RESENHA
REVIEW

LADESMAN, Charles. *Skepticism: The Central Issues*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. Pp. x + 210.

Skepticism: The Central Issues is an endeavor to "introduce the topic of skepticism, to explain what philosophical skepticism is, to identify and interpret some of the most historically influential skeptical arguments, to convince the reader that skepticism cannot be easily dismissed, and finally to show that its extreme claims denying we are in possession of knowledge cannot be sustained" (pp. viii-ix). Landesman executes his task by going through a number of skeptical questions and finally defending an externalistic approach to knowledge. Landesman's goals are venerable, even more so considering that the book is directed both to those introducing themselves to skepticism and those already well familiar with the topic.

In chapter 1 which Landesman refers to as an introduction (p. ix), he does not frame the central questions clearly enough, and much of the introductory material is postponed to later chapters. For instance, in chapters 3, and 15, he discusses everyday epistemological concepts such as 'proposition', 'belief', and 'truth'. One becomes particularly puzzled while reading the final chapter and finding there an account, for instance, of epistemic justification. Due to the lack of appropriate introduction, the reader starts to wonder what Landesman is up to.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 deal with the problem of the criterion. We take this to be the core issue of the book and of skepticism in general. The problem of the criterion can be formulated as a question as to how can we know that our most deliberate beliefs are true. If we propose a criterion—if we, for example, are *convinced* that the beliefs which we hold as true correspond with facts—it can be further asked how we know that the proposed criterion is trustworthy. Accordingly, we should give another criterion in order to justify the first one, but, of

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course, the process of providing criteria will go on *ad infinitum*. One might try to circumvent the infinite regress by taking the initial criterion at face value. Unfortunately, this procedure generates a circle, and therefore we have not provided an answer to the problem, but instead just begged the question. The upshot of the problem of the criterion is, epistemologically speaking, most unpleasant, for we are left with the dilemma of choosing between an infinite regress and a vicious circle. Whichever we choose, the skeptic has the upper hand, and it is hard to avoid biting the skeptic's bullet.

Landesman devotes no less than five chapters (8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) to an examination of G. E. Moore's solution to the effect that one can refute skepticism through acknowledging the existence of one's hands. Landesman should have somehow motivated the extensive study of Moore's argument. These five chapters would have justified their space in the book if they had provided the reader with fresh insights into Moore's views. Obviously, the discussion of Moore is attempted to set the stage for Landesman's favorite epistemological view—externalism—according to which the reliability of our cognitive processes grounds our knowledge-claims. The reliable processes (or, to use Landesman's term, *super-reliable* processes (p. 114)) bridge the gap between appearances and reality; the reason why our perceptions have the content they have is that they are caused by the things in the external world. "We are so designed by nature that how things appear generally depends upon how they are" (p. 138) For instance, my perception that there is a hand before me is caused by the fact that *there is* a hand before my eyes. The skeptic's wheel cannot start its roll, for it is useless to ask how I know various things; the world just happens to be the way it seems to be.

Landesman does not pose the obvious question which arises at this point: Which processes are reliable and which are not? We are all familiar with the fallibility of our cognitive faculties; sometimes they produce false beliefs in addition to the arguably true ones. As Landesman points out in the interesting and well-written chapter 2, colors, for example, are merely projections of our mind, instead of items in the external world. Moreover, skepticism about colors can be easily extended further to cover, for example, our causal inferences too, as Landesman notes in his discussion on Hume's views on

induction in chapter 13. Therefore, confronting the skeptic's challenge by appeal to super-reliable processes appears to beg the question. The skeptic will point out that it is certainly possible that we are dreaming or having vivid hallucinations, and the question remains as to how can we exclude those possibilities. Descartes was preoccupied with this question, as Landesman sets forth (cf. ch. 7). According to Descartes, our belief system should have a firm basis, and therefore we must exclude seemingly extravagant possibilities of deceiving demons, misleading dreams and suchlike. What could be such a firm basis? Moore's example of hands does not seem to be a foolproof instance of knowledge, because what seems to be hands in our eyes, can be, beyond the veil of perceptions, after all, just pair of oranges or what not. According to Descartes, a firm basis can be attained through perceiving one's own existence; the famous *cogito* was to become the fundamental foundation of Descartes's epistemology. There are drawbacks in Descartes's procedure, and some of them are correctly raised by Landesman in chapter 14. However, it seems strange that Landesman highlights the problems of Descartes's epistemology and yet is very sympathetic to Moore's solution. After all, one should notice that both Descartes and Moore have just gathered different exemplars to their pools of knowledge. And one is invited to think that Descartes is able to offer exemplary beliefs of a more solid sort than Moore.

Landesman finally closes the book by a short presentation of his solution to the problem of the criterion. He draws his views together in the last three pages (pp. 200–202), in which he proclaims an externalistic approach to knowledge. According to Landesman, in order to know it is not necessary to know that one knows, and therefore the question of providing grounds to one's beliefs does not even arise. As he writes: "[O]ne may have good and sufficient reason for thinking that something is true without knowing what that reason is. One may have knowledge without knowing or understanding what having knowledge amounts to. In fact, one may have knowledge even when one thinks one does not have knowledge." (p. 59.) This answer certainly does not eliminate the problem of the criterion; actually, if one admits, as Landesman does, that reliable processes *may* or *may not* produce knowledge, then one is in the same position as the skeptic

and should withhold belief. Even if we take it for granted that the problem of the criterion does not present a threat to the sort of epistemology Landesman defends, he does not give a satisfactory answer to the fundamental epistemological question "How is knowledge possible?" On our view, at least, it should be the central task of epistemologists to explain the possibility and structure of knowledge. Noting that "[w]e may have knowledge that we cannot prove we have" (p. 202) is not enough.

The book as a whole invites some critical comments. Firstly, Landesman's treatment of the central issues of skepticism involves introducing a multitude of novel technical terms. To give a few examples, the book contains terms such as 'epistemic nihilism' (p. 4), 'qualified fideism' (p. 64), 'philosophical bracketing' (p. 65), 'strong/weak cognitive internalism' (pp. 84–85), 'framework empiricism' (p. 87) and 'common sense conceptual scheme' (p. 91). Quite many of the terms are not re-employed, but appear extravagant. Secondly, the book seems fragmented; we were left with the impression that the author has written individual essays on matters pertaining to skepticism and compiled them together without bridging them into a unified whole. Finally, we find that Landesman's book does not succeed in the difficult task which any book meant for both beginners and specialists must face; it fails to find a satisfactory balance between being both an introductory text and a profound study on the central issues of skepticism.

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