

# Epistemai

Volume I

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A CONSIDERATION OF DAVID LEWIS'  
NOTIONS OF CONTINGENCY IN  
RELATION TO HIS THEORY OF POSSIBLE  
WORLDS

Sarah Alberstein

**Abstract**

In this paper, I will consider the tensions raised by the relationship between David Lewis' notions of contingency and his Theory of Possible Worlds. I first argue that both of these components are necessary facets of Lewis' theories. I will then argue that in order to maintain causal isolation in his Theory of Possible Worlds and his understandings of contingency, specifically that contingent knowledge requires causal interaction to be known, Lewis is limited to language which only employs existentially quantified description. Lewis takes possible worlds to be beyond our physical realm, and so there is no causal interaction between our world and possible worlds. Yet, Lewis' theory of contingency requires both that we have an insight into possible worlds and that we have a causal interaction with them. I conclude that this limitation reduces the potency of Lewis' theory overall as it prevents Lewis from using vivid, descriptive terms which can be imagined, understood, or perceived.

**Introduction**

In his theory of possible worlds, David Lewis emphasizes the non-existence of any causal relationships between worlds. This lack of causality constitutes a fundamental piece of Lewis' definition of possible worlds. Lewis also makes clear that a person existing in one particular possible world is able to know of an entirely different

possible world. The relationship between knowledge and causal isolation, and the metaphysical results these concepts yield, pose a potential threat to Lewis' theory. This paper will proceed by examining this relationship, considering the ways in which Lewis has previously addressed related objections, and then giving a response to Lewis' treatment of such objections.

### **The Benefit of Causal Isolation between Possible Worlds**

In Lewis' theory of possible worlds he states, "[possible worlds] are isolated: there are no spatiotemporal relations at all between things that belong to different worlds. Nor does anything that happens at one world cause anything to happen at another. Nor do they overlap; they have no parts in common..."<sup>1</sup> This piece of Lewis' definition of possible worlds characterizes those worlds as entirely isolated from one another. Importantly, Lewis notes the lack of causality between worlds. This lack of causality plays an important role in Lewis' theory as it prevents philosophically toxic self-causation. According to Thomas Morris, "the very idea of self-causation... is almost universally characterized as absurd, incoherent, or worse."<sup>2</sup> Lewis writes "if worlds are causally isolated, nothing outside a world ever makes a world; and nothing inside makes the whole of a world, for that would be an impossible kind of self-causation."<sup>3</sup> This is to say that a possible world's existence is just so – there is nothing within or outside of that world which ignites its existence. By removing causal relationships between worlds, and thus removing the possibility of self-causation, Lewis avoids potential absurdity or incoherence in his theory. In this way, lack of trans-world causation is an essential piece of Lewis' Theory of Possible Worlds.

### **The Necessity of Knowledge of Other Possible Worlds**

A second essential piece of Lewis' Theory of Possible Worlds is the ability of individuals existing in one possible world to know of other possible worlds. Not only is this piece essential, but it is also constantly exhibited by the very existence of the theory itself. To deny the knowledge of other possible worlds is a direct affront to the existence of the theory; as it is the case that in order to understand or



even comprehend Lewis' theory, one must be able to conceive of other possible worlds. It is impossible to deny the ability to know of possible worlds while simultaneously interpreting Lewis' theory in any capacity or fashion. More pointedly, it would be impossible for Lewis to even put forth his Theory of Possible Worlds if he denied the ability of people existing in possible worlds to know of other worlds. Therefore, to deny this ability yields yet another absurdity. So, in addition to the lack of a causal relationship between worlds, Lewis must also accept knowledge of other worlds.

### **Benacerraf's Dilemma**

Each of these components of Lewis' Theory of Possible Worlds are essential to this theory. To deny either would yield absurdity and thus invalidate Lewis' entire theory as a whole. However, it seems that the combination of these components points to an objectionable piece of Lewis' theory. This objection is motivated by Benacerraf's dilemma regarding mathematical intuition, which is as follows:

Benacerraf's argument starts from the premise that our best theory of knowledge is the causal theory of knowledge. It is then noted that according to platonism, abstract objects are not spatially or temporally localized, whereas flesh and blood mathematicians are spatially and temporally localized. Our best epistemological theory then tells us that knowledge of mathematical entities should result from causal interaction with these entities.<sup>4</sup>

This argument puts forth the premise that the relationship between spatiotemporally located mathematicians and abstract, non-spatiotemporally located mathematical concepts must be a causal one. As Lewis puts it in his restatement of the objection, "the trouble is that knowledge requires some sort of causal connection between the knower and the subject matter of his knowledge."<sup>5</sup> When applied to Lewis' Theory of Possible Worlds, this dictates that in order for a 'knower' ("Person P") in one possible world ("Possible World P\*") to know of the subject matter of a distinct possible world ("Possible World R"), there must be a causal connection between Possible World P\* and Possible World R, specifically between Person P, of Possible World P\*, and Possible World R. This poses a problem for the causal isolation component of Lewis' theory as it suggests that

Person P existing in Possible World P\* can have a causal connection with World R. Here, Person P is a 'member' of Possible World P\* and thus can be considered part of World P\*. Such an established causal relationship between a part of World P\* and an entirely separate world, World R, suggests there is at least some degree of causality between Possible World P\* and Possible World R.

### **Lewis' Response to Benacerraf's Dilemma**

Lewis responds to this objection by further considering the relationship between spatiotemporally located individuals and non-spatiotemporally located mathematical concepts. Lewis states,

Even if there does turn out to be some ontologically innocent way to understand mathematics, still we have judged...that we did not require any such thing before we could have mathematical knowledge; we would have had mathematical knowledge even if it had been knowledge of a causally inaccessible realm of special objects.<sup>6</sup>

In this piece of text, Lewis suggests that to be outside of the realm of direct inspection constitutes causal isolation. Here, direct inspection is taken to mean explicit contact with an object. Lewis posits that this manner of contact with mathematics is impossible as mathematical notions inhabit only a conceptual, non-spatiotemporally located existence. However, while mathematical concepts may be outside the realm of direct inspection, they are still known. Therefore, it must be possible to know at least some non-spatiotemporally concepts while simultaneously being causally isolated from them. In order to maintain Lewis' causal isolation between possible worlds, possible worlds must also be outside of the realm of direct inspection. However, if Lewis' analysis of causally isolated mathematical knowledge is correct, then when applied to possible worlds, this lack of direct inspection does not prevent a person in one possible world from knowing of another causally isolated possible world.

### **The Abstract versus the Concrete**

However, it seems that Lewis' response is not entirely satisfactory. Another objection arises which proceeds by distinguishing between the abstract and the concrete. There is an

obvious and important distinction between mathematical concepts and possible worlds - mathematical concepts are non-spatiotemporally located concepts whereas possible worlds are spatiotemporally located regions. This is to say mathematical concepts are abstract where possible worlds are concrete. This distinction seems to weaken Lewis' parallelism between a mathematician and the mathematical concepts she inspects, and Person P and Person P's knowledge of Possible World R. One cannot reasonably assume that the relationship of concrete to abstract (mathematician to concept) is the same as, or even analogous to, the relationship of concrete to concrete (Person P to Possible World R.) In order to build upon this assumption, one would have to provide justification for their parallelism; which Lewis does not provide.

### **Contingent versus Non-Contingent**

Lewis addresses this objection by insinuating that this distinction is not a pertinent one. Rather, Lewis suggests that the relevant distinction is that between contingent and non-contingent (i.e. necessary). Lewis states, "...the department of knowledge that requires causal acquaintance is not demarcated by its concrete subject matter. It is demarcated instead by its contingency."<sup>7</sup> In other words, while there may be some areas of knowledge which are incompatible with causal isolation, there are other types of knowledge which require no causal interaction whatsoever.

According to Lewis, the determinant of causal interaction is contingency. Lewis posits that contingent knowledge requires an element of causal interaction where necessary knowledge does not. He uses the example of donkeys to illuminate this claim:

Our contingent knowledge that there are donkeys at our world requires causal acquaintance with the donkeys, or at least with what produces them. Our necessary knowledge that there are donkeys at some worlds - even talking donkeys, donkeys with dragons as worldmates, and what have you - does not require causal acquaintance either with the donkeys or with what produces them. It requires no observation of our surroundings, because it is no part of our knowledge of

which possible world is ours and which possible individuals are we.<sup>8</sup>

According to Lewis, our knowledge of the existence of donkeys in our world is contingent and requires a causal relationship with the donkeys. This knowledge is contingent because our world could have possibly had no donkeys, and this knowledge entails causality because we cannot know that there are donkeys in our world until we causally interact with said donkeys; even if through simple observation. However, the knowledge of donkeys at some worlds is considered to be non-contingent modal knowledge. According to Lewis' Theory of possible worlds, there exists a real universe containing each possibility. For the phrase 'donkeys possibly exist' to be true requires the existence of a possible world wherein donkeys exist. It is neither compatible nor possible for the phrase 'there is no possible world where donkeys exist' to also be true. Thus, the knowledge of donkeys on some possible world is necessary and does not require any causal interaction in order to be known. In essence Lewis rejects the necessity of causal interaction in obtaining knowledge of concrete objects, and instead puts forth the premise that causal interaction is necessary for obtaining contingent knowledge.

### **The Fault in Lewis' Distinction between Contingent and Necessary**

This response still seems unsatisfactory as Lewis' response relying on the distinction between contingent and necessary seems to be incompatible with his discussion of contingency throughout the chapter of his book titled *Modal Realisms at Work: Properties*. In this section, Lewis states the following:

The full membership of [a] set [of instances] does not vary from world to world. What does vary from world to world is the subset we get by restricting ourselves to the world in question. That is how the number of instances is contingent; for instance, it is contingently true that the property has no instances. Further, it is a contingent matter whether any particular individual has the property. Take Brownie, another-worldly talking donkey. Brownie himself is... a member of the set; hence... an instance of the property. But it is contingent whether Brownie talks; Brownie has counterparts

who do and counterparts who don't. In just the same way, it is contingent whether Brownie belongs to the set: Brownie has counterparts who do and counterparts who don't. That is how it is contingent whether Brownie has the property..... a pair may stand in a relation contingently, if it has counterpart pairs that do and counterpart pairs that don't...<sup>9</sup>

Lewis describes contingency as “what is contingent is the case at some [possible worlds] but not at others”.<sup>10</sup> This is to say, contingency encompasses variation in presentation and instances across possible worlds.

In the case of Brownie, the other-worldly talking donkey, the contingency of Brownie's properties depends on their presentation in Brownie's counterparts in other possible worlds. It would seem then that knowledge of Brownie's properties is a contingent knowledge. Thus, based on Lewis' defense of causal isolation via the distinction between contingency and necessity, this contingent knowledge would require causal acquaintance or interaction with Brownie's counterparts on other possible worlds to be known. Causal interaction with Brownie's counterparts would violate Lewis' causal isolation of worlds. However, as previously mentioned, Lewis has posited that particular features Brownie possesses are contingent, and justifies this by appealing to the variation of that feature in Brownie's counterparts.

In other words, Lewis previously puts forth the premise that contingent knowledge requires causal interaction in order to be known. In this consideration of Brownie and Brownie's counterparts, Lewis puts forth an additional premise which states that knowledge of Brownie's other-worldly counterparts is contingent knowledge. Thus, knowledge of Brownie's other-worldly counterparts requires causal interaction in order to be known. However, such causal interaction would violate Lewis' principle of causal isolation between worlds. Lewis cannot maintain causal isolation between worlds while simultaneously claiming that in order to know of Brownie's otherworldly counterparts, one must causally interact with said counterparts as such interaction would mandate a degree of interaction between worlds. These claims are incompatible.

### **Questions and Considerations**

If Lewis is to maintain his principle of causal isolation, then he must reject the necessity of causal interaction in knowing Brownie's otherworldly counterparts. In addition to violating his premise dictating the necessity of causal interaction in having contingent knowledge, this raises a series of important questions: How can Lewis know that these features are contingent if he cannot causally interact with Brownie's counterparts (and thus discover their variation across worlds)? If we cannot causally interact with Brownie's counterparts, how can we know *any* of the features of Brownie's counterparts across worlds? If we cannot know the features of Brownie's counterparts across worlds, how can we know that there is any variation in features across worlds? If we cannot know that there is any variation of Brownie's features across worlds, how can we know that a particular feature of Brownie's is a contingent feature? Each of these questions point to a seemingly irreconcilable tension between causal isolation and Lewis' proposed notions of contingency. In considering these relevant components of David Lewis' notions of contingency, and his Theory of Possible Worlds, it is impossible to know anything about Brownie the talking donkey contingently. Thus, David Lewis' Theory of Possible Worlds must proceed without dependence on the example of Brownie the talking donkey, or any other analogous object, to illustrate his claims.

### **Conclusion**

In removing the applicability to specific otherworldly objects, Lewis limits the scope of understanding to include only purely abstracted examples. Thus, Lewis is only able to discuss things of which we have no capacity to imagine, understand, or perceive. In other words, Lewis' possible worlds are not imaginable and carry no tangible understanding. While this response fortifies the compatibility between Lewis' notions of contingency and his Theory of Possible Worlds, it limits the scope of understanding in the process. This, in turn, reduces the pungency of Lewis' theory as it sacrifices practical tangibility. While this response is philosophically and logically sound, Lewis must consider to what degree this lack of concrete understanding and applicability weakens the force of his arguments overall.

**Notes**

1. Lewis 1986, p2.
2. Morris 1989, p174.
3. Lewis 1986, p3.
4. Horsten 2018.
5. Lewis 1986, p109.
6. Lewis 1986, p109.
7. Lewis 1986, p111.
8. Lewis 1986, p112.
9. Lewis 1986, p50-51.
10. Lewis 1986, p7.

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- Morris, Thomas V. *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1989.

## In Defense of the Transmission Model of Testimonial Knowledge

By Andrew Ebrahem

### **I. Introduction**

One way we come to acquire knowledge is through testimony. Usually, this is thought of in terms of knowledge being transmitted from person A to person B. But, in order for something to be transferred from A to B, A must be in possession of it. Under this transmission model of testimonial knowledge, two conditions must be satisfied: “(1) that hearers can acquire knowledge via the testimony of others; and (2) that speakers must themselves have the knowledge in question in order to pass it to their hearers.”<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Lackey argues that this transmission model of testimonial knowledge is mistaken. According to her, a hearer can come to know that p, even if the testifier does not know that p. She does this by giving us cases where she believes a person A comes to know that p through the testimony of person B, where B lacks the knowledge that p. This implies that testimonial knowledge is not merely transferrable but is also generative. So, it is possible for testimonials to generate knowledge in person B which is not in person A. My purpose in this paper is to show that these cases fail to adequately show that transmission of knowledge can be generative. Rather, I will argue that all Lackey can show is that transmission is generative of justified true belief.

### **II. Lackey’s Argument**

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1. Jennifer Lackey. "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission." *The Philosophical*

*Quarterly* 49, no. 197 (October 1999): 471,

<http://www.jstor.org.ezp3.lib.umn.edu/stable/2660497>.



Lackey's main aim is to show that someone might testify to knowledge which he lacks. In order to do this, she has to disprove the two claims of knowledge as transmission. The first is "(2) For every speaker S and hearer H, if H comes to know that p via S's testifying that p, then S must know that p."<sup>2</sup> That is to say, if John will come to know that there is no longer any milk in the fridge through the testimony of Mary, then it is necessary for Mary to also know that there is no milk in the fridge. This claim, however, is too strong. There is a second claim (2\*), which is weaker than (2): "For every testimonial chain of knowledge C, in order for a hearer H in C to come to know that p via the testimony of a speaker S in C, at least the first speaker S<sub>1</sub> in C must know that p (in some non-testimonial way)."<sup>3</sup> Under this view, Mary does not herself need to know that there is no milk in the fridge, but, in order for her testimony to be knowledge she must have been told by someone else who does know that there is no milk in the fridge. For the sake of this paper, I want to focus on how Lackey tries to show that (2\*) is false.

If Lackey is to show that (2\*) is false, then she must show how it is possible for someone in a chain of testimony to gain knowledge even if the first person in the chain does not have knowledge. Lackey's definition of knowledge is "S knows that p iff (i) p; (ii) S believes that p; (iii) S is justified in believing that p."<sup>4</sup> So, a person counts as not knowing that p if p is not true, he lacks a belief in p, or if he is not justified in believing that p. According to Lackey, a necessary condition for testimonial knowledge is that "the hearer must not have any defeaters for S's report that p."<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this paper, I want to focus on what Lackey calls doxastic defeaters.

A doxastic defeater (henceforth defeater) is a "proposition D which is believed by S to be true, yet indicates that S's belief that p is either false or unreliably formed or sustained."<sup>6</sup> A doxastic defeater is

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<sup>2</sup> Lackey, 473.

<sup>3</sup> Lackey, 473.

<sup>4</sup> Lackey, 473.

<sup>5</sup> Lackey, 474.

<sup>6</sup> Lackey, 474.

thus a belief which one holds that undermines a different belief. For example, suppose I see a giant pink zebra and form the belief (p) “I see a giant pink zebra in the room”. However, what is said can also apply to other defeaters. See the other two defeaters and how they function. Suppose also that I have the belief (D) “I am hallucinating.” Here D functions in such a way as to make me not believe that p. The important thing to note here is that D does not have to be true in order for it to be a successful defeater. Regardless of whether or not I actually took the hallucinogen, if I believe that I did, that belief defeats my belief that p.

With that in mind, let us proceed to Lackey’s first example. The example asks us to imagine someone, let us call him Thomas, who is grappling with a skeptical worry. He is wondering whether he is actually a brain in a vat, hooked up with wires to get this perceptual world which is all a figment of his imagination. Suppose that Thomas cannot rule out whether he is a brain in a vat and as a result proceeds to believe that he is indeed a brain in a vat. This skeptical worry, thus, led to a belief that undermines his belief in an external world. And if he does not believe that the external world exists, then Thomas does know that the external world exists.

Now suppose that Thomas is sitting in the park as he is contemplating this external world skepticism further. He is then approached by Ruth who is seeking information about the closest restaurant to the park. She proceeds to ask Thomas and he tells her that the restaurant is around the corner. Now let us assume that the restaurant is in fact around the corner. Thomas relays his belief regarding the location of the restaurant to Ruth but does not tell her about his belief that he is a brain in a vat. This means that Ruth does not get the belief that serves as a defeater for Thomas. Furthermore, let us also assume that Ruth has good reason to believe Thomas’ testimony is true. Perhaps she knows from experience that when she asks people for direction they usually give her correct information. This means that Ruth is justified in believing that the restaurant is around the corner. So, Ruth forms the justified true belief that the restaurant is. For remember, in order for him to know that the external world exists, a necessary condition is that he must also believe that it does exist around the corner. This, according to Lackey’s definition of knowledge is enough to allow us to claim that Ruth knows where the restaurant is. Now, remember, the reason why

Thomas failed to have knowledge is because his belief that he is a brain in a vat served as a defeater of his belief in an external world. And, if he fails to believe that the external world exists, he fails to know that it exists; and by extension also fails to know that the restaurant is around the corner. Ruth, however, does not possess the defeater that Thomas has. And thus, she has knowledge of where the restaurant is. And she attained this knowledge through the testimony of Thomas. The strength of Lackey's example is that she shows how a "speaker can have doxastic defeaters which hearers do not have."<sup>7</sup> And, since the hearer fails to have the defeater, they can come to know that *p* while the testifier fails to know that *p*. Furthermore, this works in a chain of testimony. For suppose Ruth finds someone else on the road, Philip, who is also asking for the closest restaurant and she directs him. She would be giving him knowledge of where the closest restaurant is, and both Philip and Ruth would know the location of the closest restaurant while Thomas fails to know.

### III. Gettier Cases

Lackey's example would have been able to show that testimony is generative of knowledge were it not for the Gettier problem. Gettier was able to show how knowledge must be more than merely a justified true belief. To see how Gettier cases work, he asked us to suppose that two people, Smith and Jones, are interviewing for a job. Suppose that the hiring manager said in front of Smith that Jones will get the job. Now, before entering the company, Jones has seen that Smith has ten coins in his pocket. So, based on the word of the hiring manager, Mark forms the belief that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. He is justified in believing this since Jones does have ten coins in his pocket. Suppose further than unbeknownst to Smith, he himself had ten coins in his pocket, and he is the one who gets the job. It seems then that Smith had a justified true belief that failed to be knowledge. It was true that the person getting the job had ten coins in his pocket. And, Smith was justified in believing that the person getting the job will have ten coins in his pocket. However, Smith's belief that the person getting the job will have ten coins in his pocket was not based on a correct inference. It was based on his belief that Jones will get the job, when in fact Smith is the one that got the job. And, it was

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unknown to Smith that he himself had ten coins in his pocket.

#### **IV. Lackey's Gettier Transmission**

Now, the question we have to ask is whether Ruth comes to have knowledge that the restaurant is around the corner when Thomas tells her so. I will argue that she fails to know because the testimony given by Thomas is a Gettier-like testimony and thus is not enough to be knowledge. To do this, I will show that it is merely an accident that Ruth's justified true belief, which she gained from the testimony of Thomas, is correct. To illustrate this point, suppose you are sick and you go to the doctor. The doctor without reading your charts or asking you any questions, tells you that you have arthritis. Now suppose you do not know that the doctor did not read your charts and so you have strong reason to believe that the doctor is correct. Now if in fact you do have arthritis, we cannot say that the doctor knew this. But, you are justified in believing that you have arthritis, since usually doctors are reliable. However, it would be counter-intuitive to say that you know that you have arthritis, even though the conditions of a justified true belief are present, it was by mere luck that the doctor diagnosed you correctly. In both cases, of the doctor and Thomas, the hearer believes that the person telling him is a reliable source, although the source is in fact not reliable. This is because a source which fails to know that  $p$ , cannot reliably testify that  $p$ . And even though the hearer has a justified true belief that  $p$ , they fail to know that  $p$ . This is because the testifier's belief actualizes in the real world by mere luck. And as a result, the justified true belief that the hearer comes to form is based on luck. To further show how this is an example of Gettier, it has to be that Thomas' testimony being true is a matter of luck. For in the Gettier case, the person coming to know that  $p$ , infers his justified true belief from a false premise and it is thus true by luck. The same also occurs when the hearer acquires a justified true belief based on the testimony of someone who lacks knowledge that  $p$ . The fact that Thomas testified to the whereabouts of the restaurant, and not to the skeptical worries, is itself a matter of luck. This is because it is equally plausible to think that he could have chosen to testify to his belief that we are brains in a vat. It seems reasonable to imagine a scenario where Ruth asks for directions and Thomas answers, "How should I know? We are all brains in a vat!" Now, one might push back on this point by saying that Thomas' answer was prompted by Ruth's question. But, such an

attempt, and in fact any attempt to show that 'Thomas' testimony is not by luck, assumes that he had a reason to testify on the whereabouts of the restaurant. But, if he had a reason to pick one belief over another then it seems like he had a defeater to the belief that we are brains in a vat. Let me expand on this point further. Thomas has two beliefs (x) that we are brains in a vat, and (y) that the restaurant is around the corner. In this scenario, x acts as a defeater for y and thus causes Thomas to fail to believe, and by extension know, y. Now, Thomas' testimony to Ruth could have either been due to chance or based on a reason. Suppose one wants to argue that Thomas' answer to Ruth was not based by chance but was prompted by her question, or intentionally chosen by Thomas for any other reason. If this is the case, that is if Thomas had a reason to choose to testify to y and not x, then he must have intentionally chosen to do this. But, if he had an intention to report y, then it must be because he believed that y is the correct answer to Ruth's question. He must have thought about the question and realized that y is the appropriate response. But, if he believed that y is the correct response, then he must have also believed that the restaurant is indeed around the corner. And it thus seems that a defeater for x, namely the belief that y is the correct answer to the question. Now, one might push back and claim that Thomas was trying to deceive Ruth. But, if that is true, then again Ruth's justified true belief is based on an unreliable premise and is thus based on luck.

So, in order for the example to make sense, it must be that Thomas himself chose to testify that y instead of x based on luck. Given that he had 'access to' two beliefs, he arbitrarily chose to tell Ruth that the restaurant is around the corner, as opposed to telling her that we are brains in a vat. But, now if this is the case, then it is by mere luck that Ruth comes to believe that the restaurant is around the corner. This is because it was just as likely that Thomas would have told her his belief that we are brains in a vat. And mere luck cannot produce knowledge. So, Ruth justified true belief cannot count as knowledge since it being true about the world is based on luck. Similar to the arthritis patient who has justified true belief but cannot be said to know that he has arthritis, since that belief is based on the luck of the diagnosis.

Now, let us consider a second example. Suppose that there is a student named Anthony, who is learning Arabic. Let us assume that

Anthony heard the phrase “The kabob restaurant is around the corner” in a homework exercise and did not understand what it means. So, Anthony decides that he will ask his Arabic teacher what it means. On his way to class, Anthony repeats that phrase out loud in Arabic so as not to forget it. Now, as he is walking, he is approached by a woman who only speaks Arabic. She wanted to know where the closest kabob restaurant was.

So, as Anthony was approaching, she asks in Arabic, “Where is the kabob restaurant?” Anthony

does not hear her, but he keeps repeating the phrase “The kabob restaurant is around the corner”

in Arabic. Suppose that there is, in fact, a kabob restaurant around the corner. We would not say

that this woman knew that there is a kabob restaurant around the corner. Although the woman

comes to have a justified true belief, she cannot be said to have knowledge of the location of the

kebob restaurant. This is because it was due to luck that the restaurant was around the corner. In this case, Anthony was not intentionally testifying because he did not know (comprehend) what he was saying. Yet, the woman comes to have a justified true belief. This scenario is the same as that of Thomas. Both testifiers do not know, albeit in a different sense, what they are testifying, yet their testimony is true. If the woman who speaks Arabic does not have knowledge, then Ruth also does not have knowledge. This is because the justified belief that they both attain is true by mere luck.

So, in examples where a speaker does not know that  $p$  but a hearer comes to form a justified true belief that  $p$ , based on the testimony of the speaker, the hearer’s belief cannot be said to be an instance of knowledge. This is because it is due to mere luck that the testimony of the speaker is true. The mere luck of the testimony occurs in two ways. The first is that it was by mere luck that the testifier testified the true belief and not the belief that served as a defeater. And, this is similar to the Gettier case where Smith comes to form the justified true belief that the person who gets the job has ten coins in his pocket. The second way in which the testimony is true based on luck is that since the testifier does not know that  $p$ , it

cannot be that they are a reliable source. If the person does not know that  $p$ , and in fact have a defeater to undermine their belief that  $p$ , they might be in error whenever they testify that  $p$ . This is similar to the scenario of Anthony who testifies but it is due to complete luck that he happens to be true.

### **V. Lackey's Reply**

Now Lackey might push back against these cases being examples of luck or examples of Gettier cases. This is because the person testifying does not tell the hearer about the defeater. However, I would claim that Ruth coming to know the location of the restaurant is based on luck in two ways. The first is that it is based on the arbitrariness of the decision regarding the content of transmission. If Thomas had told her of his skepticism, or of both the location and the skepticism, then Lackey would agree that this is not an instance of knowledge. In order for the belief that we are brains in a vat to undermine the belief the location of the restaurant, the two beliefs have to be on the same footing (that is the defeater needs to be believed as strongly as the belief that the defeater defeats). So, it seems by complete luck that one was transmitted and not the other. This is similar to the doctor case, where the diagnosis was done arbitrarily. Even if it is true, it is not an instance of knowledge. The second way in which this is an example of luck is Thomas cannot know the location of the restaurant. So, the restaurant being where he actually says it would be is a matter of luck. And so, if that is the basis for the justified true belief of Ruth, it cannot be said that Ruth actually knows where the restaurant is. She has a good guess but lacks knowledge.

Lackey might reply to Anthony's case by saying that intention matters in testimony. Anthony had no intention to testify, so he was not actually testifying and that is why the woman does not know. But, if that is the case, then Thomas had the intention of testifying. And if we say that, then there must have been a reason he chose one belief and not the other. But if there is a reason, as I said earlier then that reason would make Thomas believe in the location of the restaurant, since it would give priority to the belief of the location over the belief in the external world skepticism. But, the whole scenario is built on him not believing in the external world, for if he did he would know. So, it seems like Anthony's example is clearly one in which the

hearer's justified true belief cannot be said to be knowledge if the testifier does not know it.

## **VI. Conclusion**

My purpose in this paper was to show that Lackey has failed to argue properly that

testimony can be generative of knowledge. Lackey's weakness is in thinking that the justified true belief that the hearer acquires counts as knowledge. However, she does not acknowledge that it is due to mere chance that the testifier is right. As a result, her counterexample cases are species of Gettier cases. And therefore, at most, Lackey's argument shows us that testimony can be generative of justified true belief, but she fails to show us that it can be generative of knowledge. And therefore, I have shown that the transmission model of testimonial knowledge should not be disregarded.



Endnotes

1. Jennifer Lackey. "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 49, no. 197 (October 1999): 471, <http://www.jstor.org.ezp3.lib.umn.edu/stable/2660497>.
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Relevance Logic: does it capture our informal  
notion of validity and implication better than  
Classical Logic does?

Isabella Carlsson

**Abstract**

Classical logic has a loose notion of validity: an argument is valid so long as it is impossible for its premises to be true while its conclusion is false. An argument is thus automatically valid if its premises are false. This might seem counterintuitive. Why should arguments with self-contradicting premises be considered *valid*? In some cases, this makes sense—but for cases where the self-contradicting premise has nothing to do with the conclusion of an argument, it seems unreasonable to be able to conclude any arbitrary proposition *validly* when a contradiction exists in the premises. Relevance logic proposes an interpretation of the implication symbol which allows us to formally make more nuanced conclusions about arguments containing contradictions. The proposed logical system considers some arguments invalid which would be considered valid in classical logic. False premises irrelevant to the conclusion are ignored; so, arguments with false conclusions (relevant only to other true premises) are considered invalid. Adjusting the formal system in this way results in a system not only more powerful than classical logic, but also truer to our intuitions about validity. This paper argues in favor of relevance logic over classical logic for encompassing the intuitive concept of validity.

**1. Introduction**

Assessing reasoning can be difficult without a formal system. Classical logic and relevance logic are two formal systems that use deductive logic and attempt to capture our informal notion of validity to make inference steps within arguments. Informally, validity is the

impossibility of true premises and a false conclusion, where the conclusion follows from the premises. The concept of validity should identify whether the advancements in an argument are acceptable, including steps between conditional statements. We do not want conclusions to be derivable by premises that do not support them. Relevance logic is more successful than classical logic in capturing this informal notion of validity, because it prevents us from labelling arguments ‘valid’ which have conclusions unsupported by the premises.

## 2. The Basics of Relevance Logic

In classical propositional logic, the formal validity of an argument is represented on truth tables by the lack of rows that contain both true premises and a false conclusion. If any such row exists, the argument is invalid. What this means intuitively, is that for an argument to be valid there cannot exist a possible world where the premises of that argument are true while the conclusion is false. Possible worlds are defined by the possible combinations of truth values assigned to propositions of the argument. For a valid argument, no matter how the world actually is, there is no way the conclusion could have been false given the premises were true in that world.

Relevance logic encapsulates this informal notion of validity in its formal notion of validity. However, additionally, the premises and conclusion must be relevant to each other. Relevance is bidirectional. This means that two tautologies or contradictions cannot imply each other simply because they are both true, or both false. There must be a *relevance* connection between them so that the conclusion is derivable from the set of premises, not merely a relation between truth values. Relevance will be defined more explicitly in section 4.

The validity of an argument in classical logic can be summarized below.  $P$  represents the conjunction of all premises, and  $C$  the conclusion. The formula below reads “ $P$  implies  $C$ ”.

$$(P \rightarrow C)$$

Classical logic's implication laws allow the transition to the formula below, which reads "either not  $P$  or  $C$ ."

$$(\sim P \vee C)$$

The interpretation of implication regarding the validity of an argument is a material conditional for the classical logician. This means the ' $\rightarrow$ ' above is equivalent to 'either the antecedent is false, or the consequent is true.' For Relevance Logic, the ' $\rightarrow$ ' in the formula above has a stronger meaning than that of a material conditional: the conclusion must be *relevant* for the argument to be valid.

Consider the argument "If Sarah Palin eats gummy worms today, then Obama will declare war on Germany." Assuming there is no relatedness between Sarah Palin eating gummy worms and Obama declaring war on Germany, this argument is necessarily invalid in relevance logic, because the relationship between the antecedent and consequent is not one of relevance. Formal validity in relevance logic is a stricter notion than that in classical logic. Classical logicians claim the argument valid, interpreting the implication materially. In classical logic, the argument would be valid in the case that Sarah Palin does not eat gummy worms, even if Obama did declare war on Germany. Intuitively, though, material implication does not capture the relationship between premise and conclusion in this example, because what is expressed intuitively connotes that there is a relation between the antecedent (Sarah Palin eats gummy worms) and consequent (Obama will declare war on Germany) of the argument. What we implicitly mean when we state this argument is that Obama will not declare war on Germany if Palin does not eat gummy worms. Classical logic misrepresents this.

For the relevance logician, implication means propositions are relevant to each other in a sense that does not *solely* depend on truth values. Relevance logic allows the formal construction of this argument to be labelled 'invalid' just in the case that these two

propositions do not actually relevantly entail each other, i.e. assuming Obama declaring war and Palin eating candy are not relevantly related. Classical logic, on the other hand, would not allow this move. For the classical logician, even when the two propositions are not related with respect to *relevance*, this form of argument is valid. Relevance Logic never allows an argument like this to be named valid.

The classical logician might say that the idea behind the argument was not expressed clearly in English. While the classical logician might adjust conversational language to fit her constructed formal system, the relevance logician creates a formal system which better corresponds to our informal language. The latter is more effective, because informal, conversational language parallels our informal notion of validity.

### 3. The Degenerate Case

In classical logic, an argument is valid if the premises are inconsistent with each other. Relevance logicians disagree; jointly unsatisfiable premises should not automatically constitute a valid argument. Burgess (2009) calls such arguments, and any implications with antecedents that are inconsistent with each other, degenerate cases. In classical logic, the system only creates valid arguments in the degenerate case. The only cases of invalid arguments in classical logic are contained in rows on the truth table which contain only true premises. Since the conjunction of the premises is false, there will be no case with rows that fit the criteria for an invalid argument. Our classical system is useless once an inconsistency in premises exists: it is a valid step to infer any arbitrary proposition.

Relevance logic, however, requires the conclusion to be relevant to the premises. This means that if the contradictory premises are irrelevant to the conclusion, they would be ignored while assessing the validity of the remainder of the argument (a discussion of the precise definition of relevance is given in the next section). This matches informal validity, because an argument should not indubitably be considered valid once some implicit premise is impossible. The rest of the argument could have nothing to do with

the inconsistent premises, but still be invalid. The example of a degenerate case below would be valid in classical logic, but invalid in relevance logic. In classical logic, there is no necessary relevance relation among the premises and the conclusion. In relevance logic, there is.

Sarah Palin eats leprechauns

Sarah Palin does not eat leprechauns

Jeb Bush is white

White and Black are not the same thing

---

• Jeb Bush is Black

Intuitively, this argument is invalid, because making the inference that Jeb Bush is Black is incorrect, given that Jeb Bush is white. The fact that Sarah Palin both eats and does not eat leprechauns causes an inconsistency in the premises, making the argument valid in classical logic. Whether she eats leprechauns is, however, not related to whether Jeb Bush is Black or white. Our informal notion of validity tells us that no rational reasoning exists between these premises and conclusion, because the relevant premises contradict the conclusion, and therefore do not support it, which is essential for validity.

There is reason to think a premise unrelated to the contradicting premises, yet relevant to the conclusion can contribute to meaningful inferences. Here, I assume we consider all premises saliently known to us when assessing an argument. Doing so allows for the possibility that we assume both a proposition and its negation (hence, we assume a contradiction).

One might argue that we do not actually consider all premises in the case of contradicting ones, as it would be nonsensical to do so. Carrying out this argument only strengthens the reason to favor

relevance logic over classical logic. Claiming we ignore nonsensical premises either means the argument has not been represented properly in classical logic or you have already accepted core concepts of relevance logic in your formal system.

Say we are reasoning about scientific theories. If a theory of quantum mechanics is a premise, for example, along with other commonly believed scientific theories, contradictions arise (as quantum mechanics does not mesh well with other physical theories we have about the universe). If contradictions arise from quantum mechanics, however, there is no reason to believe a theory on, say, biology should be directly influenced. Reasoning under classical logic, any arbitrary theory of biology could be concluded given a set of contradictory premises like these. Indeed, false premises *validly* imply any arbitrary proposition in classical logic. Other inferences (like those made based on theories in biology), ignoring those related to quantum mechanics, should remain intact, and they do with relevance logic.

#### 4. Circularity

The concept of relevance, which is necessary to explicate for the use of relevance logic, is based on a criterion called ‘the condition of overlapping sets.’ All logics derivable from relevance logic require this condition in order for implication to hold (Burgess, 2009). This condition is the only way to account for propositions related to each other. From it, the *Craig interpolation theorem* can be derived, which effectively states that for any relevant implication, an interpolant formula,  $I$ , exists which is implied by  $P$ , and also implies  $C$  (Burgess, 2009). This just means that for every conclusion of an argument, there must be some other formula  $I$  which is also implied by some of the premises. For the argument to be valid, this formula  $I$  must also imply the conclusion.

The letters in  $I$  overlap with those in  $P$  and  $C$  (Burgess, 2009). Essentially,  $P$  and  $C$  represent longer formulas made of individual propositions, and they contain propositions in common. Without an interpolant  $I$  between the premise and conclusion, that premise does not affect the validity of the argument in relevance logic. Effectively, any single premise that makes up the conjunction of premises in  $P$  will be ignored in assessing the validity of the argument, unless that premise has propositions in common with the conclusion.

This criterion for validity might seem to undermine relevance logic as a valuable logical system, because the only arguments that are considered valid (in any logical system derived from relevance, because all require the overlapping condition) are now ones that are also circular. If an antecedent ( $P$ ) can be rewritten to contain the propositions already contained in the consequent ( $C$ ), it seems as though the implication has no purpose. If the formula ( $P \rightarrow C$ ) does not tell us anything we did not already know by coming to know the formula  $P$ , we might think the first statement is redundant or simply unnecessary. By stating  $P$ , we would already know that  $C$  is implied by it, so why even state ( $P \rightarrow C$ )?

This seemingly redundant relation between the antecedent and consequent is made explicit by the interpolant. The interpolant expresses that there is a sense in which no new inferences are being made as it requires the condition of overlapping sets to hold. Essentially, the premises already mean the conclusion in some sense when an interpolant exists. This suggests that deductive arguments are all circular arguments of some form or another.

The conclusions of circular arguments are merely rephrased premises. A simple example of a circular argument would be “I have a car. Therefore, I have a car.” A system that only rephrases premises seems useless. Circular arguments are, however, valid in most systems of logic.

This is because the reasoning is truth-preserving and irrefutable, which are also attributable properties of informal validity. Truth-preserving arguments have true conclusions whenever their premises are true. Irrefutable arguments are those which cannot be proven



false. These are both properties of circular arguments since the premises are contained in the conclusion. The truth-value of the premise is maintained in the conclusion, by deduction, and hence the argument cannot be refuted.

The statement below, the archetypal circular argument, is a tautology when ‘ $\rightarrow$ ’ is read as either material or relevant implication. Tautologies are statements which are necessarily true. As indicated by the tautology below, they express trivial statements.

$$(C \rightarrow C)$$

Although this circularity problem challenges relevance logic, it weakens classical logic just as well. The problem is not specific to relevance logic. Logical systems are only tools we use to check whether arguments have been constructed deductively. Deduction by its own nature cannot make leaps in the sense that other inference methods can, i.e. inductive inferences may involve predictions. Deductive inferences are only guaranteed to be true because conclusions are deductively inferable from premises. In the same way that “4” can be derived from “2+2” in mathematics, the conclusion “I have a car” is derived from the premise “I have a car” in a deductive argument. In both cases, the truth of the conclusion is already contained in the premise in some sense.

All logics relying on deductive reasoning can only make conclusions based on premises given in an argument or endorse syntactic tautologies. This is due to propositions implicitly having

relationships with other propositions, “Mediate Inferences” (Jones, 1898). This means some premise is suppressed, and an implication can be rewritten so to explicitly include the relationship, similar to the *Craig interpolation theorem*. This relationship would thus be implied by what formulas represent semantically.

In the degenerate case referenced above, this is impossible in relevance logic, because no circularity exists. There is no relevant

connection between the false conclusion and either of the contradicting premises. Ignoring the contradicting premises, the argument is assessed to be invalid. This is why the degenerate case is invalid in relevance logic. These degenerate cases are, however, valid according to the formal notion of validity in classical logic, which do not match our informal notion of validity. Although both classical and relevance logic contain circularity, this is not detrimental, because deduction should be a tool for working through arguments, without arbitrarily coming up with conclusions. A system that validly concludes things arbitrarily would be worthless.

## **5. Conclusion**

Relevance Logic better encapsulates our intuitive informal notion of validity. Although the system permits contradictions in valid arguments, it allows us to make intuitive inferences which themselves do not contain contradictions. Indeed, relevance logic allows us to make inferences from an inconsistent set of premises by ignoring those premises that are inconsistent. It gives us the power to make valid conclusions which are relevant only to coherent subsets of premises. Conversely, it also gives us the power to deem more arguments invalid than we can with classical logic. By increasing the scope of arguments we can judge invalid, relevance logic becomes a stronger system. It captures how we would reason through arguments in real life and with informal language more successfully than classical logic does.

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## Perfection, Error, and an Infinite Will

Chase Pierre Vernard Torrence

“There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion”  
- Sir Francis Bacon

### Perfection, Error, and an Infinite Will

In this paper, I will investigate René Descartes’ conception of freedom in an attempt to clarify his position. Descartes does not explicitly outline a doctrine of freedom. Instead, his thoughts on the topic are scattered throughout his works, namely, the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and are mentioned merely as support for his other primary doctrines. In part I, I will assess one particular component of the contemporary discourse being waged regarding Descartes’ conception of freedom. In the process I will determine how my thesis can answer some of the questions at hand. In Part II, I will assess one particular component of the historical discourse that was waged regarding Descartes’ idea of what constitutes perfection and his conclusion regarding the source of our error. In the process I will determine that Descartes’ conception of freedom places an emphasis on the infiniteness of our will, and thereby presents a universe in which, counterintuitively, there is greater perfection in the presence of error than in the absence of error.

#### Part I: Contemporary Discourse

In “Descartes on Human Freedom” Marie Jayasekera writes that Descartes seems to explicitly present his definition of freedom in the following passage from Meditation Four. The passage, however, raises more questions than answers.

the will [1] simply consists in our ability to do or not do

something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather [vel potius], [2] it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we feel we are determined by no external force<sup>1</sup>

An immediate question arises from the fact that in the definition there are two separate clauses which are not synonymous. The question, then, is how exactly are the clauses related to each other? The two clauses are separated by the phrase “or rather” which makes it unclear as to whether or not Descartes means we should understand the two clauses as mutually exclusive, or if Descartes means that the latter clause somehow supplements the former. Many historians of Philosophy have weighed in with possible interpretations, such as suggesting that Descartes may mean “to retract or correct the first clause with the second, to add to or to clarify the first clause, to suggest that freedom at times consists in each, or to make an equivalence between the two clauses”<sup>2</sup>. However, much confusion still remains as to Descartes’ precise meaning.

In the first clause, the primary question regards the nature of “our ability to do or not do something”<sup>3</sup>. Jayasekera offers two explanations. Either it is the case that “the will can ‘do’ something under certain conditions and not do it under other conditions” or it is the case that “the will can do something or not do it in the very same conditions”<sup>4</sup>. This question is important because, as Jayasekera points out, the first explanation could render a deterministic universe whereas only the second explanation could allow for an indeterminate universe (i.e. a universe free of determinism). A deterministic universe is one in which all of our choices are dependent upon, caused by, and a necessary result of those conditions. In other words, all of our choices would be inevitably *determined* by those conditions, instead of our being *free* to choose otherwise given the very same conditions.

In the second clause, the primary question regards the nature of the statement that “our inclinations are such that we feel we are determined by no external force”<sup>5</sup>. Jayasekera questions whether Descartes means that “we merely feel we are not determined but we

are in fact determined” or that “we are not determined at all”<sup>6</sup>.

Whereas a libertarian conception of freedom is completely devoid of determinism, a compatibilist conception of freedom is instead compatible with determinism, and we merely appear to have free will. Given Descartes’ definition, one of the primary questions raised is whether his conception of freedom is libertarian or compatibilist. My contention is that we may find our answer if we look to Descartes’ emphasis on the infiniteness of our will.

As stated in my thesis, Descartes’ conception of freedom places an emphasis on the infiniteness of our will. Jayasekera herself notes Descartes’ statement that “because of our will and freedom of choice, we ‘bear in some way the image and likeness of God’”<sup>7</sup>, and this statement itself indicates that his conception of freedom includes an infinite will. The reason why this statement indicates an infinite will and the reason why Descartes draws the parallel between ourselves and God, by way of our will, is because God is a supremely perfect being possessing only infinite faculties, and our faculty of willing is significant for the reason that it is also an infinite faculty.

Furthermore, in Meditation Four Descartes writes that he cannot “complain that the will or free choice...received from God is insufficiently ample or perfect, since, [we] experience that it is limited by no boundaries whatever. In fact, it seems to be especially worth noting that no other things in [us] are so perfect”<sup>8</sup>. Descartes elaborates on this idea by explaining that we can imagine greater faculties of understanding, of memory, or of imagination, relative to our own limited respective faculties, but we cannot imagine a greater faculty of will than our own. “It is only the [faculty of the] will or free choice that [we] experience to be so great... that [we] cannot grasp the idea of any greater faculty”<sup>9</sup> While the “faculty of willing” is incomparably greater in God than in ourselves, in a vacuum, they are both infinite when each is “viewed in itself”<sup>10</sup>.

So, given our possession of an infinite faculty of willing, I contend that our answer is that Descartes’ conception of freedom is libertarian. In regard to the first clause of his definition, Descartes would clarify that his position is the libertarian position that Jayasekera offers with the latter explanation. Therein Jayasekera writes, “the will can do something or not do it in the very same conditions”<sup>11</sup>. The libertarian position is our answer because a universe in which our will is merely a result of being determined by a

certain set of conditions is one in which our will is not actually *infinite*. In regard to the second clause of his definition, Descartes would clarify that his position is the libertarian position that Jayasekera offers with the latter explanation. Therein Jayasekera writes, “we are not determined at all”<sup>12</sup>. This libertarian position is our answer because a deterministic universe in which we merely feel that we are not determined is one in which our faculty of willing is not actually *infinite*.

As evidenced by the abundance of ambiguities in Descartes’ definition, much of this debate is spawned by a lack of clarity in his writing. In considering these interpretive challenges, Jayasekera offers the explanation that intentional obfuscation by Descartes may be in play, “he might have been less than candid, or even deliberately unclear, to assuage his interlocutors”<sup>13</sup>. With Descartes’ conclusion for the source of all error in mind (which I will explain at the start of Part II), I offer that it may instead be the case that Descartes’ conception of freedom is made more intriguing simply by an instance of error on his part.

Perhaps more so than all others in academia, contemporary students of Philosophy are expected to maximize clarity in their writing, and this is one of the primary criteria for their judgment. However, the historical Philosophers being written about present perhaps the most notoriously unclear of written works in all of academia. While that disparity is ironic, this course of action nonetheless seems to be the most reasonable—in the sense that contemporary students of Philosophy are tasked with learning from and correcting *errors* of the past.

Just as it is the case that contemporary students are liable to err in presenting complex concepts as clear as possible, for the same reason, the greats that preceded us were liable as well. An additional error in the definition that Jayasekera points out is that “both affirming and denying are forms of ‘doing something,’ not examples of ‘doing something’ and ‘not doing something’... Descartes should have said ‘to affirm or to not affirm’”<sup>14</sup>. (And let us not forget the misstatement of “non magis” in Meditation Five.) With clarity issues and other such errors in the Meditations abound, and with an excess in these two clauses alone, Descartes would perhaps admit that he had erred here and that this error was in fact a testament to his freedom.

Part II: Historical Discourse

Indeed, even the father of modern Philosophy is liable to error, and as Descartes conceives it, the source of this error is our freedom. Specifically, Descartes concludes that the source of all error is the conflict between our simultaneous possession of an infinite faculty of will and a merely finite faculty of knowledge. In other words, we err when we will to do something that our better judgement would have otherwise prevented us from doing. Descartes writes, “the source of [our] errors... [is] owing simply to the fact that, since the will extends further than the intellect, I do not contain the will within the same boundaries; rather, I also extend [the will] to things I do not understand”<sup>15</sup>, and that we “make mistakes because [our] faculty of judging the truth... is not infinite [but our will to do so is]”<sup>16</sup>. This conclusion is presented in Meditation Four: Concerning the True and the False, and it is a self-admitted consequence of human freedom (which partially absolves God of any responsibility for our error, maintaining perfection of his works).

Descartes defines God as a “supremely perfect being”<sup>17</sup>, and Descartes maintains that God and his works are perfect despite his creation of a universe replete with imperfect beings who with their infinite will may err. Throughout the Meditations, Descartes invokes this essence of God and relies on it as the foundation for a number of arguments. In the Meditations that bookend Meditation Four, Descartes relies on God’s supreme perfection to prove that God exists with both the ontological argument (since God is a supremely perfect being and perfection includes existence God therefore must exist) and the causal argument (the idea of a perfect being could not be caused by anything less than a perfect being). Descartes also relies on God’s supreme perfection to conclude that God is not an evil and deceptive God, writing that, “it is impossible for God ever to deceive me, for trickery or deception is always indicative of some imperfection [because] although the ability to deceive seems to be an indication of cleverness or power, the will to deceive undoubtedly attests to maliciousness or weakness”<sup>18</sup>.

The perfection of God and his works is critical to Descartes’ project overall. The question then becomes, if God is perfect, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, then how can there be any room for error in his creation? How is it that God can create a



universe that is less than perfect? One answer to this question is in Meditation Four, wherein Descartes reconciles the presence of error in God's creation, with God's perfection.

Descartes write that, "in a certain sense, there is greater perfection in me in being able to elicit those [errors] than in not being able"<sup>19</sup>. This reconciliation can be summarized as follows. Our ability to elicit error is provided by our freedom. Our freedom includes an infinite will. The will being an infinite faculty is what makes it a perfection. The reason why it is a perfection is because it, being infinite, has a faculty that resembles the supremely perfect being, who possesses entirely infinite faculties.

Additionally, Descartes explains that God works in ways that are mysterious to our merely finite knowledge. We can only view parts of his works, but we cannot view the product of his works as a whole. The parts on their own may be flawed and may elicit error, but in considering God's universe as a whole, to invoke Aristotle, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Descartes writes, "the nature of God is immense, incomprehensible, and infinite... whose causes escape me"<sup>20</sup>. Lastly, while assessing whether or not the works of God are perfect, Descartes insists that God and all of his works are indeed perfect, and Descartes declares, "we should keep in view not simply some one creature in isolation from the rest, but the universe as a whole. For perhaps something might rightfully appear very imperfect if it were all by itself, and yet be most perfect [as part of a perfect whole]"<sup>21</sup>.

Given this insistence, Pierre Gassendi objects to Descartes' idea that the works of God are perfect. In *Objections to the Meditations and Descartes's Replies*, Gassendi argues that "God could have given man a faculty of judgment that was immune from error"<sup>22</sup>, and writes to Descartes, "it is surprising that you should have a true idea representing God as omniscient, omnipotent and wholly good, and yet observe that some of his works are not wholly perfect. Given that he could have made things if not completely perfect then at least more perfect than he did make them, this seems to show that... He was... somewhat imperfect [and/or] preferred imperfection to perfection"<sup>23</sup>. Gassendi rhetorically asks whether the universe would not be more perfect than it is now if all of its parts were more perfect than they are now, and suggests that a flawless universe absent of error, would be a more perfect universe than one with error.

Gassendi likens this to how a hypothetical republic whose citizens were all good would be more perfect than one that had some bad citizens.

As a premise, I am working from the assumption that the reason error is not present in Gassendi's hypothetical is because individuals are limited by a divine determinism, bound by a rule impressed by God which prevents a mistake<sup>24</sup>, or they otherwise exist in any other such way in which there is not an *infinite faculty* shared mutually with God. And, it must also be said that this infinite faculty shared mutually with God cannot be intellect because it is "the essence of a created intellect to be finite"<sup>25</sup>.

While *indeed* our infinite will is the source of our error and it presents some flaws in God's creation (Gassendi's "bad citizens"), I must mention that according to Descartes, this infinite will also happens to be the sole infinite faculty we share with the infinitely perfect being himself. Thus, for this reason, the presence of this error as a byproduct of our infinite will is actually more perfect than the absence of this error. In Descartes' immediate reply to Gassendi's hypothetical republic, intimating that an existence entirely complete with perfection isn't actually perfect at all, Descartes writes, "here is a better comparison to make: someone who thinks that there oughtn't to have been any creatures in the world who were liable to error (i.e. who weren't wholly perfect) can be compared with someone who wanted the whole of the human body to be covered with eyes so as to look more beautiful (there being no part of the body more beautiful than the eye)"<sup>26</sup>.

In conclusion, on Descartes' behalf, I offer an additional reply to Gassendi's objection. In reply to Gassendi, a universe would not necessarily be more perfect than it is now if all of its parts were more perfect than they are now, as if it were like a republic in which all of its citizens were good as opposed to there being present some bad citizens (error, flaw). The reason for this is because in such a universe, since error is not present, an infinite will is not present, and thereby, that sole infinite faculty that we share with the supremely perfect being is not present.

A universe absent of error would merely appear to be a greater perfection. It may seem that the presence of error as a result of the infinite will is problematic, however, that problem is negligible

relative to the invaluable possession of an infinite faculty. That infinite faculty is “the supreme perfection of man”<sup>27</sup>. Overlooking the infinite will with which those errors are allowed to be elicited, and noting only those particular errors, *fails* to recognize the most significant point. In assessing perfection, the most significant point is the presence of a sole infinite faculty in our merely finite being—a shared infinite faculty with the supremely perfect being. The presence of this infinite faculty thereby constitutes a universe more perfect than if this infinite faculty (and the consequent error) were not present. So, following a properly conducted audit of the universe, assessment of perfection therein, and comparison to Gassendi’s hypothetical republic, one may find that the presence of error is in actuality more perfect than the absence of error.

In considering the alternatives to the particular type of freedom that we have, such as God impressing a rule upon our memory that prevents us from error, Descartes rejects the prospects of those alternatives and writes, “it may somehow be a greater perfection in the universe as a whole that some of its parts are not immune to error, while others are, than if all of them were exactly alike”<sup>28</sup>. And let us also recall once again what Descartes seems to be echoing, which is that, “in a certain sense, there is greater perfection in [the individual] being able to elicit those [errors] than in not being able to”<sup>29</sup>.

Why is there a *greater perfection* in the presence of freedom and consequent error than in its absence? A variety of complex Cartesian notions can be invoked to argue this point. An additional interpretation I will offer is as follows. There is a “*greater perfection*” in the literal sense, since, given the presence of an infinite will, there is simply a *greater* quantitative presence of that sole infinite faculty which “bears the image and likeness of” God, the *greatest perfection*<sup>30</sup>. Descartes’ conception of freedom places an emphasis on the infiniteness of our will, and thereby presents a universe in which, counterintuitively, there is greater perfection in the presence of error than in the absence of error.

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What is Epistemically Valuable? The Dubious  
Exclusion of Pragmatic Factors  
in Feldman's Epistemic Value

Naomi Kadish

In "The Ethics of Belief" Richard Feldman claims that in order for an agent to believe reasonably they ought to form their beliefs based on the set of evidence they have at that time. Feldman's account entails that this is the only aspect of the belief formation process that has epistemic value. An agent does not need to account for things like the accuracy of their beliefs. However, it seems that, on Feldman's view, believing reasonably should include factors outside of the epistemic realm. Thus, I will argue that epistemic value includes other parts of belief formation.

Feldman's project is to give an account of what a person ought to believe. He claims that anyone who is in the role of a believer ought to follow the available evidence. "These oughts ... are based on what's good performance" (676). We can still determine what a person ought to do in a certain role whether or not they have control over performing the correct thing. That is, for example, a teacher ought to explain things well to their students whether or not they are capable of doing so. Similarly, a believer ought to believe certain things whether or not they have control over their beliefs.

1 Feldman first posits about how a person ought to fulfill their role as a believer with Principle 1 (PR1). (PR1) For any proposition  $p$ , time  $t$ , and person  $S$ ,  $S$  epistemically ought to have at  $t$  the attitude toward  $p$  that is supported by  $S$ 's evidence at  $t$  (678). PR1 claims that a person should believe proposition  $a$  if and only if their evidence supports it. Though straightforward as a necessary criterion of normative belief, Feldman sees PR1 to be overly demanding. As Feldman points out, a person would potentially be epistemically required to evaluate an infinite number of propositions that are logical consequences of  $a$ . Thus, Feldman does not want to claim that a person ought to believe all of these logical consequences. He wants to preserve a person's cognitive resources (679). Thus, Feldman wants a more narrow account on how a person ought to form beliefs.

Feldman refines PR1 to Principle 2 (PR2): (PR2) For any person S, time t, and proposition p, if S has any doxastic attitude at all toward p at t and S's evidence at t supports p, then S epistemically ought to have the attitude toward p supported by S's evidence at t (679). PR2 preserves a person's cognitive resources. It requires that if a person were to adopt any attitude at all toward proposition b they should develop a doxastic attitude in favor of b if and only if their evidence supports it, against b if the evidence is against it, or remain neutral if the evidence is neutral on b. Thus, for Feldman, epistemic value is determined solely by whether an agent's beliefs were formed by cohering to their evidence. "Epistemic value", Feldman claims is, "to be obtained immediately from the adoption of an attitude toward a proposition. The way to [obtain epistemic value] in every case is to follow the evidence one has" (686). Thus, if a person has gained a lot of epistemic value, but they have not satisfied the other conditions for knowledge, then the person will only have reasonable belief. But, if a person has gained a lot of epistemic value and has satisfied the other conditions for knowledge (such as truth), then they will have knowledge.

Epistemic value, though, for Feldman, is not knowledge. He does not want an account of epistemic value that relies on anything besides for what the agent knows at that time. He does not want to consider things, like true belief, as epistemically valuable. He does not want an agent to be doing a lot of cognitive work to form beliefs. Feldman thinks that "we avoid problems associated with identifying epistemic value with true belief or with knowledge if instead we say that what has epistemic value are rational beliefs" (685). Maximizing epistemic value comes solely from forming reasonable beliefs. Feldman wants to claim that he doesn't "see anything epistemically good about the person who irrationally gets true beliefs" (686). He does not think that utilizing a process that helps you arrive at true beliefs is epistemically valuable. Seemingly, Feldman wants to exclude true belief or knowledge from the question of what a person epistemically ought to do. True belief and knowledge do not determine epistemic value. Epistemic value comes solely from an agent's beliefs cohering to their evidence. Epistemic value is determined from an internalist justification, not an externalist justification.



Here, there is some ambiguity in Feldman as to how to categorize the belief formation process in terms of its epistemic status. He says elsewhere in the article “[a]s I see it, these are prudential or moral matters, not strictly epistemic matters” (689). He does not want to exclude the belief formation process or the duty to gather more evidence from an epistemic calculus, but it does seem that he wants to exclude them from epistemic value. What I take Feldman to mean is that while an epistemologist can talk about truth tracking and knowledge as important epistemic concepts, they should be irrelevant to epistemic value. Epistemic value is only grounded in belief. “[T]he fundamental epistemic goal is just to have reasonable beliefs” (689). One other place that supports my reading of Feldman is where he says “[o]f course there may be some instrumental value in those true beliefs. They may help the person negotiate the world in a better way. But that is a different matter” (686).

The upshot of PR2, and what Feldman believes a person ought to do, can be illustrated by the following cases. In all of the following cases there is a nightly three number power ball lottery, with a \$35 processing fee associated with claiming your prize. In the first case, David is someone who doesn’t gamble, but likes to know what the winning numbers are for every nightly lottery in New York. Accordingly, David does not care about what the winning numbers are anywhere else in the world and does not form any opinion about what the winning numbers are in, say, the Moscow power ball. Thus, after reading the nightly power ball report David does not have to believe or even consider what the winning numbers were in Moscow (or any other non-relevant conjunctions that come with his belief). The second case is Christian. Christian, who is also from New York and also does not gamble, does not care about what the winning numbers are anywhere. He never reads the results of the nightly lottery and never forms any beliefs about what the winning numbers are anywhere. According to PR2 both David and Christian are doing what they epistemically ought to do. Both of these cases seem like good ways for epistemic agents to form beliefs that do not require a lot of cognitive effort. These cases are good examples of where Feldman’s account makes sense

.Now consider two more cases. In both cases there is Samantha: a gambler. In case A, Samantha buys a ticket to the New Jersey three number power ball lottery every night. As she’s watching

the results on TV, the first two numbers come up and match hers. She's close to winning the lottery and believes that she still may win. Additionally, Samantha has heard that it is very likely that, if your first two numbers in the power ball match, your third number will match as well. However, as soon as they are about to reveal the third number of the power ball, her cable goes out. After her cable goes out Samantha says to herself, "based on the set of evidence that I have now, namely that I know what people say about the probability of winning when the first two numbers match and given that my first two numbers match, I believe that I have won the power ball". Samantha decides she is going to mail in her ticket and her \$35 processing fee. As she is walking to her mailbox she runs into her friend, Olivia, who is also a lottery enthusiast. Olivia, without asking Samantha, says "can you believe the last number was 6?" Olivia then walks away. Samantha then thinks "now I believe that the last number was 6", realizes she lost, and proceeds to throw away her ticket and put her \$35 back into her wallet.

Now consider Samantha in case B. Samantha in case B also buys a ticket to the New Jersey power ball every night. She has also heard that it is very likely that, if your first two numbers in the power ball match, your third number will match as well. As she's watching the results on TV, the first two numbers come up and match hers. Samantha says to herself, "based on the set of evidence that I have now, namely that I know what people say about the probability of winning when that the first two match and given that my first two numbers match, I don't need to see the result of the third ball. I believe that I have won the power ball." Accordingly, Samantha turns off the TV, and mails in her ticket along with the \$35 processing fee. Samantha then awaits her prize money.

There seems to be something off about Samantha in the second case. At first glance, Samantha is someone who follows her evidence. She frequently acquires reasonable beliefs. In fact, in both cases, Feldman would call Samantha a good epistemic agent. In the first case, fortunately for Samantha, because she accidentally runs into her friend Olivia, she acquires better evidence and a more accurate belief. In the second case, she does not. For Feldman, we do not care about the result in the first case. We do not really care that Olivia happens to know the third number and that Samantha ultimately acquired a true belief. Samantha was still correct in believing she had a winning

ticket, acquires reasonable beliefs, and gets the same amount of epistemic value in both cases. However, according to Feldman, in case B, Samantha is still doing what she ought to do even though she does not attempt to figure out the third number. For Feldman, Samantha believes what she ought to believe. Finding more evidence does not have give her more epistemic value than she has in case A. What is weird is that Samantha, in case B, has the opportunity to pretty easily make her belief more valid. After all, her cable does not go out. For Samantha, it would make a lot of sense for her to wait and see what the third number is. She even knows that it would have showed up had she kept the TV on a minute longer. Even with all of this knowledge, Feldman wants to claim that she ought to believe, in case B, that she would win.

Why does Feldman want to claim that Samantha, in case B, need not keep the TV on for 5 more seconds? This difficulty with Feldman's view can be understood better by looking at what he thinks qualifies as epistemic value. Feldman thinks that epistemic value is just coherence to evidence. He proposes a synchronic account of rationality or what is reasonable to believe. Anything that happens over a period of time, for Feldman, is not an epistemic question. He classifies these diachronic questions as moral or prudential (important yet not epistemic). So Samantha not looking at the evidence readily available to her is not a denial of her epistemic duty. However, its seems a bit weird that Samantha could have easily formed a more true belief and that Feldman does not hold her epistemically accountable for this.

Even though Feldman's account classifies the reliability of her evidence as a non-epistemic factor, he would claim that these other factors (the prudential and moral factors) are still an important part of the belief formation process. Feldman classifies these other factors as morally and prudentially important. Accordingly, he does not make the claim that moral and prudential value should be regarded as less than epistemic value. He intentionally leaves this evaluation vague. He does not think that a moral or prudential ought should determine a person's epistemic ought. That is, Feldman wants to defend the claim that there is no meaningful comparison between these oughts. Every type of ought (moral, prudential, epistemic) has independent value. By separating these oughts he does not need to evaluate the prudential value of a person's action over its epistemic value.

Feldman would claim that a prudential evaluation should happen but that it should happen independently of an epistemic evaluation.

I claim that the problem with Feldman's view is that he only considers evidential coherence as having epistemic value. For Feldman, no other part of the belief formation process is epistemically relevant. However, I think it follows from Feldman's view that when people form beliefs, epistemic value should not be fully determined by their beliefs cohering to their evidence. That is, within evidential coherence there are moral and prudential factors that come into play. I would like to claim that a full account of epistemic value should consider the reliability of the evidence as epistemically valuable, not just as morally or prudentially valuable.

Thus, even though Feldman seeks to separate moral and prudential value from epistemic value, I think Feldman's proposal about epistemic value falls short. It seems apparent that within Feldman's definition of epistemic value there is something prudential. Evidential coherence is a prudential act. In order for an agent to produce the most epistemic value she needs to cohere her beliefs to their evidence. That action is practical. In order for Alice to properly cohere her beliefs to her evidence she needs to look at what her evidence is. While she may not have a duty to gather more evidence, she has a pragmatic obligation to engage in the act of coherence. Thus, there is something inherently pragmatic within the realm of epistemic value. Accordingly, it seems to follow that simple prudential actions, like keeping the TV on for 5 more seconds, would fall into the category of epistemic value. I will not enumerate which prudential factors would need to be included in Feldman's definition of epistemic value. I will just defend the claim that certain pragmatic factors do fall into epistemic value. Therefore Feldman needs to defend his exclusion of certain prudential factors from the belief formation process any way.

Feldman claimed that only aspect of belief that has epistemic value is evidential coherence. I illustrated through cases with Alice where Feldman's division of value seems to fall short. I made the claim that epistemic value inherently includes prudential factors and value. Thus, I have shown that Feldman's account of epistemic value should include certain elements that he initially sought to isolate as just prudential value.

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**Kate Manne, *Down Girl***  
Oxford University Press 2016

Reviewed by Madeline Brighthouse Glueck, University of  
Minnesota

In her first book, Kate Manne (Cornell University) has made a significant contribution not only to the philosophical community but within public philosophy as well. In *Down Girl*, she provides us with a

brutally honest look at misogyny in our society, endeavoring to provide us with a functional and analytically precise definition of the concept. Using a series of current events, she exposes both the nature and logic of misogyny, demonstrating its perniciousness in the modern 'post-feminist' context. Though she engages with some feminist theory, she primarily brackets the issues of intersectionality which often dominate feminist discourse. With the elegance and precision becoming of an analytic philosopher, she disentangles rhetoric from real phenomena.

The first step in her project is distinguishing between sexism and misogyny. She broadly defines sexism as "the branch of patriarchal ideology that *justifies* and *rationalizes* a patriarchal social order" and defines misogyny as "the system that *polic*es and *enfor*ces its governing norms and expectations" (20). In this way, she identifies misogyny as a kind of 'systematic sexism in action.' One of the many advantages of this conceptualization is that it moves us away from the idea of misogynist acts as those perpetrated by 'woman haters.' Instead, it applies to a broader range of actions carried out due to a deeply-seated and fundamentally destructive conception of what women are and ought to be. She explains sexism as a system which constructs men and women in opposing roles with differing sets of expectations and responsibilities. Women are expected under sexist, patriarchal ideology to provide 'feminine-coded' goods to men. These include "love, acceptance, nurturing, safety, security, and safe haven...kindness and compassion, moral attention, care, concern, and soothing." (110) Most misogynistic acts occur in response to women failing to provide those goods to the men who feel they deserve them under the sexual hierarchical order. With this systematic view of misogynistic acts, she also works against the narrative that much violence against women is due to their dehumanization. She notes that, on the contrary, much violence against women is due to their particular humanness. The 'feminine-coded' capacities (as noted above) are fundamentally human ones, they are not just valued by society but necessary for its functioning. Referencing the popular children's book, *The Giving Tree*, she illustrates how the logic of misogyny positions women as 'human givers' and men as 'human beings.' Women, under this analysis, are 'the giving she's', deliberately and systematically cut down much like the fictional tree in a story that is both familiar and touching.

Manne's treatment of the all-too-topical issue of misogyny is simultaneously arresting, deeply moving, and depressing. She provides a framework which not only makes sense of political discourse and many current events involving misogynistic acts, but also speaks to everyday life as a woman both in broader society as well as within the philosophical community.



**Julian Wuerth, *Kant on Mind, Action and Ethics***  
Oxford University Press, 2014

Reviewed by William Marsolek, University of Minnesota

In his *Kant on Mind, Action and Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2014), Julian Wuerth (Vanderbilt University) introduces a new and highly ambitious interpretation of Kant's theory of the self. He argues that Kant held the self to be a simple, noumenal substance in an ontologically significant sense endowed with various powers to bring about diverse accidents or phenomenal states. This self, or soul, is the object of the unschematized category of substance (a being in which accidents inhere) with which we have immediate epistemic contact by way of simply being aware of existing as an indeterminate *something in general*. This soul is acted on by a numerically distinct substance which activates one or more of the soul's faculties or powers to bring about the soul's accidents. These accidents are the phenomenal mental states we experience. For example, some noumenal substance activates our soul's faculty of cognition to bring about the predicate of the phenomenon of an apple tree. Wuerth then provides a map of the soul by tracing the various mental faculties and their interrelations, showing how the faculty of cognition delivers spatio-temporal, causally-connected objects to the faculty of pleasure. This faculty, in turn, delivers its pleasurable feelings to the faculty of desire to bring about or to sustain this pleasurable object's existence in experience. For example, the apple tree given by the faculty of cognition is delivered over to the faculty of pleasure whenever we enjoy ruminating on the pleasures apples provide. This pleasure will be delivered over to the faculty of desire as soon as we decide whether or how to bring an apple into existence in so that we could eat it.

In making this argument, Wuerth draws on an impressive range of sources: Kant's Critical and Precritical published works, his students' notes to his lectures on Metaphysics and Anthropology, and Kant's own handwritten notes. He then marshals this picture of the soul against a few highly influential interpretive strands, including Patricia Kitcher's functionalist interpretation of Kant's theory of mind and Christine Korsgaard's ethical constructivist reading of *The*

*Groundwork*, as well as providing a new backing to his characteristically subtle reading of the ‘Paralogism’ chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason* provided in Wuerth’s other works. Perhaps his most controversial argument (as if the rest weren’t enough!) is that Kant already had the theoretical framework for the *Wille/Willkür* distinction in place well before the publication of *The Groundwork*.

While the book suffers from unwarranted repetitiveness and some strained interpretive moves, the result is a dense, carefully articulated, and wide-ranging marathon of a book. The reviewer is not surprised it won the North American Kant Society’s Senior Book Prize in 2014.

**Raymond Geuss, *Changing the Subject: Philosophy from Socrates to Adorno***

Harvard University Press, 2017

Reviewed by C. Alex Jensen, University of Minnesota

In his latest book, *Changing the Subject: Philosophy from Socrates to Adorno*, Professor Raymond Geuss (University of Cambridge) offers an ambitious romp through the history of Western philosophy, with each of the book's twelve chapters devoted to a specific philosopher. Beginning with Socrates, Geuss traverses over two-thousand years of Western thought, discussing the works of Plato, Lucretius, Augustine, Montaigne, Hobbes, Hegel, Nietzsche, Lukács, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and, finally, Adorno.

Though each chapter has the tone and cohesiveness to be a freestanding essay, Geuss' discussion of these twelve, disparate philosophers is held together by the author's overarching questions as to what sort of activity philosophy is, what it is intended to do, and under what historical conditions it emerges. "It is my basic contention," explains Geuss at the beginning of the book, "that one of the characteristics of philosophy [...] is that it generally avoids giving a direct answer to a direct question." Instead, maintains Geuss, philosophy *changes the question* – "and what is most interesting to observe and most enlightening is to look carefully at *why* and *how* the question changes" (1). Between the first and second chapters of the book, for instance, the characteristically Socratic question 'What is it for a soul to instantiate justice?' is transformed into the macrocosmic question of Plato's *Republic*: 'What is it for a *city* to instantiate justice?' (51).

Though one might quibble with Geuss' characterizations of one or another thinker in this book, his attitude towards their thought is never cavalier but always careful, nuanced, and charitable. For each dubious assertion about some detail of a philosophical view or doctrine, Geuss raises a number of insightful questions, highlighting the tensions within each philosopher's work. Often, having laid out the project of a philosopher and pointed to its incongruencies, the need to yet again change the fundamental question becomes

apparent, allowing Geuss to seamlessly transition to the next chapter and take up the transmogrified question of a later philosopher. Geuss' twelve chapters have much to offer, his writing being not only enlightening and thought-provoking but also engaging, witty, and even humorous – it is, I believe, the only work by a professional philosophy in which I've come across what can only be called a “dick joke,” in the form of a euphemistic reference to Alcibiades' “magic wand” (24). The chapter on Hegel includes perhaps the clearest explanation of the historical dialectic that I've come across (158-60). And the chapter on Nietzsche, in which Geuss does an admirable job of clearly saying what Nietzsche's philosophical project is – and, equally importantly, what it is *not* – should be required reading for every angsty teenage boy hopped up on energy drinks and the will-to-power.

Like the philosophers he considers, Geuss does not directly answer the questions with which he sets out, namely what that set of activities we call ‘philosophy’ is and in what historical situations it arises. Rather, by the conclusion of the book, Geuss himself has changed the subject, instead raising the question whether the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a century “after” philosophy, as Hegel maintained of the 19<sup>th</sup> with respect to art. If art, as Hegel thought, “is no longer the place where people find their highest needs satisfied and their highest interests articulated” (295), might we not say the same of philosophy? Just as we no longer bend the knee in the presence of the torso of Apollo, though it might still be the object of our aesthetic contemplation, so too, suggests Geuss, philosophy “could, for one reason or another, stop being important and lose the centrality it once aspired to have and laid a claim to” (294). Indeed, Geuss suggests that this is the situation in which we now find ourselves, at least since 1976 when Heidegger, as Geuss gracefully puts it, “finally died” (296).

Geuss' attitude towards the possibility that we are now living in an age after philosophy seems to be, at best, one of ambivalence: Perhaps, Geuss suggests, it was always a myth that philosophy articulated our deepest human interests. It's difficult to know what Geuss makes of the purported death of an intellectual tradition inaugurated by that self-proclaimed gadfly whose “monumentally inventive ways of being irritating” often amounted to little more than just being an “intellectual bully” (115-6).

That said, Geuss does not foreclose the possibility that the kinds of social and historical conditions under which philosophy thrives will reemerge. Indeed, Geuss even predicts this much with respect to Heidegger's later work, in which impending ecological collapse might spur a revival of interest. "But," Geuss is quick to add, concluding his chapter on Heidegger, "it seems more likely that the few survivors of the imminent catastrophe will have more pressing concerns than philosophical texts from the mid-twentieth century" (249).



