RICHARD FOLEY <u>Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others</u>. New York: Cambridge
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Living a normal life requires trusting that one's opinions are generally correct, and the
faculties and practices that give rise to them generally reliable. Likewise, it's hard to
imagine sane-looking living on the part of someone who placed no trust in the opinions
and faculties of others. A philosophical account of intellectual trust will go beyond these
platitudes and 'say something about what necessitates intellectual trust, how extensive it
should be, and what might undermine it' (3-4). Such is the task of Richard Foley's
<u>Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others</u>.

Those familiar with Foley's next-most-recent book, <u>Working Without a Net: A
Study of Egocentric Epistemology</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), will
know that he promotes a certain way of reading post-Cartesian epistemology. Descartes
attempted an epistemology in which internally defensible beliefs would be guaranteed to
amount to knowledge. Most allow that the Cartesian project is doomed to fail, and that
there is no response to the sceptic that is both knock-down and non-question-begging. (In
Chapter 1 Foley criticizes some recent attempts to avoid this result.) The moral, however,
is not that either of the central notions – crudely, knowledge, and (egocentrically) rational
belief; 'what is required for one to stand in a relation of knowledge to one's
environment', and 'what is required for one to put one's own intellectual house in order'
(13) – should be abandoned, or even that we must choose between them. While
contemporary 'internalists' and 'externalists' tend to treat rational and reliable belief,
respectively, as <u>the</u> central epistemological notion, we should acknowledge that they
correspond to 'different, equally legitimate projects for epistemologists to pursue' (13),

and give up the idea that these epistemological goods are bound to converge – that even the most (egocentrically) rational of our beliefs is bound to be true. Hence the necessity of trust, a 'leap of intellectual faith' (18), 'the need for which cannot be eliminated by further inquiry' (20).

Having made a case for its inevitability (Chapter 1), Foley presents the outlines of a positive account of self trust (Chapter 2), which he sees as a contribution to the 'rational belief' side of the aforementioned divide – to 'egocentric epistemology', as he has called it. Foley sees questions concerning intellectual trust as 'first-person questions', matters to be addressed 'from one's own perspective' (27), in terms of an invulnerability to self-criticism. Here, the core idea is that, insofar as one strives to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs, one's current belief that P is rational just in case one would, on reflection, regard believing that P as part of what's involved in one's now having accurate and comprehensive beliefs' (33). Part One of the book concludes with Foley's (Chapter 3) discussion of familiar empirical findings concerning humans' tendency base-rate neglect, overconfidence bias, and so on. In Foley's view, such findings may highlight the need for reflective 'self-monitoring', but they do not undermine -- as though they could! -- the necessity or reasonability of self trust.

In Part Two, the account is extended to intellectual trust in others, including one's past and future selves. In Chapter 4, Foley defends a form of 'universalism' about the opinions of others: what others tell us is prima facie credible, even where we know little or nothing about the source. Foley rejects overly strong forms of universalism, according to which testimony is somehow 'necessarily reliable in general' (97) and/or 'necessarily prima facie credible' (107) -- a view that Foley (though by no means him alone)

attributes, erroneously, to Thomas Reid (97-99). The proper brand of universalism is grounded in a consistency argument: I have good reason to think that my beliefs have been deeply influenced by the opinions of others, and that my intellectual faculties and environment are broadly similar to theirs; but then if self trust is ineliminable, so too must be a basic trust in the intellectual authority of others (106ff.); thus, '[t]rust in myself radiates outwards towards others' (106). (This is pretty much Reid's view: it is among 'the first principles of contingent truths' that we must grant others' testimony prima facie authority.) Because such trust is only presumptive, and can often be over-ridden, this is a 'modest' form of universalism. But it is no more avoidable, and no less reasonable, than intellectual trust in oneself.

An exactly similar argument warrants trust in one's past (Chapter 5) and future (Chapter 6) selves: one's past opinions have shaped one's current opinions, which will in turn shape one's future opinions; so, given present self trust, what I have believed and what I will believe ought to have prima facie credibility for me too. (For obvious reasons, we are seldom actually confronted with what we will believe, where this is interestingly different from what we believe now.)

Though most contemporary epistemologists regard the enterprise as a dead-end, current theorizing about knowledge and rational belief does continue to be shaped by our Cartesian heritage. Foley's book is an admirable and important treatment of a topic that, as a result, has gotten far less attention than it deserves. At certain points, however, Foley's own discussion may betray a residual adherence to Cartesian assumptions. For instance, if we've rejected classical foundationalism and ceased to seek 'ironclad assurances' that our beliefs are on the whole reliable (17), why speak of intellectual trust

as a 'leap of faith'? Why should a lack of <u>demonstrative</u> assurances of our own reliability make the assumption thereof less than perfectly rational? Likewise, it may be misleading on Foley's part to speak of self-trust as 'radiating outwards' (106, 168), suggesting as it does that there is some interesting sense (either ontogenetic or epistemic) in which self trust is prior to trust in others. From a purely egocentric perspective, self trust might <u>seem</u> to have a certain sort of priority, but the consistency argument itself suggests that there is a genuine parity here: I could not have been so significantly shaped by the opinions of others without trusting them; and unless such trust were warranted, how could <u>self</u> trust come to be such?

Another important question concerns the general internalistic tack Foley takes in his treatment of intellectual trust. For example, some externalists balk at the suggestion that there are multiple 'senses' of 'justified' or 'rational belief', none of which is more fundamental than the others (10-13). (See, e.g., Fred Dretske, (1991) "Two Conceptions of Knowledge: Rational vs. Reliable Belief," in <u>Perception, Knowledge and Belief: Selected Essays</u> (2000); Cambridge University Press: 80-93.) Further, while it is a common complaint against externalist theories that they fail to offer 'useful advice' (22), Foley is explicit in saying that we should give up on the idea that epistemologists 'have a privileged role to play in handing out intellectual advice' (22) -- of providing <u>Rules for the Direction of the Mind</u>; and while Foley sees his account of rational belief as importantly internalistic (39), he allows that, from a first person perspective, there's no special reason to think that one will be able to tell whether a given belief can/could withstand one's own critical scrutiny -- hence, whether that belief is rational (39-40, note 8). Together, these points might make one wonder whether intellectual trust does require

a specifically internalistic handling, or whether one couldn't profitably explore the

subject from an externalistic perspective. (In terms of the legitimacy of certain default

inference rules, say. See, e.g., Kent Bach, "A Rationale for Reliabilism," Monist 68: 246-

63.)

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