

Christopher Peacocke, *The Realm of Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. x, 284.

At any given time, an individual has certain beliefs and certain procedures or methods for modifying those beliefs. In *The Realm of Reason*, as in his previous book, *Being Known* (1999), Peacocke is concerned with the elusive question of what it is for someone to be “entitled” to a given belief or procedure.<sup>1</sup>

According to Peacocke, an entitlement is *a priori* if it derives entirely from “grasping” certain concepts, where grasping a concept involves understanding the “constitutive” truth conditions of the concept. An entitlement is empirical if it also depends on experiential evidence of some sort. The individual has an *inferential* entitlement to a belief or procedure if the belief or procedure has been inferred from other beliefs to which he or she is entitled using procedures to which he or she is entitled. An individual can also have a *perceptual* entitlement to a belief about the environment, an *introspective* entitlement to a belief about his or her current experience, a *testimonial* entitlement through believing what he or she has been told, and so forth.

The main theme of the present book is that all entitlements depend at bottom on *a priori* entitlements, because in Peacocke’s words, “Not all warrants can be empirical, on pain of regress” (31).

More precisely, Peacocke claims that the possession conditions of a given concept determine truth conditions of the concept’s application. These possession conditions also involve finding it “compelling” to apply the concept in certain cases. Sometimes it is “clear” or “immediately obvious” (187) that in so applying the concept one is guaranteed to have satisfied the truth conditions. Sometimes it is “clear” that one has a default entitlement to take the truth conditions to be satisfied. Such guarantees or default entitlements are *a priori* entitlements.

Clearly, Peacocke’s appeal here to what is “clear” or “immediately obvious” needs further explication, because if “it is clear” means *it is a priori clear*,

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<sup>1</sup>Peacocke uses the term “entitlement” roughly in the way Tyler Burge uses the term “warrant” in “Content Preservation,” *Philosophical Review* 103 (1993), 457-88. For Burge, warrants are either justifications, if accessible to the person who is warranted, or entitlements if not accessible.

there has been little progress in explaining what it is for an entitlement to be a priori and Peacocke's account of a priori entitlement appears to reduce to the tautology that an entitlement is a priori if and only if it is a priori.

Peacocke envisions an epistemology that would be similar in certain respects to the epistemologies of half a century ago, when some philosophers argued that a person's behaving in a certain way was evidence that he or she had certain thoughts or feelings because of the meaning or "logical grammar" of talk about thoughts and feelings; perceptual experiences were said to justify beliefs about the environment, because those experiences constituted by definition grounds for such beliefs; induction was justified by noting that induction is by definition an instance of good reasoning; etc.

The most serious worry about the earlier epistemologies was their inability coherently to explain how alleged analytic meaning connections differ from synthetic substantive connections in a way that allows the analytic connections to provide a special sort of justification. The same worry arises for Peacocke's version, substituting "entitlement" for "justification" and "constitutive" for "analytic."

The main competitor to all such *special foundations* theories is the familiar idea that justification or entitlement must begin from current beliefs and procedures, which are then possibly modified in ways that make them more coherent with each other until some sort of reflective equilibrium is attained.<sup>2</sup> This view might be called a *general foundations* view because it gives all of an individual's beliefs and methods the a priori status only some have in a special foundations approach (using "a priori" here to mean merely "prior to the present inquiry," what one starts out accepting at the beginning of inquiry). General foundationalism does not assign a special epistemic role to definitions, meaning postulates, or "constitutive" principles.

Here is one way to assess the issue between a general foundations approach and a special foundations approach like Peacocke's. Imagine a community of people about whom the correct epistemology is the general foundationalist epistemology. In this community everyone is (default) entitled to their current beliefs and methods. They have concepts, beliefs, and a language, they discuss issues with each other, and have much knowledge of the world,

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<sup>2</sup>John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 18.

even though Peacocke’s epistemology does not apply to them, because their concepts do not have any “constitutive” conditions. There may be philosophers in the community who wrongly think that the correct epistemology for the community is Peacocke’s. But imagine that these philosophers are wrong.

If Peacocke thinks this imagined case is not really possible, it would be helpful for him to explain why not. On the other hand, if this sort of community is possible, Peacocke’s theory (if “theory” is the right word) implies that members of such a community are not entitled to any of their beliefs and methods—an extremely counter-intuitive result. Furthermore, if this sort of community is possible, how can it be shown that our own community is not such a community?

Peacocke does recognize that philosophers have had doubts about the epistemological usefulness of a distinction between “constitutive” and other conditions for the application of concepts, but his discussion is limited to dismissing a few arguments Quine gave against Carnap fifty years ago.

Mostly, Peacocke’s book is devoted (merely) to *sketching* his favored form of “rationalism,” indicating which lines of further development of these sketches seem to him most promising.

An important part of Peacocke’s motivation appears to derive from an assumption that logic is a normative subject and that what are sometimes called logical “rules of inference” are normative rules for thought transitions (63). This is, of course, a serious mistake. Logic is neither a psychological nor a normative subject.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>So, for example, it is unfortunate that an otherwise excellent contemporary logic text begins as follows:

Logic is the study of principles of reasoning. it is concerned not with how people actually reason, but rather with how people ought to reason if they wish to ensure the truth of their results. That is, by “principles of logic” we mean those that yield correct reasoning. Moreover, the principles of logic are general: they do not govern reasoning in one specific subject matter or another, but with reasoning as it applies to any and all areas of study. (Warren Goldfarb, *Deductive Logic*, Hackett, 2003.)

What Goldfarb should have said, of course, is that logic is the study of principles of *implication*, etc.

According to Peacocke, one version of nondeductive inference is inference to the “easiest explanation,” for which he says there exists an a priori justification. (His account of this a priori justification appears to assume the equivalence of the conditional probability of  $P$  given  $Q$  with the conditional probability of  $Q$  given  $P$ ! But I do not pretend to understand what he says about this.) According to Peacocke, a nondeductive inference is like an argument; it has premises in a way that a deductive argument does and it can provide entitlement only if one is entitled to the premises. He does not discuss the obvious worry that inductive inference typically involves *giving up* some considerations initially accepted. Presumably one is normally not entitled to the acceptance of those considerations at the conclusion of the inference. But then are the considerations that are given up premises of the “inductive argument”? If they count as “premises,” Peacocke’s principles imply that one is not entitled to the result of that reasoning, because the reasoning rests on premises to which one is not entitled. On the other hand, if the considerations in question are not “premises,” then the considerations relevant to the reasoning are not all “premises.”

Finally, to change the subject, I want to correct a misleading reference to David Lewis. Peacocke says (47), “There is no plausible truth-conditional content for the indicative conditional,” with a footnote reference, “See D. Lewis, ‘Probabilities of Conditionals and Conditional Probabilities’, *Philosophical Review* 85 (1976), 297-315, and ‘Probabilities of Conditionals and Conditional Probabilities II’, *Philosophical Review*, 95 (1986), 581-9.” Peacocke gives no further explanation. But this completely misrepresents the argument of these papers. In them Lewis explicitly defends the view that the indicative conditional does have truth-conditional content (namely, the content of the material conditional).

Gilbert Harman

*Princeton University*