

possible. The resulting book manages to present a compact, but highly informative and enlightening, overview of (many of) the most relevant topics in the modern philosophy of language.

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JOSÉ L. ZALABARDO. 2012. *Scepticism and Reliable Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This book presents a deep and detailed reliabilist account of knowledge that attempts to overcome the central sceptical arguments (the regress argument, arguments based on sceptical hypotheses and the problem of the criterion), which is worthwhile on its own. It is an extremely suggestive and dense analysis that surpasses the task of offering a theory of knowledge and goes deep into our metaphysical outlook. The book has this double aspect. Firstly, it tries to concede to the sceptic as much as possible, with the result that he proposes a change in our way of conceiving the goal of cognition, that is, a middle position between realism and anti-realism, in order to defuse the sceptical threat. But, secondly, although the motivation is anti-sceptical, the account of knowledge presented is, as the author himself asserts, “largely independent of how it affects the prospects of the sceptical arguments” (p. viii).

In *Knowledge and its Limits*, Timothy Williamson jolted the philosophical community with a series of striking claims that prima facie seemed quite hard to accept, but which were so compellingly argued that it proved very difficult to reject them. These claims included among them, that knowledge is not to be analysed in terms of belief and justification, but that it can be used to elucidate the latter concepts, and also that knowledge is a mental state. One has quite the same feeling regarding Zalabardo’s book. It is full of striking claims, but so well argued that it is difficult not to end up convinced of their truth, their initial implausibility notwithstanding.

Zalabardo argues for a reliabilist account of knowledge, according to which evidence is not necessary for knowing. This allows us, on his view, to block those sceptical lines of argument we have just referred to, since all of them rest on what he calls the *evidential* constraint, i.e. that knowledge requires adequate evidence. Particularly, he maintains that evidence is not necessary for non-inferential knowledge. It is fair to say at this point that the author conceives evidence in a propositional way: only propositions can be evidence. This may help to understand why non-inferential knowledge is possible without evidence. His account of knowledge is based on Nozick’s truth-tracking account, but in a revised form (construed in terms of conditional probabilities, instead of counterfactuals and possible worlds), and restricted to a kind of non-inferential knowledge. So the claim is: it is not necessary for inferential knowledge to track the truth. But some qualifications are in order. Whereas Nozick’s truth tracking

amounts to *sensitivity* (Nozick's third clause is: "If  $p$  were false,  $S$  would not believe that  $p$ ") plus *adherence*, as he calls Nozick's fourth clause ("If  $p$  were true,  $S$  would believe that  $p$ "), Zalabardo maintains, instead, that only sensitivity, not adherence, is necessary for the truth-tracking kind of knowledge. So conceived, truth tracking is a kind of non-inferential knowledge. In addition, there are two other kinds of knowledge which do not (need to) track the truth: inferential knowledge and the so-called knowledge by default, whose object are standing beliefs, i.e. beliefs that do not result from the operation of cognitive mechanisms, or, as he puts it, those which we have an innate predisposition to form "that is largely independent of input, but we are not equipped to detect [their] truth value" (p. 137). Standing beliefs are "that our experiences are produced by the kind of physical world that we take ourselves to inhabit [...], that objects continue to exist when we are not perceiving them" (p. 137), etc. With regard to these beliefs truth is a sufficient condition for knowledge. But, for them to be knowledge it is not necessary that they track the truth, not even that we have adequate evidence to support them.

Concerning inferential knowledge, evidence ( $E$ ) has itself to be known; and also has to be known that  $E$  gives an adequate support to  $p$ . That is, in order to know that  $p$  on the basis of evidence  $E$ ,  $S$  has to know that  $E$  and also that  $E$  adequately supports  $p$ . Support is an objective probabilistic relation:  $p$  is very likely to be true if  $E$  is true (chapter 4 is devoted to further specify the conditions of this relation of adequate support).  $S$  cannot know that  $p$  on the basis of  $E$  if either  $E$  is not true or the required objective probability does not obtain. It is not easy to argue for this without commitment to an exaggerated intellectualist model and also to either an infinite regress or a vicious circle, but Zalabardo succeeds in presenting it in such a way that it is not obvious at all that he falls prey of these problems.  $E$  can be known non-inferentially, then both the regress and the circle can be prevented, and it is not required that the belief in  $E$  supports  $p$  is a conscious belief.

Chapter 5 examines this model of inferential knowledge and tests it against some classical puzzles, as Gettier's counterexamples. Since in Gettier's original cases the inference is based on a false premise, they cannot count as knowledge. Probably this is one of the reasons for requiring that the belief in evidence is true. Since the beliefs in the premises are false, they cannot be knowledge and cannot then give adequate support to the inferential belief, which cannot consequently be knowledge either. The problem is that we might devise cases in which the evidence is not false, which leads Zalabardo to a slight modification on his account of inferential knowledge. According to him, what happens in Gettier's cases is that "the contentious proposition can be made true by several recognizably distinct states of affairs" (p. 91). So, he adds a new constraint to his account: the requirement that evidence that makes  $p$  true is acquired in the way that it actually made  $p$  true, i.e., that the evidential support is not *misplaced*. The problem, in my opinion, is that this proviso cannot solve other Gettier-style cases of inferentially justified true belief, particularly those in which the *prima facie* reason for believing  $p$  is defeated by an unknown defeater which in turn is also defeated. In these cases the way in which  $p$  is made true is the same that evidence indicates; however, it is not clear that the subject knows that  $p$ . For instance, imagine that John,

a laboratory assistant, believes that the first flask on the shelf of a particular display cabinet contains acid, because yesterday he dipped a litmus paper in its liquid and it turned red, and afterwards he locked the cabinet. However, unbeknownst to John, Peter, an envious colleague, stole the key and substituted that flask of acid for an identical flask full of water. Nevertheless, just a few minutes ago, Peter has regretted having done that, and has restored the original flask to its place, before secretly returning the key. Neither his reformulation of misplacement, “E’s support for H is *misplaced* just in case there is a true proposition X such that E doesn’t confirm H & X” (p. 93), nor even his added principle PI: “S can have inferential knowledge of H based on the evidence provided by E only if S’s belief in E confirms H” (p. 98), can avoid this kind of counterexamples. Moreover, the introduction of PI has the (unwelcome) consequence that knowledge closure is not universally valid, as Zalabardo honestly recognizes.

After offering his thoroughly elaborated account of knowledge, Zalabardo comes back, in chapter 7, to check it against the sceptical challenge. The output is the one that might be foreseen. Reliabilist accounts get to deal with the sceptical challenge by giving up the iterative principle of knowledge (S knows that p *iff* S knows that S knows that p). Hence, on this view, one can know even if one does not know that one knows. But then, even though reliabilist accounts can respond to the kinds of sceptical arguments addressed in the first chapter (the regress argument, those arguments based on sceptical hypotheses and the problem of the criterion), they are unable to cope with the sceptical challenge concerning reflective knowledge. As Zalabardo contends, the former sceptical arguments were unsound, since one of their premises (the evidential constraint) was false. But this latter type of sceptical challenge “doesn’t rest on any assumptions that wouldn’t be licensed by [my] account of knowledge” (p. 163). Hence, according to the account of knowledge he offers (which aims to be the best available version of reliabilism), even when we know that p, we cannot know that our belief that p is true (conversely, that we do not falsely believe that p), then it cannot defuse scepticism. However, insofar as the reliabilist account is correct, Zalabardo argues, the sceptical difficulties result, “not from an incorrect analysis of knowledge, but from a mistaken construal of cognition” (p. 166), and he closes the book (chapter 8) with an interesting outline of a “middle position” between realism and anti-realism. A metaphysical outlook, as we said at the beginning, that deserves to be attended with care, as the whole book does.

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