

Dylan Dodd and Elia Zardini (eds.)

Skepticism and Perceptual Justification. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

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If I gave this book the justice it deserves, this review would never be completed. Dodd and Zardini have brought together a fine collection of essays, each of which reward careful study. After Dodd and Zardini's introductory essay, there are fifteen essays coming in at over three-hundred pages built around questions about perceptual justification. Ernest Sosa provides an excellent opening essay on Descartes's epistemology and its relation to Sosa's own virtue epistemology. Sosa argues that Descartes's epistemology aims for reflective knowledge of the puzzles that arise from animal knowledge. Descartes's goal is best understood as achieving a secure second-order perspective on the first-order animal knowledge. Descartes is not attempting to rebut a radical skepticism about natural, pre-reflective beliefs. The goal is to find a perspective at which we can reflectively endorse these beliefs from a stable and secure perspective.

After Sosa's inaugural essay, Dodd and Zardini's volume divides nicely into three sections. The first section "The Immediacy of the Senses" discusses dogmatism, the view that perception can justify belief independently of any warranted beliefs about the conditions of perception. This section features essays by Elia Zardini, Brian Weatherson, Jonathan Vogel, José L. Zalabardo, Alan Millar, Susanna Siegel and Nicholas Silins. The second section "The Dependency of the Senses" focuses on conservatism, the denial of dogmatism. Conservatives claim that perception may justify belief only if there is warrant for beliefs about the conditions of perception. This section features Crispin Wright's updated conservative view with his second "On Epistemic Entitlement" essay (for the original essay see Wright 2004). Several other papers in this section by Aidan McGlynn, Duncan Pritchard, and Annalisa Coliva discuss the plausibility of a conservative view. The last section of essays, "The Evidence of the Senses," discusses the relatively novel idea that the evidence from the senses differ in the normal case and the skeptical case. This section includes essays by Alex Byrne, Roger White, Martin Smith, and Dylan Dodd. These fifteen essays easily form a rewarding semester long study on perceptual justification. The volume provides an excellent sample of the richness of contemporary epistemology including topics in formal epistemology, cognitive neuroscience, traditional epistemology, and some history of epistemology. In the following I comment on three of the essays that I found particularly interesting.

Susanna Siegel and Nicholas Silins begin their fascinating contribution "Consciousness, Attention, and Justification" (149–169) with the following question:

Compare a subject who enjoys conscious visual experience of a ball, and a hypothetical blindsighted subject who does not have a conscious visual experience of a ball, but who nevertheless registers the presence of a ball in unconscious perceptual processing. Across a range of cases, both subjects reliably form accurate judgements about whether a ball is present. Does the sighted subject have more reason to believe a ball is there? (149)

Seigel and Silins formulate the following theses:

Attention Needed: One has reason from an experience to believe that x is F only if attends to x to more than a low degree.

Attention Optional: One sometimes has reason from an experience to believe that x is F even if one either does not attend to x at all, or attends to x only to a low degree. (153)

They then articulate and defend the Attention Optional view. The view assumes that there is conscious experience without attention. Consider Simons and Chabris's (1999) experiment asking participants to count the number of passes of a basketball while a person in a gorilla suit walks in the middle of the players. This case supports the idea that the participants really did see the person in the gorilla suit but because their attention was elsewhere it didn't register. The Attention Optional view suggests that the participants have reason from that experience to believe that a gorilla is present.

A positive answer is suggested by two main sources. First, the phenomenon of inferential blindness. Often we fail to realize incompatible commitments we've made. We have justified beliefs about each of the commitments and justified beliefs about their incompatibility, but we fail to put these sources of beliefs together. In this case you have reason to believe that you can't fulfill these commitments even though you don't realize that you can't fulfill these commitments. Seigel and Silins suggest that the attentional optional view is analogous to this view. A relevant difference, though, is that the unnoticed features of experience are *not* beliefs. Beliefs are available for use in reasoning. Unnoticed features of experience aren't available for such reasoning.

A second line of support comes from change blindness. Consider the case Seigel and Silins offer: your friend Moe has a silly moustache. After years of ribbing, he shaves it off. You see him the next day but don't note a change even though it's plausible that you do experience a difference in Moe. When you do realize that Moe shaved, it's natural to have a Homer Simpson experience—D'oh! the difference was staring me in the face. Seigel and Silins comment: "we