

---

*Warrant in Contemporary Epistemology: Essays in Honor of Plantinga's Theory of Knowledge.* Edited by Jonathan L. Kvanvig. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996. ISBN: 0-8476-8159-9. Pp. 385.

---

Among those not at all convinced by Richard Rorty concerning the death of epistemology are the honoree and the thirteen essayists who respond here to the position Plantinga propounded in his OUP volumes *Warrant: the Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function* (1983). In that pair (which has been augmented by a third title, *Warranted Christian Belief*, applying his general approach to that more specific domain), Plantinga concerned himself with what makes the difference between beliefs that constitute genuine knowledge and those that are merely true. He labels this factor "warrant." Distinguishing warrant from various alternatives assessed as inadequate, he spells it out as generally a matter of the believing subject's cognitive capacities satisfying four conditions. Those faculties involved in furnishing the beliefs in question must be functioning (1) properly, (2) within an epistemic milieu that is appropriate for their operation, (3) according to a design plan that is directed at truth, and is (4) successfully so aimed. His proposal has generated various rejections as well as seconders. This collection features fourteen counter contentions. One is a complementary account and another an extended reply from Plantinga himself to the reputable contributors and several issues they raise.

The editor has structured the volume to treat five distinct areas of discussion. A short introduction, without summarizing each submission within these sections, nicely sets out the major questions that pertain to each division. Part 1 respondents advocate the epistemic value of systematic coherence for one's beliefs and also internal access whereby one may reflectively ascertain whether one's belief has legitimacy or not. The essayists in Part 2 champion the notion that warrant that confers knowledge involves indefeasibility; that is, it will not be done in by what one has not yet learned. Part 3 offers objections to Plantinga's provocative claim that while his emphasis on proper function is a naturalist epistemology, specimens of that sort fit best within a theistic framework, whereas a strictly evolutionary account would cast the reliability of its own deliverances quite into question. Part 4 is more of an assemblage dealing with matters like expert knowledge and degrees of warrant. Part 5 addresses Plantinga's position from the perspective of virtue epistemology. Part 6 provides Plantinga's rejoinder, marked by careful selective attention to challenges put forward, yet not without some appreciative concessions.

In general, the articles sufficiently expose a reader to various ably articulated analytic approaches concerning what makes for knowledge, and how these intuitions and formulations face up to formidable difficulties. A fair bit of the discussion revolves around which slant best deals with the kinds of problems associated with the name of Edmund Gettier, whose samples (among others) have highlighted how true justified beliefs obviously do not always

yield knowledge, being sometimes only coincidentally correct. Plantinga, persuaded by several respondents, admits that his treatment of such problems was rather deficient. He also pleads guilty to the accompanying indictment that he neglected to treat the solution perhaps afforded by some stipulation stating that no defeater emerges to cancel that justification status. He proceeds to spell out more precisely where his original analysis came up short in not accounting for a resolution problem apparent in the cases. Sustained scrutiny of Peter Klein's proviso of indefeasibility discloses serious shortcomings in Klein's admirable attempt. Plantinga finds an answer in an amplified account of his own second warrant condition concerning congenial cognitive milieu. It must now specify a favorable mini-environment in order to set apart really warranted true beliefs from those that are responsible but only accidentally accurate and thus not knowledge.

In the more particular domain of religious knowledge, a number of conflicting orientations are engaged. Plantinga has argued that the objective conditional probability for a proposition affirming that our cognitive faculties are reliable is low on the assumption of naturalism and evolution. This not only defeats that affirmation for one who subscribes jointly to naturalism and evolution, but also calls for agnosticism over any belief entertained, including belief in naturalism and evolution. Keith Lehrer argues conversely that the probability of our cognitive faculties being reliable is low on the evidence for theism, given that the deceptive effects of evil factor in. Amused to see one of his own favorite strategies employed impressively against him, Plantinga suggests Lehrer's case would be a forceful one except for a further factor. The probability of reliable faculties is not at all so low with respect to the combined cluster of core Christian convictions. This core includes belief in God but is not evidentially based, dependent on theism. Moreover, it also involves redemptively counteractive measures against evil's effects. Bas van Fraassen seeks to support a Duhemian position that scientific inquiry can be conducted in a significantly neutral fashion. Empirical hypotheses may be employed in detachment from their originating metaphysical assumptions. The theses conveyed by those assumptions, as in the case of materialism, naturalism and scientism, should be regarded as expressing attitudes rather than asserting factual claims. Rather than respond by drawing and expanding on arguments he articulates elsewhere for a non-neutral Augustinian approach against a detached Duhemian outlook on the scientific enterprise, Plantinga sets out why he still finds expressions of materialism and those other *-isms* to be views with cognitive content. As such they still deny in more than some pragmatic way the kind of theism he commends as consistently Christian.

Several essayists register their objection to Plantinga's claim that his epistemology is actually naturalist, yet best fits within a theistic ontology since the notion of proper function seems to end up entailing design and to be unaccounted for by any strictly naturalistic analysis. The complaints prompt him to specify and support the sense in which his emphasis on proper function is naturalist. His claim that the concept of proper function really points to cognitive derivation from an intelligent agency, quite possibly supernatural, is de-

monstrably a separate metaphysical offering. Adoption of his externalist epistemology need not necessarily accept the additional argument, but such a demerit bears the burden of a general explanatory deficiency in accounting for proper function.

The book is marked by a generally respectful exchange of arguments, with ready allowance that one has at points perhaps or indeed misunderstood the other's position. The clarifications do provide impetus for further discussion and appropriation of others' insights. Within the compass of the analytic orientation taken by the essayists, this is an instructive and exemplary collection of reasoning about knowledge. It introduces the reader to implications in Plantinga's perspective that can be readily pursued in examination of his other work recently and soon to be published. Both he and his critics, especially the editor, point out related questions and issues Plantinga has not treated that others could take up with profit.

Tim Dyck

McGill University

---

*Womanhood in the Making: Domestic Ritual & Public Culture in Urban South India.* By Mary Hancock. Boulder: Westview Press, 1999. ISBN 0-8133-3583-3. Pp. xv+286.

---

Mary Hancock's rich and nuanced study is a provocative inquiry into the engendered universe of domesticity in South India. This work is marked by an informed and sensitive analysis of the construction of femininity as both centre and margin among the urban *smṛta brāhmaṇa* community of Chennai. Hancock's meticulous ethnography clearly reveals how the ideologies of "tradition" and "modernity" are re-produced, re-formed and re-inscribed on the body of the *cumaṅkali*, the auspicious married woman. For Hancock, the *cumaṅkali*, operating within the realm of the "everyday practice" of both public and private culture, negotiates and contests the gendered language of the bourgeois nationalist culture which urban *smṛta brāhmaṇas* have come to represent.

One of Hancock's pivotal arguments revolves around understanding domesticity as practice. The Tamil notion of domesticity indicated by the terms *illaṛam* and *iṅḷḷkai*, denotes a "way of life" which accommodates ritual action. Tamil *brāhmaṇa* women's domestic ritual actions (demarcated by specific spaces and behaviours) are "ways of *doing* things" not unlike the performance of similar actions in nonritual contexts. Drawing from the theoretical work of Bell, Foucault, Althusser, and Turner, Hancock argues that ritual is a locus for the exertion of hegemonic power, and that the study of ritual can reveal subjects as occupying and reproducing specific gender, class and status positions. Furthermore, as a centre of power, ritual is also a site for resistance. It *creates* subjects who are "both compliant and resistant."