one can typically say which mental power or faculty one is relying on—the usual list of acceptable answers is: perception, introspection, memory of something one has experienced, memory of something of which one has been informed by testimony, recognition of valid inferences or simple necessary truths. We can normally say at least that much by way of justification of non-inferential claims. (I go into this matter in section IV below.)

But what we have to look at carefully here is the case of a knowledge-claim made on the basis of 'intuition' or 'faith', where the subject cannot cite any generally-recognized mental faculty as the source of her claim. She might even say 'I know that p, but I cannot justify it in any way'. Is this incoherent? Pressed a little further, she might say 'I cannot provide anything that *you* (rationalist or sceptic or unbeliever as you are) would count as justification, but nevertheless I know it'. But that suggests a relevant distinction. It

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

may be that she cannot provide anything that will measure up to the standards of justification accepted by her interlocutor, or more generally by her society—and that seems *prima facie* coherent, for we had better not assume that socially accepted norms of justification are beyond all criticism.[9] But what if we ask her 'Are you saying that you are not justified in believing p, *even by your own standards*?' It would surely be embarrassing (not merely socially but conceptually) for someone to admit that they have no justification even in their own eyes for something they are claiming to know. Provided that 'justification' is assessed according to the speaker's own epistemic norms, 6b seems thus to involve a very similar sort of tension or irrationality to that in 3a.

Consider now the first members of the above three pairs. 4a, 5a and 6a seem to be ways of expressing caution or diffidence (perhaps, indeed, a becoming modesty) about one's own authority, epistemic entitlement or achievement. But how is one to interpret someone who says something of the form 4a? He asserts p, and immediately follows this up with a disavowal of knowledge that p, which seems to take away much of the force of his assertion. He seems to go against Austin's principle, quoted in section II above: 'when we make an assertion … there is a sense in which we imply that we are sure of it or know it'. But since this Austinian kind of implication is not logical entailment, isn't it open to the speaker to explicitly disavow it (just as one can disavow a Gricean conversational implication)?

What then could be the point of an assertion of p, combined with a disavowal to knowledge of it? It might be to express belief that p without claiming knowledge of it, which would assimilate 4a to 5a. But why should someone want to assert 5a, and thereby disavow knowledge of what they say they believe? If it is the truth element in knowledge which they reject, i.e. if they think or suspect that the relevant p is false, they would be in the Moorean situation of saying 1b. If it is the justification element in knowledge which they reject, that puts them in the situation of 3a.

We seem to be left with 6a. What could be the point of the disavowal of knowledge in 6a? If it is the truth element in knowledge which the subject rejects, then he is prepared to assert not-p, and this would amount to a case of 2b. But it seems more likely that an assertor of 6a wishes to make a systematic distinction between justification and knowledge. There might be many reasons for this. One contrast is between merely probable and conclusive reasons for belief. A standard example is a lottery in which there are, say, a mil-

[9] It deserves further inquiry under what circumstances any individual can be entitled to make such a striking declaration of epistemic independence.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

lion tickets each with an equal chance of winning the prize. The purchaser of a single ticket can say, with an extremely high degree of justification, that he is not going to win. But does he *know* (and can he say that he knows) that he will not win? Although we may say that for all practical purposes he 'knows' it (he himself might admit that it would be highly irrational to spend money on the assumption that he will win), still he might insist that, strictly speaking, he does not *know* that he won't win. And we might be tempted to agree with him. Here, and in a host of other probabilistic cases, it seems in order for someone to say something of the form 6a or 5a, and presumably 4a too.

This might be extended to cases where there is a distinction between canonical and other grounds for belief (or 'criteria' and 'symptoms', according to one strand in Wittgenstein). For example someone might refuse to claim *knowledge* that it will rain tomorrow, however strongly-based the weather forecast may be; they might insist that knowledge of local weather can only be gained via perception of it. Someone else might feel compelled to set a yet higher standard and say that knowledge *proper* requires infallibility. This is not the place to evaluate all over again such tendencies towards 'high' redefinitions of knowledge. I need only remark that we have not shown any irrationality or infelicity of the Moorean or Austininan kind in 4a, 5a and 6a. There may, for all the linguistic evidence shows, be a difference between the working standards of justification someone accepts and the stronger standards he applies to knowledge-claims.[10]

There is a different reason why someone might assert 6a. If he has heard that justified true belief may not amount to knowledge, he could be thinking that he might be 'Gettiered' about p. Let us consider:

7a I have a justified true belief that p, but I do not know that p
7b I know that p, but I do not have a justified true belief that p

In what have come to be called Gettier cases, a true belief may be inferred from a proposition which is false, although justified—for example, someone might truly think he is going to become a grandfather because of a false but justified belief that his son has been 'sowing his wild oats', whereas unbeknownst to him it is his daughter who is pregnant. In a second class of cases there is no inference, only a perceptual judgment—for example, someone may truly

[10] If there is a deep incoherence about this, it will have to be shown by further argument (the beginning of which might lie in the question whether anyone can really have a clear conception of *knowledge*, if the standards for its application outrun anything he can justifiably apply in practice).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

believe there is a door in front of her because she sees a reflection in a mirror of a door behind her, when there happens to be an exactly similar door at an appropriate distance behind the mirror.

I claim, however, that one cannot rationally take oneself to be presently 'Gettiered' with respect to a particular claim. The identification of a Gettier situation depends on the disparity between two standpoints—that of the subject who takes himself to have a justified true belief in p which amounts to knowledge that p, and that of the better-informed assessor who denies the latter. To be sure, one can admit that one might sometimes be Gettiered, and one can even allow that one *is* Gettiered with respect to *some* proposition or other, as long as one does not specify any particular case this applies to. (In the same way, an author can consistently say in her preface that she is sure her book contains mistakes, without identifying any particular examples.) One can even admit the possibility with respect to a particular p that what one now takes to be a justified true belief about it might, in future states of information, *turn out* not to be knowledge after all.

But if one comes to know (or to have good evidence) that one is Gettiered about p, one cannot continue to present as a justification what one now believes or suspects is rationally defective. In an inferential case, I cannot admit that q is false or unjustified, and yet still use q to justify my belief in p. In a non-inferential case, I cannot present a perceptual judgment as justified while acknowledging that it is based only on a reflection (or a trick of the light, or a hologram) which may not be connected in the right causal way with the relevant fact. In either case, I might believe p on other grounds—but if so, I would have to be prepared to defend those grounds as non-defective. Justification is defeasible, and one has to acknowledge this, if pressed—so one can allow the logical possibility of future information which would defeat what one now takes to be one's justification for p, while still claiming to have sufficient justification for p in the actual situation. But one may not, if rational, accept something as a justification if one thinks its justificational status is *already* defeated.

The coincidence we find in first-person present applications of truth, belief and justification has not smoothly extended to all the first-person combinations involving the concept of knowledge. Knowledge may be a rather different kind of concept from justification. Audi has recently suggested that knowledge is an externalist concept, whereas justification is an internalist one.[11] Another clue is that justification admits of degrees, but knowledge does not. Of

[11] R. Audi, *Epistemology: a contemporary introduction to the theory of knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1998), Ch. 8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

course, A can know better than B about p, in the sense of being more reliable about such matters, or knowing more about them, but A cannot know *a particular proposition better* than p, although he can have better reasons or justification for believing it.[12]

IV. The need for a modest degree of internalism about justification

I will now explore the implications of our distinction between first-person present and other-directed contexts for the debate between internalism and externalism in epistemology. According to the basic internalist thought, the normative epistemic status of a belief must depend entirely on facts that are immediately accessible to the subject (i.e. he or she must, on the basis of introspection alone, be able to make a justified judgment about the relevant facts). Externalists deny this, and claim that the epistemic status of a belief can depend on facts to which the subject may have no immediate introspective access, such as a purely causal relation to the relevant facts, or his or her reliability as shown in a track-record of having made true judgments.

Consider the old story of the chicken-sexers (or the more recent story of 'blindsight'). Some people can acquire the knack of telling the sex of newborn chicks by a brief examination. If asked what signs they go by, they cannot describe or point to any, yet the truth of their judgments becomes obvious when the chickens mature. This is just one dramatic example of the familiar phenomenon of non-inferential perceptual judgments, which are our usual way of getting to know whether something is red, warm, soft, smelly, bitter-tasting, or out of tune. But what, if anything, *justifies* such judgments, if the subjects cannot give reasons for them?

On an externalist conception of knowledge, one can be said to know something even if one cannot formulate any justification for the claim, let alone believe or know that it is a justification. So the chicken sexer, the blindseer, or the person with a musical ear can be said to know the genders of chickens, the position of a spot on the screen, and the piano's need for tuning. Knowledge would depend only on there being some appropriate relation between the beliefs and the relevant facts: it would not matter whether the subject is *aware* of that relation.[13] Someone who did not even have the concept

[12] Beliefs can also be thought of as having degrees of strength.

[13] A. I. Goldman, 'Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge', *Journal of Philosophy* **73/20**, (1976), 771–91. See also Goldman's *Epistemology and Cognition*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of reliability (a young child, for example) could still *be* reliable on certain matters, and could be said to know about them.

If we assume that third-person questions are the most important in epistemology, this reliabilist approach can seem very plausible. Each of us acquires many of our beliefs from other people—and it is difficult indeed to imagine ourselves doing without this massive dependence on socially-transmitted testimony.[14] So it can often look as if the main point of applying the concept of knowledge is to help us operate the division of epistemic labour, so that each individual can learn from others and not be restricted to his own unaided efforts in knowledge-gathering. To say that A knows about matters such as p, or knows that p, is to accept A as a reliable informant on the topic. Believing this, B may ground her acceptance that p on A's having said so, and perhaps commend p's acceptance to C on the same basis. The concept of a reliable informant (relativized to topics) is obviously a useful , and is arguably essential for any socially-shared system of information and inquiry.[15]

But can knowledge and justification be completely reduced to reliability, or to any purely natural states of affairs, any non-normative relation to the facts? Talk of A's reliability involves a comparison between A's beliefs and the relevant facts, and any such correlation must in the end be empirically established. So to justify a judgment about A's reliability, we have to use *another* way of finding out about those facts without taking A's word for it. Now in some cases we have uncontroversial ways of doing this: we test the assertions of chicken-sexers, dousers, blindseers, or alleged clairvoyants by using our own senses at the appropriate places and times, in good conditions for observation. When children are learning the words for colours and shapes and many other things, we check their responses to standard samples, in appropriate conditions, by looking at the same samples with our own eyes. If a doctor or medical student is making a diagnosis, their clinical judgment can be checked against the opinions of colleagues, and the evidence of blood-tests, X-rays, or post-mortems. If someone claims telepathic powers we can check their assertions by the usual ways (whatever they are!) of getting to know about people's mental states.

But in cases where we are in doubt or disagreement about how *anyone* can know the relevant facts, we cannot so straightforwardly

[14] Philosophers' fables of a person coming to linguistic and epistemic maturity on a desert island, or as a wolf-child, may be logically possible, but are quite unrealistic in terms of actual human psychology.

[15] E. Craig, *Knowledge and the State of Nature* (Oxford University Press 1990); and R. B. Brandom, 'Insights and Blindspots of Reliabilism', *The Monist*, Vol. 81 (1998), 371–392.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

test someone's reliability. Who is reliable about future human events—e.g. whether Scotland will qualify for the next World Cup, whether Jane will find a husband or will become a grandmother, or whether there will be world war, epidemics, or famine in the 21st century? These matters are factual, in a wide sense, but we have no agreed ways of making reliable judgments about them. Conceivably some scientific methods may one day be found to help answer some of these questions, but it seems unlikely for them all. There are similar unanswerable questions about the present—who is reliable about people's deepest feelings, or needs?—about what constitutes supreme excellence in the arts?—or about the best way to live our lives? How could it be *shown* that someone is reliable on such matters? In ethics, aesthetics, and religion there is a prior semantic or metaphysical question whether there are any relevant truths or facts to be reliable about.

On some topics we invoke scientific expertise, or the judgments of 'qualified judges'—but there is of course a vital epistemological question what should count as genuine expertise, rather then mere social status. Scientists, doctors and psychiatrists are often accorded epistemic authority—but then so are presidents, priests, gurus, therapists, fashion guides, astrologists and television presenters. Which of these alleged or self-styled authorities know what they claim to know—and if so, how? If they are reliable, what shows that they are? Our most fundamental motive for doing epistemology is surely to try to help ourselves decide what we rationally *ought* to believe, and not just to endorse claims to knowledge because they are widely accepted in our cultural community (however that is identified), or because one has accepted them oneself so far. We cannot rest content with an entirely naturalistic, biological or sociological approach to epistemology, for we are asking normative questions. We can thereby enquire about justification in the first-person present (singular or plural)—what am I (or are we) now justified in believing?[16]

Some degree of internalism about justification is involved here, for we are acknowledging a rational obligation to justify our own claims. For rational beings, belief involves the possibility of discussing and assessing justifications for beliefs, and hence some preparedness to acknowledge and follow norms about justification. It is not that we are all obliged to go in for philosophical theorizing about epistemic norms (that is a minority pastime, fortunately). But for any particular belief p, being justified in believing p surely involves

[16] See J. L. Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (London: Hutchinson. 1987), 137–8. Pollock calls this notion of justification 'reason-guiding' (see pp. 10, 125, 141–2, 183ff), and argues that it is the central concern of epistemology. See also Brandom, op. cit., note 15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

having some idea of what in one's present situation justifies one in believing p.

But how can this modest degree of internalism apply to non-inferential judgments? It cannot mean that whenever someone is justified in making such a judgment, he must be able to offer a set of premises from which it can be inferred, deductively or inductively. This would start a regress which would have to be either infinite or circular, as the ancient sceptics saw. Wittgenstein made a relevant distinction here, when he said that to use a word without a justification (*Rechtfertigung*) is not to use it without right (*Recht*).[17] I take him to mean that one sometimes has the *right* to say something (e.g. 'I am in pain', or 'This is green', or 'P follows from P&Q') even if one does not have a *justification* for it in the form of a premise from which it can be inferred.[18]

It would be ludicrous to expect the rational subject always to be consciously aware of her justifications for every one of her beliefs, but it seems reasonable to expect her to be *potentially* self-conscious about her justification for any particular belief. The modest degree of internalism I am here suggesting requires only that she should be *able to say something* by way of justification, either about her reasons (in inferential cases), or about which 'source' or mental faculty she is relying on (in non-inferential cases). In answer to the question 'How do you know that p?', we often say things like 'I see it' (perception), 'I can feel it (proprioception, or introspection), 'I remember seeing it or doing it' (experiential memory), 'Sheila told me' (testimony) or 'I remember it, I must have heard about it somewhere, I don't know where' (factual memory based on forgotten testimony), and 'It follows logically' or 'I've added up the figures' (reason). As Wittgenstein suggested, it can be a sufficient answer to the question 'How do I know that this colour is red?' to say 'I have learnt English'[19]—or to be more specific, 'I know what counts as red, when I can see it, in good light'. More verbosely, one can say 'I

[17] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), *289.

[18] To avoid confusion, note that there is a choice of terminology here. One option is to restrict the use of 'justified' to beliefs which *are* based on inference, and to use some other term of positive epistemological evaluation (e.g. 'having the right to believe p', or 'entitlement') for the wider class, including non-inferential judgments. The other choice is to use 'justified' for that wider class, whenever the relevant epistemic norms are satisfied. I find it convenient to follow the latter convention. This is a merely verbal difference from Wittgenstein: I can acknowledge his point by saying that justification sometimes consists not in the possession of propositional reasons but in the appropriate exercise of mental faculties such as perception, memory and reasoning.

[19] Wittgenstein, op. cit., note 17, *381.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

have sufficiently shown my competence in applying English colour terms in standard conditions in the past, and there is no reason to suspect anything abnormal about the present occasion'. In giving a *source* for one's belief or knowledge-claim, one is presuming that the cited source is epistemologically acceptable (not mere hunch, faith, or reading the tabloid press), and that the relevant mental faculty will be accepted as reliable in the circumstances (though there is surely no need for it to be infallible).

This can be described as part of 'folk epistemology' (in one sense of that ambiguous phrase—for another sense, see section V below). Some philosophers have been rather disparaging about what they attribute to the folk: I come, however, not to bury folk epistemology, but to praise it. I submit that any rational being must have some conception of the basic ways in which his or her beliefs can be justified: including sources such as perception, memory, introspection, deductive or inductive inference, and testimony. This is not as demanding as it may sound, for the concepts of the senses, of memory, of being told something, and of one belief being a reason for another are not technical terms, but concepts that we all acquire quite early in childhood. There are of course various deeper philosophical questions to be asked about all these 'sources'.[20]

Could we rest content with a purely externalist approach to justification in other-directed contexts? This depends on how we interpret the concept of reliability. In one sense, even inanimate objects can be reliable—a thermometer can 'tell' us the temperature, and the layers in an ice-cap may be a reliable guide to the weather many years ago. But artefacts or natural states of affairs do not have *beliefs*, and they do not have *justifications* for their readings or informational states. We do not treat each other as mere instruments or carriers of information; we take it that other people do not merely have beliefs but have (or at least hope to have) justifications for them, which we can enquire about. Rational subjects *aim* at truth (at least some of the time!). And any rational being must accept the need for appropriate methods of forming beliefs and evaluating the evidence for them.[21] So to treat someone as capable of propositional beliefs at all is to see them as a subject who can ask about justifications, as someone capable of regulating their beliefs, however inarticulately, by norms of truth and of justification.[22]

[20] In the case of testimony, there has been a tendency until recently for philosophers not to recognize it as a source with a legitimacy of its own, but to try to treat it as a special case of induction. I argue against this in 'Why Believe what People Say?', *Synthese*, **94**, No. 3 (March, 1993), 429–51.

[21] See Brandom, op. cit., note 15.

[22] What to say about the transitional cases of young children is a difficult question which I beg leave to shelve here.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

V. Second-order justification: in defence of reflective equilibrium

I have argued that any rational subject should be able to say something by way of justification for any claim they make. But it seems far too much to require everyone to be able to justify their claims to justification (e.g. to answer questions like 'How do you know that you really see it?' or 'How do you know that your memory is reliable?'), or to be able to state, let alone defend, general principles of justification (epistemic norms). For the philosophical few who do pursue such second-order reflection, the problems at this level have a long history going back as far as the ancient 'problem of the criterion'. Scepticism—both about ordinary judgments and about the possibility of any rationally defensible epistemological theory—has been a recurring threat.

But if we are going in for epistemology, we have to face up to the challenge posed by alternative standards of justification, different systems of epistemic norms. Some of the alternatives may be actual—they may be embodied in the practice of a past or present society, or a subculture of our own society, e.g. magical, or religious, pre-scientific, or extra-sensory epistemologies. Obviously, I am not endorsing *everything* that might be called 'folk psychology', only that central core—including the list of sources outlined in section IV—which is common to all communities, and arguably necessary for anyone to have any kind of knowledge. Some alternative epistemic norms may be presented merely as logically possible, e.g. those higher than normal standards for knowledge adverted to in section III. At the level of epistemic norms we can make a first-person plural/other-person plural distinction analogous to that made about the justification of particular beliefs in section I. We can distinguish between the epistemic standards of our own culture (however exactly it is individuated) and those of other cultures. The latter may include periods of our own society in the distant past, if we allow ourselves to identify societies across periods long enough to encompass major cultural and epistemic change.

Alvin Goldman's distinction between two different conceptions of justification is relevant here.[23] According to the 'strong' conception, in discussing A's justification for p we are interested in the question of whether A has what we, *from our standpoint*, would

[23] A. I. Goldman, 'Strong and Weak Justification', in *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 2, *Epistemology*, J. E. Tomberlin (ed.) (Atascadero: Ridgeview 1989), 51–69. Reprinted in *Human Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Approaches*, P. K. Moser and A. vander Nat (eds) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd edition 1995).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

count as adequate grounds for believing p. We evaluate the rational relationship between the evidence A has and the proposition p, and we thereby ask whether that evidence constitutes sufficiently good reason for 'us' (i.e. for anyone with our epistemic standards) to believe p. We thereby apply the norms that we accept, not the perhaps rather different ones which A may follow.

According to Goldman's 'weak' conception of justification, however, in discussing whether A is justified in believing something we are taking it that A is not strongly justified, i.e. not justified by our epistemic standards; but we can still review A's state of epistemic conscience. We can ask whether A has lived up to her own intellectual lights and done as much as she could reasonably be expected to do in the particular cultural context and evidential situation she is in; we ask whether she is conforming to the epistemic rules she has been taught, or has implicitly learnt to follow.

There are variations on this theme: Alston has offered a notion of 'deontological' justification, which is not confined to cases where (as in Goldman's 'weak' case) we ourselves reject the epistemic norms involved.[24] We can apply this deontological notion to anyone, including members of our own culture, and ask whether someone has fulfilled her epistemic obligations, or (to put it negatively) whether she has avoided transgressing her epistemic norms. For the weak and deontological notions of justification, 'ought' implies 'can', in the sense that the relevant notion of rational obligation is defined by the epistemic norms that the subject explicitly or implicitly accepts.

We can thus allow that A has correctly followed her own epistemic norms, without endorsing them ourselves. Indeed, we may sometimes take it upon ourselves to say that because of A's limited education, or cultural indoctrination, he cannot be blamed for having such poor epistemic standards. Or we may even say of an individual that because of innate lack of the relevant sort of intelligence, he cannot be blamed for being unable to apply the norms, even if he has had some instruction in them. From a 'scientifically enlightened' point of view, it is common to dismiss beliefs in gods, witchcraft, miracles, astrology, the alleged defects of other races, or the rationality of buying lottery tickets. Conversely, someone who recognizes no knowledge except what is justified by the methods of the natural sciences might be said (by those who reject such 'scientism') to be missing out on the available knowledge of other minds, and of truths in ethics, aesthetics, or even religion. All such diag-

[24] See Alston's distinction between 'deontological' and 'evaluative' conceptions of epistemic justification in W. P. Alston, 'Concepts of Epistemic Justification', *The Monist*, **68** (1985), 57–89. Reprinted in Moser and van der Nat, op. cit., note 23.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

noses sound paternalistic, in that they categorize someone as having defective epistemic standards or practice, where the assessor assumes that he knows better about these matters. We may thus be inclined to describe the members of another culture, or those brought up in some subculture within our own society, as epistemically blameless ('How could they know any better, given their upbringing?'), but as having inadequate grounds for their beliefs.

These cases obviously involve the two standpoints, that of the subjects being assessed and that of the assessors of justification. But can Goldman's distinction between strong and weak justification (or Alston's distinction between evaluative grounds and deontological justification) be applied to ourselves, in first-person present contexts? The answer is clearly negative. One cannot coherently divorce one's judgment about the adequacy of one's present total evidence as grounds for p from the question of what one now rationally *ought* to believe about p. One cannot simultaneously take two standpoints towards oneself: on the one hand noting as a matter of psychological fact that one follows certain norms, and on the other hand accepting them as rationally guiding one's beliefs. To be sure, one may note failings in one's own previous epistemic dispositions—e.g. one might acknowledge how susceptibility to a pretty face and a winning smile has led one into false expectations in the past. But in so far as one brings this rueful self-knowledge to bear on one's present situation, one should see it as reason for scepticism about what the new pretty face is saying.

The same applies in the first-person plural. When a group of people debate what to believe about certain matters, they cannot simultaneously take a sociological and a normative view of themselves and their cognitive practices. They may acknowledge that they have in fact followed certain epistemic norms in the past (e.g. by believing what priests, gurus, presidents, politicians, lawyers, scientists, or medical 'experts' have said), but that does not entail an answer to the normative question whether they should continue to do so in future. Naturalistically-inclined philosophers from Hume to Wittgenstein and Quine are prone to switch in the course of a single discussion between factual questions about the causation of our beliefs and normative questions about what we rationally ought to believe. But such switching will be misleading if not acknowledged. It is vital to distinguish the factual and normative questions, even if one thinks that answers to one have implications for the other.[25]

How then are we to decide which epistemic norms to follow, in

[25] As the Edinburgh-based 'strong programme' in the sociology of science would have it. See D. Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2nd edition, 1991), Ch. I.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the face of alternative possibilities? The method of 'reflective equilibrium' has seemed to many to be the best we can do in such second-order inquiries. John Rawls introduced this term to designate the attempt to achieve harmony between our first-order judgments and our higher-order principles or norms.[26] The term is his invention, but the method it stands for is surely as old as philosophy—it can arguably be discerned in Socrates and Plato, Aristotle and Kant. A famous version of it (though not under that name) was given by Nelson Goodman a generation ago.[27]

The method can be applied to any topic of normative judgments—deductive logic, inductive inference, epistemology, ethics or politics. By a dialectical process, we are supposed to make mutual adjustments to try to achieve consistency between general rules and our 'intuitions'—our untutored judgments (or inclinations to judgement) about individual cases. Sometimes we may change a particular judgment to conform to a rule that we find plausible, but in other cases we may amend or reject a proposed rule because it implies judgments that we are unwilling to endorse. And we are to keep on making such adjustments, until—ideally—we reach a state of overall consistency and stability ('reflective equilibrium' as philosophical nirvana!). In epistemology we would thus hope to attain 'wide' reflective equilibrium between our reflectively endorsed judgments about the justification of particular beliefs and whatever set of general epistemic norms we are prepared to accept, after reflection.[28]

But the method of reflective equilibrium—and with it the whole project of 'analytic epistemology' understood as proposing to arbitrate between rival theories of justification on grounds of conceptual or linguistic analysis—has come under a newly sophisticated kind of sceptical attack.[29] Stich has objected that there is no guarantee that the attempt to formulate higher-order epistemological principles will produce 'correct' results. Surely, he says, 'we are not at all

[26] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford University Press, 1971) *9. See also B. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1912), end of Ch. II.

[27] N. Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947), Ch. III.2.

[28] For the notion of 'wide' reflective equilibrium, taking everything into account, see J. Rawls, 'The Independence of Moral Theory', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association,* **47** (1974), 5–22; and for a recent defence of this see N. Daniels, *Justice and Justification: Reflective Equilibrium in Theory and Practice.* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), Ch. 1.

[29] S.Stich, 'Reflective Equilibrium, Analytic Epistemology and the Problem of Cognitive Diversity', *Synthese* **74** (1988), 391–413, reprinted in Moser and vander Nat, op. cit., note 23.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

inclined to say that a person is justified in using any inferential principle—however bizarre it may be—simply because it accords with his reflective inferential practice.'[30] For example, the gambler who infers in accordance with the Monte Carlo fallacy might reflectively endorse that principle if formulated explicitly, but we surely do not want to say that it is thereby justified.

However we have to ask: who is to be the judge of the correctness of epistemic norms? It is a crucial feature of the example just given that it is a third-person context, involving two standpoints. It is assumed that we, who describe the gambler's first-order practice and his reflective formulation of his norms, know better than he does about his probability judgments: it is *we* who judge that the Monte Carlo fallacy is fallacious. Consider what happens if the above quotation is put into *first*- person form: 'Surely we are not at all inclined to say that we are justified in using any inferential principle—however bizarre it may be—simply because it accords with our reflective inferential practice.' This would surely involve some incoherence, if one describes an inferential principle as 'bizarre' while still being prepared, on reflection, to endorse it. What better justification of an inferential principle can we have than that it accords with the inferential practice *we* are prepared, after reflection, to accept? The way remains open to say that for any individual or group the only way of justifying a proposed set of epistemic norms is the method of wide reflective equilibrium.

Stich objects, once more: 'it is surely not going to turn out impossible for a person to reach wide reflective equilibrium on a set of principles and convictions that includes some quite daffy inferential rule … many people are deeply attached to outlandish philosophical views'.[31] But this again presupposes a superior standpoint from which a particular rule can be seen to be 'daffy' or 'outlandish', and whose standpoint is this? Who is to be the judge of 'daffiness'? The method of reflective equilibrium, widely construed so that *all* relevant considerations are to be taken into account, leaves no place for appeal to any External Examiner of unquestionable authority. Even if there were such a thing as a God's-eye-point-of-view, it would be of no use to us unless we could identify it as such, so that we could take account of it in our reflective judgments.

So if anyone—Stich or whoever else—suspects that a certain epistemic norm is incorrect, invalid or unreliable, let him say so, and let him propound whatever considerations seem to him to favour that view. All this can and should be fed in as more grist to the mill of reflective equilibrium. Let all such arguments be put to whoever

[30] Op cit., note 29.
[31] Op cit., note 30.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is doing the reflecting. It is then up to him or her (or the relevant epistemic group) to take these considerations into account and arrive at their own judgment in the light of them. At every stage of such ongoing philosophical inquiry, the currently accepted epistemological theory can only be *defeasibly* justified. There can be no infallible certainty even at the level of philosophical theory, no guarantee that a long-established consensus on principles will never be upset. A degree of openness to new considerations, at any level, must therefore be maintained.

Any conclusions reached by reflective equilibrium may be revisionary rather than descriptive. They need not conform to the conception of justification explicitly or emplicitly 'embraced by everyday thought or language',[32] or by the majority, or by the dominant voices, of the relevant 'cultural community'. Philosophers have sometimes been subversive of widely-held beliefs in the past, occasionally at considerable personal cost, especially in matters of politics or religion.[33] If 'analytic epistemology' is defined in terms of defending existing (linguistically-entrenched) beliefs or epistemic norms or social or cultural traditions, I have no wish to attach myself to its coat-tails.[34] But if it is understood as the search for reflective equilibrium in the widest possible sense, doing epistemology in the reflective, first-person way, seeking harmony between our general norms and our particular judgments, I see no reasonable alternative.

I would like to end by suggesting that Kant's best thoughts about philosophical methodology fit with this conception. Two centuries ago, Kant propounded his critical philosophy as providing a method of transcending sterile debates between rival dogmatists, and between dogmatists and sceptics. I submit that the basic pattern of metaphilosophical alternatives have not changed much in the interim, for all the 'sophistication' of our culture, and the professionalization and technicality of our philosophy. Dogmas of many kinds—religious, political, national, ethnic, psychological and gender-based—are still asserted with various degrees of aggression or politeness, crudity or cleverness.[35] The attractions of certainty, commitment, 'identity', and membership of a strongly-defined cultural and epistemic community, remain as strong as ever. And in reaction,

[32] Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition*, op cit., note 13, p. 58.

[33] These days, defenders of moral or religious epistemologies may find themselves going against the prevailing scientific *Zeitgeist*.

[34] In this, at least, I agree with Stich.

[35] The so-called 'global village' made possible by the electronic media all too often brings different views or cultures together only for confrontation, not communication or dialogue.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

second-order scepticism remains tempting. These days it tends to take the name of 'cultural relativism' or 'postmodernism', offering a supposedly ultra-sophisticated meta-point of view according to which no particular dogma or cultural tradition or set of epistemic norms can have any more justification than any other.

One of the most influential instigators of this trend was Nietzsche. 'The falseness of a judgment is to us not necessarily an objection to a judgment', he wrote, 'the question is to what extent it is life-advancing, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-breeding'. And he dismissed any pretension to normative epistemology with a sneer: 'Philosophy reduced to "theory of knowledge" ... that is philosophy at its last gasp, an end, an agony, something that arouses pity.'[36] But despite Nietzsche's scorn for theory of knowledge and for 'old Kant', however wittily expressed, I suggest that the earlier German philosopher is more profoundly right.

Nietzsche himself can be caught applying a double standard when on the one hand he describes a judgment as *false*, and on the other he says that it can have some sort of life-enhancing virtue (whatever that may be). But how did he know that the particular judgment is false? And how can he say that its falsity is no objection to it at all—can he really mean that truth does not matter *in any way*? Of course, one may believe a proposition, and take a risk in acting on it, while acknowledging that one's justification for it is *defeasible*, that it *may* later turn out to be false—such is our human epistemic situation, as fallible beings. But if Nietzsche thinks a particular claim *is* false (although possessing some kind of survival value), he should, if the argument of section IV is correct, have some idea of what *justifies* him in saying so. His contempt for epistemology threatens to leave him without a way of justifying his own judgments.[37] But nobody has an option of opting out of belief, and the justification of belief. Everyone has to make their own judgments, and be prepared to support them. If the standards of justification are challenged, debate can be joined at the meta-level by

[36] F. Nietzche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (1886), translated by R. J. Hollingdale, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1973), see *4, *204.

[37] Or indeed his rejection of 'herd-animal morality' (which he accuses Kant of rationalizing) in favour of some 'higher morality' (*Beyond Good and Evil*, *202, 186). Contrast Kant's dictum that although scepticism offers 'a resting place for human reason', in which we can reflect on the continuing battles between rival dogmatisms, and diagnose what is going on, it is 'no dwelling-place for permanent settlement'—I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), translated by N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), A761/B789.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press

asking the challenger what second-order justification he can offer for his alternative.

Kant wrote that the proper method to follow in thinking is: (1) to think for oneself; (2) to think from the standpoint of everyone else; (3) always to think consistently.[38] (1) and (2) may appear contradictory at first sight; but I suggest that they can be defended as deeply consistent. One must in the end make up one's mind for oneself—to do anything less, to accept some authority blindly, and believe and do whatever that authority says, is to be heteronomous, to be less than what one can and should be as a rational being. But it is still a requirement of rationality that one should take account of what any other rational being has to say on the topics one is concerned with. One is not obliged to *accept* what they say, of course, but it deserves a hearing, and some evaluation of its justification. Kant's principle (3) demands consistency over time: as a rational being, one is committed to applying the same general principles to various particular instances as they come up successively in experience. Changes of mind are allowed, of course, both on particular cases and on general principles. One is not irrevocably constrained by one's own past judgments, for one must be prepared to admit a mistake and withdraw a particular judgment—or even a general principle—in the light of new evidence or further argument. But consistency and reflective equilibrium must always be aimed for: inconsistency is necessarily a reproach, and a reason for revision.

I conclude that epistemology must, most fundamentally, be done in the first-person present, whether in the singular or the plural, both at the level of justifying particular judgments and in second-order reflection on epistemic norms. One must remain open to new considerations, and rationality in any one person requires the constant possibility of dialogue with others. This applies at the collective or cultural level too. Despite contemporary relativist tendencies, I submit that Kant's ideals—which of course have roots much further back, especially in Socrates and Plato—remain valid.

University of St. Andrews

[38] Kant gives this pithy formulation in an interlude to his analysis of judgments of taste in the *Critique of Judgment*, *40. He discusses philosophical method at greater length in the concluding 'Method' section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, see especially A707–712/B735–740 and A738–769/B766–797. For a sympathetic account of Kant's methodology see O.O'Neill, 'Vindicating Reason', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, P. Guyer (ed.) (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 280–308.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819199000637 Published online by Cambridge University Press