

Book reviews

Epistemological Disjunctivism, by Duncan Pritchard. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2012, 206 pages.

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In *Epistemological Disjunctivism*, Duncan Pritchard aims to present a McDowell-inspired version of epistemological disjunctivism and to defend it against three main criticisms. The central claim of Pritchard's view, which he restricts to perceptual knowledge, is that such knowledge is 'paradigmatically constituted by a true belief whose epistemic support is both factive [...] and reflectively accessible to the agent' (2-3). Pritchard does not offer positive arguments for this view but since, as he claims, it has the potential to be the 'holy grail' of epistemology, this should prove to be enough motivation for epistemologists to take the view seriously. So, although the goals of *Epistemological Disjunctivism (ED)* might seem modest, the project is worth undertaking given that many, if not most, epistemologists think that the view is clearly false. Importantly, Pritchard skillfully succeeds, in a rather short book, in placing epistemological disjunctivism (ED) as a position worth considering.

The book is divided into an introduction and three parts that consist of three substantial essays that are partly based on previously published work by Pritchard. The book starts properly in Part One, but it begins with a brief introduction where the above initial statement of the view is provided and where the two main theoretical benefits that render the view attractive are introduced. One benefit concerns the debate between epistemic internalism and externalism. The view seems to combine aspects found in the internalist and externalist approaches in such a way that, Pritchard suggests, it offers a legitimate third option to them and deals with both camps' main challenges. The other benefit concerns radical scepticism. Given that the view enables us to have reflective access to reasons that entail facts about the world, radical scepticism can lose its bite and Part Three is dedicated to show us how this can be done.

In Part One, on the other hand, Pritchard occupies himself partly with the first benefit, as well as setting out in more detail what the view amounts to, introducing three *prima facie* problems facing ED and considering two of them. Here Pritchard articulates the *Core Thesis* of ED as follows:

‘In paradigmatic cases of perceptual knowledge, S has perceptual knowledge that *p* in virtue of being in possession of rational support R for her belief that *p* which is both *factive* (i.e., R’s obtaining entails *p*) and *reflectively accessible* to S’ (13)

Paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge are cases where S sees that *p* and believes that *p* on this basis and S has no undefeated psychological defeaters concerning *p*. So, in such paradigm cases, the rational basis for the belief that *p* has two interesting features.

First, the rational basis is *factive*. So beliefs about the external world can be based on *factive* reasons: reasons that imply that the beliefs are true. So a central thesis of ED is that you can have *factive* support for your beliefs about the external world.

Second, this epistemic support can be *reflectively accessible*. One can have reflective access to the fact that one sees that *p*, where this reflective access is understood in terms of what can be known through reflection alone (i.e., through a priori reasoning and introspection).

The disjunctivist aspect of the view is brought to light by comparing the sort of epistemic support one would have in paradigmatic cases and in bad cases where S does not see that *p* but S’s experiences are introspectively indistinguishable from the ones in the paradigmatic case. The orthodox view suggests the subject has the same degree of reflectively accessible rational support in both cases, whereas ED holds that this support is radically different in kind: the subject possesses *factive* support in the paradigmatic case, but she lacks this sort of support in the bad case.

So, given the above reflective accessibility requirement, ED is committed to *accessibilism*: S’s epistemic support is constituted solely by facts that S can know by reflection alone. Moreover, given the above disjunctivist approach, ED rejects the *new evil genius thesis* that internalists normally accept: S’s epistemic support is constituted solely by properties that S shares in common with her envatted physical duplicate. So ED is not a paradigmatic internalist view (i.e., a

view that maintains the strong supervenience of epistemic support on the internal). Nevertheless, Pritchard believes it has the means to capture our intuitions about epistemic responsibility since the epistemic support is within one's reflective ken and importantly, given the factivity of reasons in the paradigmatic cases, it pre-empts externalist worries concerning the truth-connection.

Pritchard also tries to provide some pre-theoretical motivation for the view in Part One. Worryingly, it is rather feeble: ED accommodates some of our ordinary way of talking about these matters. But it is not Pritchard's intention in *ED* to convince us that ED is true, but that it is not *plainly* wrong. So, he introduces what he considers to be the three key sources of dissatisfaction with ED, which are the main concern of this review.

The first is a sort of McKinsey-style problem that he calls the *access problem*:

- P1. I can know via reflection alone that my reason for believing the specific empirical proposition p is the factive reason R.
- P2. I can know via reflection alone that R entails p .
- C. I can know via reflection alone that p .

But (C) seems false, since p is a contingent proposition about the external world. So, given (P2) seems true, it seems that (P1) is false. But, ED seems to entail (P1).

Nevertheless, as Pritchard shows, once one realizes that ED is not committed to the claim that one can have knowledge of specific empirical propositions from reflection *alone*, given that R is an *empirical* reason that one *sees that* p , the problem vanishes. In fact, the alleged problem is so easily solved that it is difficult to imagine that it could be (even partly) responsible for anyone's reluctance to accept ED.

A more serious source of dissatisfaction is the *basis problem*. Roughly, the problem is that the following three claims seem inconsistent:

- i. If one sees that p , one knows that p .
- ii. Seeing that p is the epistemic basis for knowing that p .
- iii. One's epistemic basis for knowing that p cannot entail that one knows that p .

Given that ED is committed to (ii) and that (i) seems very plausible (seeing that p seems to be a way of knowing that p), it seems that the basis for knowing that p is knowing that p . But, given (iii), that cannot be right.

Pritchard wants to deny that seeing that p is a specific way of knowing that p . And he rejects the *entailment thesis* (i) by means of counter-examples. One such case exploits misleading defeaters. One sees a barn but is also told that one is in the land of fake barns. One does not know then that there is a barn before one, given the undefeated defeater. But suppose that later on one discovers that the testimony was false, would one retrospectively treat oneself as having *seen that* there was a barn? Pritchard thinks so and that might just be right. So, it seems that one can see that p without knowing that p .

Nevertheless, Pritchard holds that seeing that p necessarily puts one in a good position to gain knowledge that p even if one cannot exploit the opportunity. This, he claims, allows us to capture part of the insight that motivates (i): that seeing that p is both *factive* and *robustly epistemic*. So, Pritchard thinks he has resolved the basis problem.

But there seems to be a related issue lurking in the background. After all, Pritchard's story seems to go roughly like this: having reflective access to the fact that one sees that p is the rational support for which you believe that p , which in turn explains how you come to know that p . Now, it seems right to suggest that: if one knows by reflection that one sees that p (i.e., that one is in a *factive* state that has p as content), one knows that p . And, given how Pritchard seems to understand reflective access, it seems that is what he is suggesting. Say, if I can tell by introspection or reason that I see that there is a desk before me, I know that there is a desk before me.

But if this is so, the story we got hides a deficiency connected to another way of knowing. It is true that Pritchard is only interested in *perceptual* knowledge, but it seems that a complete story as to how we can perceptually know will need to say something about how we can know via introspection or reason. Frustratingly, we do not get that story.

The third source of concern Pritchard introduces in Part One is the *distinguishability problem*. It seems that the following two claims are in tension:

- a. I have reflective access to factive reasons in the paradigmatic case.
- b. The paradigmatic case is indistinguishable from the bad case.

This is because it seems that if one has reflective access to something in a case, one should be able to exploit it to distinguish this case from cases in which this thing is not present. So, it seems that if one claim is right, the other is wrong. And Pritchard dedicates the whole of Part Two to resolve this problem, since doing so requires motivating a distinction between favouring and discriminating epistemic support.

So, Part Two has two goals. First, to show that there is an independently motivated and plausible distinction between favouring and discriminating epistemic support. Second, to show that such distinction can be exploited to avoid the distinguishability problem. Let's consider the first goal.

The widespread *core relevant alternatives intuition*, that states that it is a necessary condition of knowing that p that one is able to rule out all relevant not- p alternatives, and the intuitive connection between perceptual knowledge and discrimination suggest an attractive *Relevant Alternatives Account of Perceptual Knowledge*, where to rule out an alternative is to be able to make the relevant perceptual discrimination:

'S has perceptual knowledge that p only if S can perceptually discriminate the target object at issue in p from the objects at issue in relevant (not- p) propositions, where a relevant alternative is an alternative that obtains in a near-by possible world.' (67)

But a problem of this account is that if one holds a plausible closure principle, perceptual knowledge becomes very hard to come by. In other words, given this account and closure, it seems one should be able to know things that intuitively one should not be able to know. For example, by knowing that one is looking at a zebra one should also be able to know that one is not looking at a disguised mule.

Pritchard, like most epistemologists, is not willing to give closure up (nor to become an sceptic). Instead, he wants to reject the view that to rule out an alternative is to possess the relevant discriminative ability, while retaining the spirit of the relevant alternatives account. To do this, we need to construe the evidence available in

these cases broadly enough to include background information. This way one can have favouring epistemic support to think that what one sees is a zebra rather than a disguised mule, even though one cannot perceptually discriminate between those objects. So, we have two kinds of epistemic support: one provided by favouring evidence, the other by discriminatory capacities. And Pritchard thinks that it is this overlooked distinction that allows us to make sense, as closure suggests, that one can know that one is not looking at a disguised mule although one does not possess the relevant perceptual discriminatory capacities.

Unlike other theories, Pritchard's rightly does not hold that the background evidence is required to know perceptually, say, that one is looking at a zebra. If one does not become aware of the disguised-mule possibility, one can know simply by means of one's discriminatory powers. However, if one becomes aware of the error-possibility, one can know only if one can eliminate that alternative by means of favouring evidence.

So, given closure, if one knows that it is a zebra and one becomes aware of the disguised-mule possibility while making the competent deduction, one *must possess* the background evidence that allows one to know that it is not a disguised mule. Of course, one might not possess this evidence, but in that case, Pritchard suggests, one does not retain the knowledge that it is a zebra because one is unable to rationally dismiss the error-possibility that you know is incompatible with what you believe. So there is no violation of closure.

However, it is not clear that all such *salient* error-possibilities need to be rationally dismissed in order to know. Indeed, this seems to be an unwelcome result. Salient error-possibilities need not be regarded as relevant ones (especially since unmotivated challenges are usually conversationally illegitimate; 146) and it seems possible that one does not regard the error-possibilities as relevant even if one does not have the means to rationally dismiss them (cf. sceptical error-possibilities merely raised). But if this is so, closure does not hold in full generality and so the motivation for the distinction between favouring and discriminating epistemic support starts to wane.

But there might anyway be some such distinction that ED can exploit to its benefit. Given such distinction, one can reflectively distinguish between the paradigmatic and bad cases either by be-

ing in possession of favouring evidence or a discriminatory capacity. Overlooking this distinction is what makes (b) plausible, when thinking that knowing the difference implies knowing the difference discriminatorily. And although one cannot discriminate between the cases, in the paradigmatic case, one can anyway know that one is in such scenario as opposed to the bad one by being in possession of favouring evidence. So, if we understand (b) with the help of the above distinction, the tension vanishes, and so the final problem Pritchard considers, *if* we are willing to accept that one always has grounds for dismissing the error-possibility in the paradigmatic cases.

In Part Three, Pritchard moves towards the application of ED to the problem of radical scepticism. He is mainly concerned with the following argument:

BIV1. I don't know that I'm not a brain in a vat (BIV).

BIV2. If I know that I have two hands, I know that I'm not a BIV.

BIVC. I don't know that I have two hands.

(BIV1) seems plausible given the nature of the BIV-hypothesis and (BIV2) is motivated by a closure principle that seems plausible to Pritchard and many others. Of course, closure might not hold in full generality even with Pritchard's distinction between favouring and discriminatory epistemic support in place, but leaving that aside, we seem to have reason to worry about this argument.

ED is a form of neo-Mooreanism and so rejects (BIV1). The reason (BIV1) is false, Pritchard thinks, is that: given sceptical error-possibilities are not epistemically motivated, one can rationally dismiss the sceptical hypothesis, in paradigmatic cases, simply by means of one's available reflective access to factive rational support for the relevant belief.

But (BIV1) does not seem false and in fact the Moorean assertions (e.g., 'I know I'm not a BIV') do. So Pritchard also needs to give a story as to why this is so. Since he thinks that, typically, explicit (perceptual) knowledge claims represent oneself as possessing the relevant discriminating evidence rather than favouring evidence and one does not possess the relevant discriminating evidence due to the nature of the sceptical challenge, it seems conversationally inappropriate to make the true Moorean assertions.

So, ED's philosophical potential should be apparent and Pritchard's treatment of these and other issues is very rich (far more than what has been here portrayed). *ED* makes a concise but strong case to place ED as a 'live' option in the epistemological terrain. So *ED* beautifully succeeds in achieving its main goal and it should be read by anyone with an interest in epistemology.

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