Book Review: Reasons for Belief, edited by Andrew Reisner and Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. ix + 273. H/b £55.00. [This is a post-print version published in *Mind* 122 (2013): 315–9.]

How are we to understand 'reasons for belief'? And how might such reasons talk illuminate traditional issues in epistemology? These are the two guiding questions around which this co-edited collection of twelve multi-authored essays *Reasons for Belief* is organised. As the editors observe, although reasons have taken centre stage in discussions of practical normativity over the last 35 years, it is only more recently that 'philosophers interested in the problems of normative epistemology have appealed to reasons both to help explicate justification, warrant, and related concepts, and to address… other concerns in epistemology'. (p. viii) The volume is therefore timely: it not only reflects this epistemological turn to reasons but offers state of the art discussions of some central issues within and about that turn.

Given the two organising themes—normativity and epistemology—the volume's remit is vast. And, inevitably for a multi-authored collection, many of the chapters are motivated by different philosophical agenda. Nonetheless, there is considerable unity to the volume (more so, indeed, than the editors' introduction or chapters themselves make explicit). And this unity-despite-diversity is a virtue: many essays engage with related subtopics in fruitful ways, while the competing starting points guard against too singular a take on what the significant issues are. Most importantly, the articles are of high quality: most are quite ambitious, with many contributing nicely to ongoing debates while others may guide future directions in their fields. All in all *Reasons for Belief* is well worth reading, both for those with prior stakes in debates

about normativity and for those interested in assessing the prospects of reasons talk across a range of issues in epistemology.

A now orthodox view (accepted by many, though not all, of the contributors) is that a normative reason is a fact or consideration that 'counts in favour of'. A reason to believe that *p*, on this view, is a fact that favours believing that *p*. This is how the editors set the scene in their 'Introduction'. They note some substantive and meta-normative issues this leaves open, following up with useful summaries of the essays. The volume is then divided into two Parts, corresponding to its two guiding questions. I'll first offer a brief summary of each essay.

The first chapter-proper, Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen's 'How to be a teleologist about epistemic reasons', develops a very interesting, non-standard 'value-based' account according to which an epistemic reason to believe that *p* (understood as a consideration that counts in favour of holding a belief in the proposition that *p*, solely on account of the belief's epistemic properties, such as its being evidentially supported (p. 17)) depends on both the evidence for, and the value of holding the belief, that *p*. Andrew Reisner, in 'Is there reason to be theoretically rational?', presents a worthy case for a modest version of the conclusion that there is: wide-scope consistency requirements of theoretical rationality provide epistemic reasons *against* holding inconsistent combinations of beliefs, since the probability of contradictory beliefs all being true is zero.

The next three chapters transpose issues familiar from metaethics to the epistemic domain. Veli Mitova's 'Epistemic motivation: towards a metaethics of belief' makes a

programmatic case for cognitivism about epistemic judgements. In his thought-provoking 'Error theory and reasons for belief', Jonas Olson defends an error theory about categorical epistemic reasons. Nishi Shah's 'Can reasons for belief be debunked?', however, presents a novel argument for thinking epistemic error theory incoherent.

Kicking off Part II, Clayton Littlejohn's 'Reasons and belief's justification' offers an account of what is involved in doing (including believing) what reasons require, using this to undermine views according to which a belief's being epistemically justified is subject either to only evidence or to knowledge norms. It is worth noting, however, that the account implicitly focuses on 'objective' reasons, whereas an appeal to non-objective reasons (perhaps of the sort featuring in Schroeder's essay, chapter 10) may help evidentialists respond to Littlejohn's criticisms.

The next five essays examine different aspects of the relation between perceptual experience and epistemic reasons. In 'Perception, generality and reasons', Hannah Ginsborg argues that perceptual experiences have conceptual content of a kind distinct from that had by beliefs, but in virtue of which they are capable of standing in rational relations to (and indeed rationalising, though maybe not giving reasons for) beliefs. Adam Leite's 'Immediate warrant, epistemic responsibility, and Moorean dogmatism' argues that, even granting a Moorean assumption that there are immediate experiential reasons for belief, responsible reasoning from these would not license the doxastically justified belief that we are not deceived; hence, Moorean dogmatism is unable to evade external world scepticism. Following on nicely, Ralph Wedgwood's 'Primitive rational belief-forming processes' argues that it is rational to

‘take experience at face value’ by accepting (as true) propositions involved in representational experiences—because part of what it is to be a rational agent is to have a disposition to have veridical experiences, where such a disposition presupposes possession of concepts and capacities for attitudes that direct us towards the truth. In ‘What does it take to “have” a reason?’ Mark Schroeder’s answer is that we should set a low bar when it comes to both inferential and perceptual cases. The account, if defensible, has wide-ranging implications that may get us to rethink both coherentist and purely externalist models of justification and knowledge. In ‘Knowledge and reasons for belief’, Alan Millar then considers how it is that we can get so much—knowledge, say—from so little. Focusing on knowledge via perceptual experience and testimony, he reverses orthodox accounts by arguing that the exercise of recognitional abilities often *is* the acquisition of knowledge and that we can thereby explain why we are justified in believing something in terms of our exercising such abilities.

The final essay, Duncan Prichard’s ‘What is the swamping problem?’ returns full circle to issues of value. The supposed problem concerns how to explain why justified true belief (say) has greater (non-instrumental, putatively epistemic) value than mere true belief. Prichard argues that the difficulties emerge from an inconsistent triad of commonly held theses; and in the course of raising doubts about one of these—that true belief is the fundamental epistemic good—he urges that epistemologists may need to tame their love affair with (the value of) knowledge.

Each essay deserves more detailed attention than is possible here. But I’ll offer some passing comments on three, focusing on the nature of the normativity that reasons for belief supposedly involve.

Central to Steglich-Petersen's account of epistemic reasons is the following conditional '(T)': 'Necessarily, if S has epistemic reason to believe that *p*, then [if S has all-things-considered reason to form a belief about *p*, S ought to believe that *p*]'. (p.24) (T)'s plausibility rests on several contestable assumptions—for instance, that epistemic reasons cannot conflict and that they do not have weights. But more may also need to be said about the 'ought' that figures in it, to see how the account handles the following basic kind of case. Suppose that the fact that it is raining gives me epistemic reason to believe that it is raining. Let's also assume that there is an all-things-considered reason for me to form a belief as to whether it is raining, since it is important for me to decide whether to go outside. Nonetheless, a moment later you offer me something of great value for believing that it is not raining (and for not believing that it is raining). Here, arguably, it is not the case that I ought to believe that it is raining. In which case (T) looks questionable: it looks true that 'I have epistemic reason to believe that it raining', yet false that 'if I have all-things-considered reason to form a belief as to whether it is raining, I ought to believe that it is raining'. A common response amongst value-based theories is to treat such an ought as *practical*, rather than *epistemic*. However, once one introduces this distinction it becomes less clear what the remaining motivation for (T) is. So it would be interesting to see what this value-based account says about such oughts—and, more generally, how conflicting evidence-oriented and pragmatic reasons interact.

Unlike Olson, I'm not impressed by Mackie-style queerness worries when it comes to motivating an error theory about categorical reasons (practical or epistemic). Nor do I think that the *concept* of a *normative reason* can be adequately analysed in non-

normative terms. But one of Olson's implicit suggestions raises an important issue for all concerned. If we understand reasons for belief as categorical, there is a big question as to the relation between the following claims: (i) *e* is evidence for believing that *p*; (ii) *e* is a categorical reason for believing that *p*. If the fact expressed by (ii) is the fact expressed by (i) then, so long as evidence is not itself irreducibly normative, supposedly categorical reasons for belief turn out not to be normative—hence we can be error theorists about (the putative normativity of) such reasons. If the fact expressed by (ii) is not the fact expressed via (i), we stand in need of further explanation as to what (ii) does amount to—whereby it remains to be seen in what sense such reasons do categorically favour beliefs and hence whether there are irreducibly normative, categorical, epistemic reasons. At this juncture, one important issue becomes whether (the stuff constituting) evidence is irreducibly normative (see also Steglich-Petersen, pp. 31-2). Raising the right issues, as well as mounting a plausible defence of epistemic error theory, Olson presents a serious challenge which those wishing to resist such an error theory must address.

Shah, though, returns a challenge to the error theorist. Schematically put (pp. 98-101): Error theorists about reasons for belief attribute beliefs to people. However, belief-attributions are constitutively subject to a norm of *correctness*: ascribing a belief to someone involves judging (at least implicitly) that the belief is correct if its content is true. Correctness is normative. So, even the error theorist is committed to the existence of normative stuff (presumably stuff concerning reasons for belief). One question about such an argument is whether *correctness* has to be understood as normative in the specific sense that is the error theorist's target. Olson, for instance, might reply that the correctness involved in ascribing any given belief to someone can

either be explicated in non-normative terms or else implicates only non-categorical reasons to ascribe relevant beliefs (reasons the normative force of which depends on one's goals or one's desires to attribute particular beliefs, say). Such a response raises many further questions, of course, on which (as with the other chapters) it may have been nice to see a little more dialogue within the volume.

Nonetheless, I hope this brief overview encourages those interested in normativity, epistemology and their interrelations to delve deeper into at least some of these essays. There is much to be learned from—and debated with—each.

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