

Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology. By Susan Haack. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. x + 259 pages.

On the whole and despite some arid passages this is more fun to read than most books on epistemology. Professor Haack has humor and commonsense, both well displayed in her chastisements of Steven Stich and Richard Rorty in Chapter 9, "Vulgar Pragmatism: An Unedifying Prospect," and - more gently - in other obligatory putdowns of rival theorists; though her own position is so close to the views of Willard Quine that highlighting the differences sometimes involves her in veritably Scotist subtlety.

This is a book about the justification of belief, which seems to be what epistemology has boiled down to at this point in time. How are we to interpret "justified" in the generally accepted formulation "knowledge is justified true belief"? (As is well known, Edmund Gettier constructed some somewhat bizarre counterexamples, which theorists tend to whistle by: Haack calls them "boring.") The two main isms are Foundationalism: belief is justified by deriving it from unassailable basic beliefs; and Coherentism: justification lies in showing that the belief is supported by other beliefs in the grand system of coherent beliefs.

After showing why neither Foundationalist nor Coherentist theories of justification will do, Haack employs a Kant-type strategy: the two contenders are not mutually exclusive and exhaustive, there is a third way combining the valid insights of both while avoiding their drawbacks. This synthesis she calls, alas, Foundherentism. Like Foundationalism, it holds that experience plays a necessary role in justification, but it rejects the notion that there has to be a privileged class of basic beliefs justified independently of the support of other beliefs. Like Coherentism, it sees justification as largely a matter of mutual support, but unlike it, denies that beliefs can be justified only by other beliefs.

Haack's model of the justification of belief is neither that of foundations supporting a superstructure, nor the seamless web of Coherentism, but the crossword puzzle. The Across/Down clues are analogues of experiential input; reciprocal support by intersecting entries illustrates how corroboration does not have to be unidirectional.

Foundherentism presupposes that what is to be justified is a person in believing a proposition, not the proposition as such; and that justification, as well as belief, comes in degrees that may vary with time. Professor Haack's "first approximation" to a formula is: "A is more/less justified, at t, in believing that p, depending on how good his evidence is." Acknowledging that this is "close to trivial," she introduces notions of supportiveness, security, and comprehensiveness of evidence, and a distinction between two "aspects" S- (for 'state') and C- (for 'content') of beliefs, evidence, and reasons (I will return to this distinction presently), which she develops into the third and final formula "A is more justified in believing that p the more supportive his direct C-evidence with respect to p is, the more [less] independently secure his direct C-reasons for [against] believing that p are, and the more comprehensive his C-evidence with respect to p is." ([] in original.)

The S/C distinction is at the heart of Haack's defense of her position, because she feels the main battle she has to fight is against the Coherentist argument that since

justification is a logical matter, and only "sentences or propositions," not experiences, can stand in logical relations, experience cannot be relevant to justification. Her response is to draw a distinction:

[I]n the coherentist's premiss that there can be only causal, not logical, relations between a subject's experiences and his beliefs...the term 'belief' is ambiguous...: there can be causal relations between a belief-*state*, *someone's believing something*, and that person's experiences; there can be logical relations between a belief-*content*, *a proposition*, *what someone believes*, and other belief-contents, other propositions. This suggests that an adequate account of how the fact that a person's having certain experiences contributed causally to his believing something could make it more or less likely that what he believes is true, will need to exploit the distinction between belief-states and belief-contents.

The belief-state is the S-belief. (She also writes of S-evidence and S-reasons, without further explanation.) The belief-content is the C-belief (etc.). The S-belief has causes (and can be a cause); the C-belief has reasons (and can be a reason).

If I am in the state of believing that there is a dog in the room (S-belief, which is a physiological condition, not a proposition), what I believe (C-belief, which is not a physiological condition) is the proposition, "There is a dog in the room." If my belief state was caused by the presence of a dog in the room, that fact makes it more likely that my C-belief is true - hence, by definition, more justified - than if my belief state was caused only by hearing a yelp (which might have been coming from the TV). This is so because as a matter of fact, explainable on evolutionary grounds, C-beliefs that are the contents of S-beliefs with certain kinds of causal antecedents are more likely to be true than are those with other sorts of causes.

This seems unexceptionable. But if it is all that Haack is getting at with the S/C business, I do not see why it could not be stated more succinctly in the platitude that beliefs are more likely to be true if their causes are also reasons for them. Haack deems her elaborate procedure to be required because she agrees with the coherentists that causes are things or events in the 'physical world', while reasons are "sentences or propositions," and never the twain should meet. But this is false or unintelligible. Facts, not the sentences - still less the 'propositions', whatever those are - that describe them, are evidence and reasons, and the very same facts are causes and effects - to be sure, in different contexts of discourse. One might think it strange that Haack, who rightly claims a place in the true succession of Pragmatism, feels obliged to make concessions to Platonic metaphysics.

As mentioned already, Haack also distinguishes "A's S-evidence for p" from his C-evidence. The former is all of A's S-beliefs which, together with relevant "perceptual states" (if any), comprise the "vector of forces" (she seems to mean this literally, physiologically) supporting his S-belief that p; the latter consists of sentences or propositions that A believes, being the propositional content of the S-evidence. There may be states of the body besides these - mainly emotions - that influence beliefs but do not count

as evidence. (She writes also of S-reasons and C-reasons, but these I take to be synonyms for the preceding.)

Now, at least if one holds some version of materialist monism, as Haack does, one must concede that the S-beliefs and perceptual states really exist, though little more than that can be said about them yet, and that in some way they combine as "vectors of force" influencing other S-beliefs. One may, however, be suspicious of C-beliefs. We are told that S- and C- are two "senses of belief." What senses? A belief is a state of the body, all right; and its content or object is a proposition, if you like; but how can a proposition or sentence *be* a belief? Sentences and propositions - more exactly, 'that'- clauses - *express* or *designate* beliefs. To say, however, that they *are* beliefs makes no sense. (Houses are designated by street addresses, but it is not the case that a house *is* a street address). Even to say, as so many philosophers do, that sentences or propositions are essential parts or relations or 'aspects' of beliefs leads immediately to the paradox that dogs, cats, even the charming and politically correct bonobos are incapable of having beliefs, until, at least, they have gone to school in Reno and learned signing. And Professor Haack frequently expresses her aversion to paradox.

S-evidence and C-evidence are even harder to swallow. Evidence is things or events such as red shifts, DNA samples, bloody gloves. Evidence can (often) be laid on a table. Sentences and propositions describe evidence, but they are not themselves evidence (except of what somebody said). No more can a bodily state *be* evidence (save in special cases such as wife-battering). It is an *apprehension* of evidence; at any rate one would have supposed that Haack, who disdains phenomenalism and sense-data, would so hold.

These criticisms are not intended to cast any doubt on Haack's theses, that there are such things as beliefs, that some of them are true and others false, independently of what either the believer or the 'community' think, that persons are more justified in their beliefs the better their evidence for them is, that the criteria for good evidence are supportiveness, security, and comprehensiveness, and that experience is relevant to the justification of empirical belief. Making these points would be laboring the obvious, were it not for the dismal fact that so many trendy philosophers get their kicks by denying them. "Reconstruction in Epistemology," like graffiti removal, is a never-ending task.

Wallace Matson
University of California, Berkeley