

*Axel Gelfert (Cambridge):*

**Richard Foley: *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others***

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In his previous books, *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality* (1987) and *Working Without a Net* (1993), Richard Foley presented a highly influential account of what it means for one's beliefs and belief-forming practices to be rational. Developing a positive new account of epistemic rationality, however, has never been Foley's sole concern. His project is meta-epistemological in character as much as it is epistemological. Put crudely, questions such as 'What makes some beliefs knowledge?' are of equal importance to Foley as such questions as 'How is scepticism possible?'. Indeed, given the way in which philosophical debates tend to be shaped, it may be the more fruitful way of tackling a philosophical problem to start from questions of the latter type and work one's way backward to the fundamental questions that gave rise to the debate in the first place. Such an approach need not be strictly historical; rather, it will be meta-epistemological in that it probes deeply into the possibility of an epistemological theory, its prospective subject matter as well as its limitations. Given the difficulty of constructing a coherent epistemological theory and defending it against the various objections that are standardly run against such theories, it should often prove more viable to illustrate the general meta-epistemological 'lessons' by way of referring to previous epistemological theories and the long-standing debates that surround them. Hence, a meta-epistemological approach naturally gives rise to an historically informed outlook.

Foley's recent book *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others* is a fine example of how an approach that is broadly meta-epistemological in spirit can lead to a fresh perspective on a number of core issues in epistemology. Amongst the topics discussed by Foley are such classics as the origins of scepticism, the nature of epistemic rationality and justification, the principles underlying belief revision, and the epistemology of testimony. The unifying theme for this motley of epistemological problems, each of which has in itself been the topic of considerable debate over the years, is the notion of *intellectual trust*. Questions of intellectual trust are most conspicuous in the case of accepting another person's testimony, but Foley's understanding of the role of trust is not limited to the interpersonal case. As the title of his book suggests, there is also the question of intellectual self-trust: How much trust should we place in the veracity of our own (current, past and future) beliefs? Furthermore, do the methods we employ in forming those beliefs deserve the trust that we typically place in them? Indeed, as Foley sees it, the question of epistemic self-trust not only precedes questions of trust in others, but also points to a possible justification of the latter. For, once it can be shown that an irreducible element of trust is involved in every epistemic enterprise, even simple ones that do not involve other people, it may not seem such a big step any more to extend this trust to other rational beings. Trust in one case 'tends to transfer to the other' (p. 3). As Foley summarizes his view towards the end of his book: 'Insofar as I trust my own

faculties and opinions, and insofar as this trust is reasonable, it not being a condition of rationality that I have non-question-begging assurances of my reliability, I am pressured to grant intellectual authority to others.’ (p. 175)

Foley does not give a precise definition of what he understands by the term ‘intellectual trust’, but a clear enough understanding of the meaning of the term can be gleaned from the previous quotation, in which he hints at an intimate connection between intellectual trust and the notion of epistemic rationality. Epistemic rationality, of course, has been at the heart of epistemology ever since the great age of classical foundationalism associated with such names as Russell, Ayer, Carnap, and C.I. Lewis. The great hope, which fuelled foundationalist epistemology, that it would prove possible to discover a set of ‘methods and rules that would provide guarantees that our beliefs are generally accurate’ (p. 18), has long been utterly disappointed. However, it is this hope, Foley argues, which still informs contemporary epistemological debates. Even though few epistemologists nowadays explicitly subscribe to a strongly foundationalist view, the demise of classical foundationalism has not transformed the field of epistemology as thoroughly as one might have expected. As an example, consider the controversy about epistemological internalism and externalism, which are standardly regarded as philosophical competitors. It is not at all obvious why internalism and externalism should be regarded as mutually exclusive: Where internalism aims to explicate what it means to have beliefs that are defensible from one’s own perspective, externalism is primarily concerned with stating conditions for knowledge. Once it is realized that there are no general guarantees that can assure us of the accuracy of our beliefs – something that the failure of classical foundationalism should have long taught us – then the perceived antagonism evaporates. In other words, when the externalist analyzes the reliability of our beliefs and the internalist considers why some of our beliefs are less blameworthy (and in this sense more rational) than others, each pursues a perfectly legitimate project. It is only when adherents of one position think that the other position ought to be reducible to their own preferred view, that things go awry: ‘If it is assumed that the properties that make a belief rational must also be the very same properties that turn true belief into a good candidate for knowledge, then an account of rational belief is adequate only if it contributes to a successful account of knowledge.’ (p. 20) This assumption, however, is unfortunate not only in that it breaks down a distinction that is worth making, but also in that it distracts from the fundamental lesson the failure of foundationalism should have taught us, which is: where there are no epistemic foundations, there can be no guarantees of the accuracy of our beliefs. ‘Try as we may, we cannot entirely discredit this worry’, writes Foley (p. 18). Indeed, this should also be the moral of scepticism, which no amount of philosophical hand-waving can completely dissolve. ‘The proper reaction to such worries is to admit that they are unavoidable rather than to try to legislate against them.’ (p. 19) Hence, for philosophical inquiry to ever get off the ground, what is needed is an ‘intellectual leap of faith’ (p. 18). There is nothing irrational about this, on the contrary: It simply reflects a *de facto* necessary precondition for any meaningful practice of inquiry, and it would surely be irrational to deprive oneself of the possibility of inquiry altogether.

Faith in the accuracy of one’s beliefs, of course, need not, and should not, be unlimited; this is why the problem perhaps should have been phrased in terms of intellectual trust from the very beginning, rather than in terms of faith: Trust is always trust *within limits*, whereas faith can be unlimited (and may not only persist but grow stronger even against better evidence). The question then arises how trust in one’s opinions and beliefs should be

apportioned in an epistemic context, and what it means to speak of an ‘epistemic context’ in the first place. Foley distinguishes between what he calls a (general) ‘epistemological point of view’ (p. 27) and what one might call the viewpoint of epistemic rationality. The former reflects one’s (first-person) goal ‘to have accurate and comprehensive beliefs’ (p. 27), whereas the latter concerns the ways in which this goal is to be pursued. It is only by adopting the epistemological point of view, one might say, that some forms of goal-oriented behaviour amount to *intellectual inquiry*, and in this sense it constitutes a minimal requirement for any account of epistemic rationality. However, this observation does not yet prescribe any specific criteria for what makes some beliefs or belief-forming practices rational as opposed to others. (Of course, whether epistemic rationality lends itself to an analysis in terms of goal-oriented behaviour, is open to debate; see Kelly, 2003, for a critique of this view.) Not surprisingly, Foley suggests that the most plausible criteria of epistemic rationality are rules concerning the apportionment of epistemic trust. For a belief or opinion to qualify as (epistemically) rational it is necessary that it stand up ‘to one’s own, most severe scrutiny’ (p. 28). It is this ‘invulnerability to self-criticism’ (p. 27) which renders a belief rational on Foley’s account. This, however, should not be misunderstood to mean that mere failure to exercise one’s capacity to self-criticism can immunize one’s beliefs against the charge of irrationality. Rather, the criterion should be understood counterfactually: If one were to exercise one’s critical capacities, would the belief or opinion in question survive close scrutiny?

There are at least two distinct ways in which a belief can fail to survive self-criticism: It may be held with insufficient confidence or it may be easily undermined by reflecting on further beliefs, for example contradictory background beliefs. Of course, even if a belief passes both tests and, in this sense, is invulnerable to self-criticism, this does not make it knowledge. But this should not come as a surprise, given that it is part of Foley’s project to divorce the theory of epistemic rationality from the search for necessary and sufficient criteria for knowledge. In driving a wedge between rationality and knowledge, new middleground for principled epistemic evaluation becomes available. Whether one is rational in holding a particular belief is not so much a matter of whether one can give reasons in its defence (as Foley notes, ‘with enough information and dialectical skills, one may be able to defend even that which one disbelieves’, p. 26), but whether one would continue to hold the belief *were one to exercise one’s capacity of self-criticism*. Epistemic rationality, understood in this way, does not allow for ‘epistemic self-immunization’ (after all, refusal or lack of self-criticism is not the same as ‘invulnerability to self-criticism’), but it does allow for a considerable degree of variation of what is (or was) rational for someone to believe in a certain epistemic situation at a certain time. Epistemic rationality, hence, contains an irreducibly perspectival element.

One could regard Foley’s account of epistemic rationality as somewhat ‘deflationary’. Having rejected the received view of rationality, according to which there is at best a difference in degree between what makes some beliefs (merely) rational and others knowledge, Foley is free to also reject the view that there must be a priori principles that ‘capture necessary truths about how to conduct inquiry’ (p. 43), for example regarding sources of epistemic justification. Rather, plausible guidelines for how to conduct epistemic inquiry are ‘to be accounted for by the above notion of epistemic rationality and the contingent (although hard to avoid) fact that most of us believe, and on reflection would continue to believe, that introspection, perception, memory, and coherence are, in general,

reliable ways of regulating opinion' (p. 43). This also extends to the social aspects of knowledge acquisition, to which Foley devotes considerable space throughout the book. While Foley recognizes that 'social factors ordinarily play a major role in determining what it is epistemically rational for an individual to believe' (p. 44), he argues that it is possible to advocate a genuinely social epistemology without thereby having to adopt a consensus view that places agreement with one's community at the heart of the enterprise of intellectual inquiry. Rather, social factors influence our epistemic perspective 'in an indirect and contingent way, through shaping the individual's deepest convictions and standards' (p. 44). By accounting for the social nature of intellectual life in this indirect way, rather than in terms of agreement and consensus, Foley can allow for 'the possibility of rational iconoclasm, that is, for the possibility of individuals rejecting the most cherished opinions of their contemporaries or the most deeply held assumptions of their traditions [without thereby ceasing to be rational]' (p. 99).

The exemplary case of knowledge acquisition in a social context is coming to believe something on the basis of someone else's testimony. Or, at the very least, this is how epistemologists have most often tried to conceptualize the social nature of inquiry, namely in terms of the trust that is extended to other people in accepting their testimony. (For a survey of the epistemology of testimony, see Coady 1992.) Given the intuitive importance of trust in testimonial interactions, this would seem an ideal test case for Foley's proposal. How, on Foley's account, can we ever rationally accept what other people tell us? Foley rejects the two most familiar positions in the epistemology over testimony, namely Humean inductivism (according to which testimony is acceptable only to the extent that we have gathered inductive evidence supporting its reliability) and Reidian fundamentalism (which maintains that we have a defeasible a priori entitlement to accept testimony as *prima facie* true). The weaknesses of each account have been rehearsed many times in the literature concerning the epistemology of testimony. The inductivist project fails because it is simply not realistic: If, in collecting evidence for the reliability of testimony, we rely only on first-hand empirical data, the inductive basis is far too narrow to allow for any substantial generalization. If, however, we decide to broaden the inductive basis by going beyond first-hand evidence, we cannot do so without relying on other people's reports of confirming, or disconfirming, instances, i.e., on other people's testimony, and the project of justifying reliance on testimony becomes circular. One standard reaction to the failure of inductivism is to claim that 'testimony is necessarily *prima facie* credible' (p. 97). Such testimonial 'fundamentalism' (or, in Foley's terminology, 'universalism') comes in different varieties: Some, like Tony Coady (1992), have argued that the existence of a public language can only be explained by the reliability, in general, of testimony. Others, for example Tyler Burge (1993), regard the mere intelligibility of testimony as evidence of the testifier's status as a 'rational source' of knowledge, that is, as a 'resource for reason'. Foley is sceptical about such proposals and claims that 'it is not hard to detect a hint of desperation in some of these accounts' (p. 97). However, Foley gives testimonial fundamentalism rather short shrift, and one is left to speculate about the reasons for this quick dismissal. Two reasons come to mind: First, as mentioned earlier, Foley repeatedly urges that an adequate account of intellectual authority 'must leave room for the possibility of rational iconoclasm' (p. 99); hence, arguing for an a priori *prima facie* warrant of testimony might seem too close to issuing a *carte blanche* to those in a position to exercise intellectual authority. (Elsewhere, p. 122f., he discusses the difficulties of squaring one's 'egalitarian sentiments' with the demand,

necessitated by the increasing ‘division of intellectual labour’, to defer, on occasion, to intellectual elites, e.g. technical or scientific experts.) As an objection against testimonial fundamentalism, however, this does not seem quite to the point. After all, the fundamentalist’s conception of an a priori prima facie warrant for testimony is egalitarian in spirit: It applies to the dissenter’s testimony just as much as to the majority’s (or the governing elite’s) testimony, and who is right – the dissenter or the majority – will typically depend on the specific circumstances of the situation. Hence, it seems that the ‘prima facie’ clause in the fundamentalist’s argument that ‘testimony is necessarily prima facie credible’ can successfully handle the dissenter case. There is, however, a second line of critique against the fundamentalist’s slogan, and this targets not the ‘prima facie’ structure of testimonial justification but the requirement that this justification be *necessary* (or a priori). As mentioned earlier, Foley argues that one need not assume the existence of a priori principles capturing necessary truths about the conduct of inquiry in order to convince oneself of the rationality of one’s intellectual habits. If this holds for intellectual inquiry in general, it can also be expected to hold for the individual methods that constitute our epistemic practices. Hence, it would indeed seem strange if, when it comes to justifying our reliance on testimony, all of a sudden a priori principles were called for.

Foley’s own justification of our reliance on testimony provides further evidence for the view that what he resents in the fundamentalist position is the overambitious claim that we have an a priori (necessary) warrant for accepting someone’s testimony. Put crudely, Foley’s argument is an argument from analogy. We are justified in trusting other people’s opinions for the simple reason that those, to whose opinions we are typically exposed, tend to be broadly similar to us. Not only do we, as human beings, share a broadly similar cognitive equipment, but furthermore, ‘unless one of us has had an extraordinary upbringing, your opinions have been shaped by an intellectual and physical environment that is broadly similar to the one that has shaped my opinions’. (Whether you and I have *in fact* been immersed in a similar epistemic environment is, of course, a purely contingent matter, and Foley is careful to point out that nothing in his argument from similarity is ‘capable of supporting anything stronger than a contingent claim’, p. 107; in this regard, Foley’s argument connects closely with recent debate over the contingent nature of epistemic reliability, cf. Greco, 1999.) Hence, Foley concludes, ‘if I trust myself, I am pressured on the threat of inconsistency also to trust you’ (p. 102). On this account, we are not merely justified in accepting another’s testimony, but we are rationally obliged to do so. The phrase ‘on the threat of inconsistency’ has a decidedly categorical ring to it, and one might argue that, within Foley’s framework, it plays a similar role as the a priori necessity assumption in the fundamentalist framework. Contrary to the fundamentalist account, however, the obligation it expresses does not derive from a metaphysically, or conceptually, necessary connection between testimony and truth (or meaning); rather, it derives from the internal demands of self-trust: *If* I trust myself (my first-order beliefs as well as my second-order opinions regarding my belief-forming practices), *and* if in every epistemically relevant respect you are much like me, *then*, in order to be able to continue to trust myself, I also need to trust *your* (first-order and second-order) beliefs. A willingness to extrapolate intellectual trust from oneself to others in this way is, one might say, a sign of epistemic integrity.

As Foley sees it, the fact that ‘self-trust radiates outward’ (p. 168), from our current self to others as well as to our own past (and future) selves, is the result of the peculiar structure of the argument from self-trust. In all three cases – trust in the opinions of others, trust in

one's own past self, and trust in one's future self – the argument can be analysed in three steps (p. 154f.). First, there is a *credibility thesis*: Given the commonalities of my present epistemic situations with those of others (as well as with my own past and future epistemic predicament), and given the de facto ineliminability of the influence of my own past opinions and those of other people on my present opinions, I 'risk inconsistency if I trust my current opinions' but do not also generally trust my own past opinions and the opinions of others. In a second step, the credibility thesis must be qualified by a *priority thesis*: If my current opinion about *p* conflicts with yours (or with my past opinion *x*), the prima facie reason that your (or my own past) opinion gives me is defeated. This, however, seems to go a step too far, which is why, loosely speaking, a 'fail-safe' mechanism must be added in the form of a *special reasons thesis*. For, there will frequently be cases where, in spite of the priority thesis, it is nonetheless epistemically rational for me to defer to you (or my past self), namely whenever I have reasons that indicate that you are (or I was) 'in a better position to evaluate *p*' than I am now.

Foley's project of putting self-trust at the heart of the epistemological project is fascinating, and his observation that a number of issues, such as the perceived antagonism between epistemic internalism and externalism, on closer inspection turn out to be merely due to the neglect of self-trust in traditional debates, may come to have a liberating effect on epistemology as a whole. The sketch that Foley presents of a 'theoretically unified way of treating all issues of intellectual authority' (p. 156) is certainly highly ambitious. As always, however, the devil is in the details. In the remainder of this review, I would like to hint at some possible lines of criticism of Foley's proposal. In doing so, I do not wish to develop an alternative to Foley's view; rather, I want to suggest that epistemologists, no matter what their persuasion, would be ill-advised to simply ignore Foley's proposal where it differs from their own, and that Foley's arguments and insights not only merit but demand close attention – particularly from those who wish to defend views that are in tension with Foley's.

First, one might challenge Foley's argument from the similarity between our epistemic predicament and that of others. Even if one is willing to accept the argument as valid, that is, even if one accepts that *if* other people were like us (in the epistemically relevant sense) *then* we would be pressured, on threat of inconsistency, to accept their opinions as true, one may still have doubts about the applicability of the argument: Is it indeed the case that we are all broadly similar as far as our opinions and epistemic practices are concerned? One could argue that the assumption that our opinions are shaped by an intellectual environment that is broadly the same for all of us does not sit well with the high diversity and fragmentation, also in epistemic terms, of present (Western) societies. Nonetheless, testimonial practices seem to work remarkably well across different cultural groups. (A similar point could be made with respect to temporally distinct communities – that is for the testimony of historical sources.) Perhaps there is a sense in which even the most culturally contrary communities still have more in common than perhaps they themselves would realize, but certainly a lot more must be said about which features of epistemic practices are important and which are not, in order for the notion of similarity to bear the weight of Foley's argument.

Another, perhaps more fundamental worry about Foley's proposal is that, by modelling all matters of epistemic authority after intellectual self-trust, it risks blotting out vital differences between trust in oneself and in others. Consider again the case of trusting another's opinion. As Foley insists, in order for someone else's opinion to have an effect on my opinion 'it must be rational for me to believe that the person has this opinion' (p. 110).

Only once I have formed a (rational) idea of what the other person believes, can I ask the further question of what influence that person's opinion should have on my own. However, it is this very first step, which, at least at first sight, appears to be quite different in the case of self-trust than in the case of trusting others. For, in the self-trusting case I typically have special access to the opinions that I want to consider: They are either opinions that I currently hold or that I remember having held at some point in the past. The instances where I am unsure about whether I really used to believe what the evidence suggests I did believe at some point (cf. Foley's hypothetical case of the forgotten, and then re-discovered, diary; p. 131f.) will be fairly rare and, at any rate, will not be the cases that establish the privileged status of self-trust, from which all other issues of epistemic authority are supposed to follow on Foley's account. In the case of trusting others, however, we lack special access to their opinions. While we mostly learn about other people's opinions through their testimony, there is no guarantee that other people's testimonial utterances indeed express their opinions – after all, people may choose to keep many of their opinions to themselves, and even when they do purport to voice their opinions, they may choose to lie or mislead. Hence, even if one grants that Foley has successfully shown that we can (prima facie) trust other people's opinions, the basic question of testimony remains: Can we trust what they tell us?

Perhaps there is no real asymmetry between self-trust in our own (past, current, and future) opinions and trust in the testimony of others. Just as others may lie to us, perhaps we, too, are guilty of self-deception more often than we would like to think. One might argue that others sometimes know us better than we know ourselves, and that this observation adds yet another twist to the argument connecting self-trust in our opinions and intellectual faculties with intellectual trust in others. After all, it is striking that the very mechanism that, on Foley's account, renders self-trust rational – namely, the capacity to subject each of our opinions to self-criticism – is itself modelled after the example of debate and exchange of arguments. Perhaps, then, there is an irreducible element not only of trust but also of sociality involved at all levels of intellectual inquiry. It is no small achievement of Foley's book to give rise to this roster of new questions, while at the same time having convinced the reader that questions of intellectual trust should long have been restored to the place they deserve.

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