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# Foley's Theory of Epistemic Rationality*

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## i

Foley's *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality*,[1] is one of the most important works in epistemology to be published in recent years. It does a masterful job of working out an original position on the most fundamental epistemological issues. Foley has thought through the issues; he knows what he is about and his words are not to be taken lightly.

Foley presents his theory as a particular form of an "Aristotelian" conception of rationality, according to which "rationality is best understood in terms of a person pursuing his goals in a way he would believe to be effective were he to take time to reflect carefully on the question of how best to pursue them" (6). Epistemic rationality will differ from other sorts of "Aristotelian" rationality by virtue of involving a distinctively epistemic goal, "now to believe those propositions that are true and now not to believe those propositions that are false" (8). It is epistemically rational for a person to believe that p at t *iff* S would believe, on sufficiently careful reflection, that believing p at t is an effective way of realising the goal just mentioned. And under what conditions would S believe that? According to Foley he would believe that "just if he has an uncontroversial argument for p, an argument that he would regard as likely to be truth preserving were he to be appropriately reflective, and an argument whose premises he would uncover no good reasons to be suspicious of were he to be appropriately reflective" (66). We are to understand this last formulation to allow for the limiting case of a belief that S would, on appropriate reflection, take to be such that the mere fact of his having the belief gives him a sufficient reason to do so, a belief that, on appropriate reflection, S would take to be "self-justifying" (52).

* Editor's note: This paper and the three that follow it derive from an APA book symposium on Richard Foley's *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality*.

[1] Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987.

First I want to make a comment about the "Aristotelian" garb in which Foley clothes his view, and then devote most of my time to the substance of the position.

ii

Talk of a person choosing ways to reach a goal is unproblematically applicable to voluntary action, where one can employ one or another way as he chooses. But belief does not seem to be under the immediate or direct control of the will, at least not usually and perhaps never.[2] That being the case, how can we spell out what it is for S to rationally believe that p, in terms of S's taking believing that p to be an effective way to reach a goal? Foley confronts this issue. He says that even though "people ordinarily do have at least some kind of indirect control over what they believe" (12-13), the account does not presuppose any sort of voluntary control, although he acknowledges that where it is not within S's power to get himself to believe or refrain from believing that p, he cannot be *praised* or *blamed* for his doxastic attitude. But the trouble goes deeper than the applicability of praise or blame. If I lack the power to effectively decide whether to A or to not-A, it is not appropriate to think of me as choosing, selecting, or employing A as a *means to a goal*. 'Means-end' talk, along with 'pursuit of goals' talk and 'acting with a purpose' talk, is indissolubly bound up with the possibility of effective voluntary control of the alleged "means". If we don't have that control, this conceptual scheme is inapplicable. Consider an analogous situation. We are situated with respect to organic conditions like blood pressure much as we are with respect to belief. In neither case can I bring about a certain state of affairs (a certain blood pressure or a certain belief) just by willing to do so, or even by willing to do something that will bring it about right away. But I can do various things that may have a longer range effect on my blood pressure or my beliefs. Moreover we might think of blood pressure as related to the goal of health much as belief is related to Foley's epistemic goal. In each case the pursuit of the goal will be furthered by one blood pressure or one belief rather than another. Can we devise an "Aristotelian" conception of rationality for blood pressure, so that a given blood pressure is rational for me to have just if I would, on sufficient reflection, recognize it as an effective means to the goal of health? That would, at best, be a markedly infelicitous way of speaking. It would inevitably carry the false suggestion that I am capable of using blood pressure as a means for realizing this goal, actualizing a certain blood pressure straight away in the pursuit of this goal,

[2] For a detailed discussion of this see my "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification", *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. II (1988).

rather than, as is actually the case, using other means to achieve the appropriate blood pressure. It will be much more accurate to think of blood pressure as an *instrumental value*, valuable for the extent to which it contributes to the goal of health, rather than thinking of it as a *means* to be used in the pursuit of health. And so it is with belief and the epistemic goal. Believing in such a way as to satisfy Foley's criterion could be unconfusedly thought of as instrumentally valuable in that it tends to promote the central epistemic value of believing what is true and not believing what is false. So far as I can see, restating Foley's view in this way would not enforce any changes in the substance of his account. It would only free it of unnecessary encumbrances.

## iii

Turning to that account, it presents three salient and controversial features.

1. It is *internalist*, in the sense that it restricts rationality-making features to those to which the subject has cognitive access (at least by "appropriate reflection"). For properly basic beliefs the "rationality-making feature" is the subject's believing the proposition; in all other cases it is an argument for the proposition, constructible from premises believed by the subject. These are factors to which the subject can plausibly be thought to have access by reflection.

2. It does not recognize the source of a belief to be relevant to its rationality. The view is, as Foley puts it, *ahistorical*. (174).

3. It is *subjective*. The rationality of a belief depends on how it would be assessed in terms of the subject's own deepest epistemic standards (those that would come into play on sufficient reflection), *whatever those may be*, whether or not believing in accordance with those standards is in fact truth conducive.

I will not comment on 1., since I accept an internalist restriction of that general sort. But I do have something to say about both 2. and 3., in that order.

A number of contemporary epistemologies make rationality, justification, or warrant, hang on what a belief is based on, or on what it is causally dependent on in the right sort of way. This includes reliabilist theories like those of Goldman and Armstrong, but it extends much further to the views of Swain, Audi, Sosa, Plantinga, and myself. Although Foley presents no positive argument for his ahistoricism, he does attempt to counter familiar arguments for the opposite view. In particular, he considers contrasts that are used to exhibit the necessity for a *based-on* requirement, e.g., Roderick Firth's case in which although Holmes and Watson both have the same evidence Holmes arrives at the belief that the

coachman is guilty by acceptable reasoning from the evidence, whereas Watson comes to that belief independently of the evidence, just because he believes that coachmen generally have criminal tendencies. Assuming that Watson would, on sufficient reflection, take it that he has an uncontroversial argument for the belief, it is, on Foley's view, epistemically rational for him to believe this. But surely, we want to say, Watson's belief, as described, is a paradigm of irrationality, while Holmes' belief is paradigmatically rational; and Foley's theory treats them just alike. Foley accepts the point that there is something wrong, rationality-wise, with Watson's belief, but he thinks that what's wrong can be brought out without getting into questions of source. He develops a stronger notion of rational belief, which, following Firth, he calls the "doxastic" sense, as follows.

1. S's belief that p is epistemically rational in the sense originally developed (call this the "propositional" sense).

2. There is an argument A that S believes to be a good argument for p.

3. This belief is also propositionally rational for S.

4. A roughly resembles what is in fact a good argument for p. (180-81)

Cutting corners on details, such as how we are to understand "roughly resembles" and "good argument", what this amounts to is that in order for a belief to be doxastically rational, S must have a propositionally rational higher level belief that a certain argument for p is a good argument, and this belief must be roughly correct. On this reckoning the trouble with Watson is not that his belief that p (the coachman is guilty) has the wrong source, but that Watson lacks something in his present belief structure, viz., the right sort of belief about an argument for p.

But it seems clear that this stronger ahistorical analysis gives rise to troubling examples of the same sort. Foley is presumably supposing that if Watson has a higher level belief of the kind specified he will be arriving at the lower level belief on the basis of the reasons indicated by that higher level belief. But surely it is both logically and psychologically possible that he will not. If he can ignore the relevant evidence in arriving at the belief, he can also ignore the higher level assessment of the evidence; though, no doubt, cases in which this happens will be much rarer. All we have to do to produce such a case is to make the higher level belief sufficiently latent, so that what is actually influencing Watson's belief forming processes at the moment he lights on the coachman is something quite different, e.g., his prejudice against coachmen. In that case, Watson's belief will be doxasti-

cally rational, in Foley's sense, while it is still paradigmatically irrational. The general moral is this. No matter what the details of S's present belief structure, it will be possible that S forms a given belief in an irrational manner.

Foley does consider this criticism, but all he says by way of direct response is that although something is amiss where a belief is formed on disreputable grounds this does not amount to a failure in *epistemic rationality* of the belief (185-86). But this reply is nothing more than a reiteration of the claim that Foley's analysis captures what it is to be epistemically rational. A more signficant point is made in the next section, viz., that in negatively evaluating the Watson case what we are marking down is the *way* in which the belief is acquired or, more generally, "some flaw in the believer's intellectual character or in his cognitive equipment" (203) that is reflected in this mode of belief acquisition; we are not evaluating the belief itself. However I do not see the force of this latter claim. Why does an evaluation of the mode of acquisition not count as an evaluation of the belief itself? What would count as such an evaluation? Why should a determination of whether the subject would, on sufficient reflection, take there to be an uncontroversial argument for p count as an evaluation of the belief that p itself, while an evaluation of its origin does not? Both go into matters over and above the belief as a psychological state? Pending a satisfactory answer to this question, I am not disposed to take this move of Foley's very seriously.

## iv

Let's now turn to 3., the subjectivism of Foley's account. It is this that marks it off most sharply from the current competition. First, let me note how surprising it is that Foley simply presents his conception as *the* conception of *epistemic* (or *purely* epistemic rationality), without ever giving any real argument for this preference. He does attempt to answer various objections to his position, and he makes various objections to other positions, in particular, objections to any position that makes truth conducivity part of the concept of epistemic rationality (see especially Chapter III). And he alleges that his analysis is both plausible and that it "provides a framework for understanding and appreciating these other accounts. It provides, in effect, a way of giving proper recognition to the worries and considerations that prompt these other accounts" (15). But even if the view does have these virtues, one still wants Foley to come to grips with the question: "Why should we suppose that this, rather than something more objective, is *the* distinctively epistemic conception of rationality?"

Even more surprisingly, in a section (2.8) that belies the claims made throughout the book, Foley backs off from the assertion that his concep-

tion captures *the* purely epistemic form of rationality. In this section he distinguishes different conceptions of what it takes for a means, Y, to a goal, X, to be a rational one to choose.

1. Reflective subjective. S on reflection would believe that Y is an effective means to X.

2. Radically subjective. S believes that Y is an effective means to X.

3. Radically objective. Y is an effective means to X. (131)

Foley's account is, of course, a version of 1. Most accounts of justification or rationality are various forms of 3.

In speaking of these accounts Foley asks "... which general conception of rationality is *the* correct one? I do not think there is an answer. Each of the conceptions is plausible." (132) And, speaking of epistemic rationality in particular, he says.

> I have no argument that indicates that this perspective — the subjective reflective one — is intrinsically any more important or any more appropriate for making judgments of rationality than any other perspective. Indeed, I do not think that it is intrinsically more appropriate . . . Likewise, I have no argument to show that the label "epistemic" is appropriate only for evaluations of a person's belief from what I have called "the purely epistemic point of view", the point of view that consists of the epistemic goal and the subjective reflective (or Aristotelian) perspective . . . My calling this point of view "purely epistemic" is a matter of stipulation . . . The label is of little importance. What does matter is that this point of view and the perspective associated with it be distinguished from other points of view and their associated perspectives. (136-37)

This is a remarkable passage. The second part, concerning the label 'purely epistemic', is inevitably going to strike the reader as disingenuous, in view of the insistence throughout most of the book that Foley's conception is *the* "purely epistemic" conception of rationality. But leaving that aside, I very much like what Foley is saying here, and I propose to take him at his word. According to that word, the book is to be construed as the exhibition and exploration of one of the various conceptions of epistemic rationality, drawing out its implications for various epistemological issues, comparing and contrasting it with others, exhibiting its strengths and limitations. This means that in evaluating the book, we need not engage in the futile attempt to show that some one conception is or is not *the* conception of epistemic rationality. Instead we can consider how relevant, appropriate, or important this conception and other conceptions are for one or another purpose, an enterprise to which I now turn.[3]

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[3] Though I don't want to insist on the point I will just record the fact that it seems to me much more natural, in most contexts, to understand talk of the rationality of a belief in a

First let's ask how central for epistemology Foley-rationality (hereinafter 'F-rationality') is in comparison with other conceptions.[4] I shall deal with the following conceptions of what it takes for S's belief that p to be epistemically rational.

A. Foley's view.

B. S has (objectively) adequate grounds for the belief, grounds that are sufficiently indicative of the truth of the belief.

C. The belief was formed on the basis of objectively adequate grounds.

The contrast between (A. and B.) and C. brings out the source-relevance issue, and the contrast between A. and (B. and C.) brings out the objective-subjective issue.

One way to determine the relative importance of different conceptions of rationality for epistemology is to ask about their contribution to an account of knowledge, since epistemology is, by etymology, centrally concerned with knowledge. Foley thinks that there are two senses of 'know' (even when restricted to propositional knowledge) (4.3), one of which, the "causal-historical" sense, is something like reliably acquired true belief, with some additional conditions; and in one of which, the "evidential" sense, 'S knows that p' is true *iff* the following set of conditions holds.

1. S has a true belief that p.

2. S's belief that p is doxastically rational.

3. The argument for p that S is propositionally rational in believing to be a good one (in order that the belief be doxastically rational) is one whose conclusion is in fact probable, given the truth of the premises.

4. There is no falsehood that is essential to the arguments that make the belief that p to be doxastically rational. (192)[5]

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more objective fashion. If you tell me what the rational thing is for S to believe about the worth of a certain investment, and then it turns out that you were making a judgment as to what S would believe on reflection about this, using his weird standards for adequate support, I would feel that I had been misled.

[4] In this discussion I shall ignore differences between 'rational', 'justified', and 'warranted', and treat views expressed in other terms as conceptions of epistemic rationality.

[5] Note that even this "evidential" kind of knowledge is not nearly as internalist as F-rationality. For the third and fourth conditions introduce a decidedly extenalist note, even though they do not involve "causal-historical" considerations.

If there are these two senses then both A. and C. are central to the analysis of knowledge.

However, it does not seem to me that there is a sense of 'know' in which the above four conditions are sufficient for S's knowing that p. This is both because of the ahistorical character and because of the subjective character of the analysis. Begin with the first, and go back to Watson. We have already seen that Watson could be doxastically rational in believing the coachman to be guilty without that belief being based on the argument that makes him doxastically rational. The other three requirements could also be satisfied even though Watson forms this belief because of his prejudice against coachmen. The belief could be true, the argument could involve the appropriate relation between premises and conclusion, and no falsehood be essentially involved. Nevertheless, so long as Watson's belief is based solely on prejudice against coachmen it seems clear that he shouldn't be said to *know* that the coachman is guilty. This will become clear if we think of a large number of beliefs that satisfy Foley's four conditions without having the right kind of basis. Let's say that whenever S has a belief about the motives of other persons that satisfies Foley's four conditions, that belief is formed on the basis of prejudice. Surely in that case we would not say that the person knows all these things. Given what leads him to believe them it is just an accident that he is correct. And that is not knowledge.

To see that the subjectivity of the account prevents it from being sufficient for knowledge, consider a person with wildly liberal standards for the proper basicality of beliefs, a person with inordinate confidence in her powers of "intuition" or perception. This person, S, believes X to be untrustworthy (call this proposition 'p') on the ground that X habitually betrays confidences. This ground, q, S would, on Foley-reflection ('F-reflection') take to be properly basic, since she supposes herself to be able to ascertain such patterns just by looking at the person. To be sure, on Foley's principles, proper basicality requires not only that S would, on F-reflection, take her belief that q to be a sufficient ground for supposing q to be the case, but also that there is nothing S believes with at least as much confidence as q that she would, on F-reflection, take to defeat this argument for q. Let's suppose this is the case too, either because she believes no potential defeater with as much confidence as she believes in her own powers of intuition, or because she keeps herself carefully shielded from contrary evidence, or both. In any event, it is clearly possible that q should be properly basic for a subject, by Foley's lights. This being the case, it cer-

tainly could be that the belief that p is doxastically rational. Let's say that she would, on F-reflection, take the argument for p to be uncontroversial; she believes it to be a good argument for p, this belief is propositionally rational for her (we may as well suppose that this higher level belief is properly basic for her also), and the argument for p in question "roughly resembles" what is in fact a good argument for p. Of course this last condition depends on what Foley takes to be a good argument here. But his remarks on this make it plain that he takes it to be sufficient for this that the argument contains only premises that are properly basic for S and that S would, on F-reflection, take the argument to uncontroversially support the conclusion. And here the argument for p precisely resembles such an argument; it *is* such an argument.

Now in order to get a case of "evidential knowledge" all we need add is that the belief that p is true, that the argument for p is one whose conclusion is in fact probable given the truth of the premises, as is in fact the case, and that no falsehood is essential to this argument. We can also stipulate all this, making the sole premise of the argument (q) to be true. Thus we have a case in which S satisfies Foley's requirements for "evidential knowledge"; and yet it is clear that S doesn't really know that p. S's sole reason for this is one that she accepts only because of her wildly inflated confidence in her powers of intuition. She is just lucky that this basis for the belief in p turns out to be correct. And even if we agree with Foley that there is something properly called "epistemic luck", it is clear that luck does not yield knowledge.

The moral is that so long as rationality remains this subjective, it will not play an essential role in an account of propositional knowledge. F-rationality does not pull its weight by contributing to the understanding of knowledge.[6]

## V

Another way to assess the epistemological importance of a conception of rationality is to consider the extent to which it is an important question in the conduct of life whether a certain belief is rational in this sense. After all, epistemology is a higher level reflection on judgments we make in a

[6] For that matter, I do not consider Foley's conditions to be necessary for evidential knowledge either, if "evidential knowledge" means *knowledge based on evidence*. For I am not convinced that any such higher level belief about an argument as is required for Foley's "doxastic rationality", is required for knowledge. It seems clear to me that I can know that you are ill on the evidence provided by a thermometer reading, without having any belief, much less a propositionally rational belief, that I have a good argument for your being ill. I may not be given to forming any higher level beliefs about arguments for propositions I believe; but surely that doesn't keep me from having evidential knowledge.

naive, unsystematic, relatively unreflective way in daily life. That is what provides epistemology with its subject matter. Let's approach this issue by taking a wider conspectus of the interests we have in the status of beliefs vis-à-vis the goal of believing the true and avoiding believing the false.

First of all, we are often interested in whether a given belief is true or false. But unless we are engaged in determing how accurate a belief-former a given individual is, this will usually reflect an interest in the subject matter rather than in the belief as such, or in the believer. Where I am interested in whether "the belief" or "Jones' belief" that there is life on other planets is true, this will usually be because I am interested in extra-terrestrial life, not because I am interested in assessing his beliefs as propositional attitudes. In any event, no one would be tempted to identify truth and rationality, since it is obvious that one can irrationally hold true beliefs, as well as rationally hold false beliefs.

We can also be interested in assessing the probability of a certain proposition on a more impersonal basis than the evidence possessed, or used, by a particular individual. We might assess the probability of there being life on other planets, given what is known in the scientific community, or given some specified body of data. But, again, this is too impersonal to count as a question about the rationality with which some individual believes that p.

Coming down to the conceptions listed above, each of which has some claim to being a conception of rational belief, let's note that there are many contexts in which it is of interest to determine whether it would be rational for S to believe that p, given what he has to go on, what he knows about the matter, the evidence available to him, and so on (B). We are likely to be interested in this question where S has not yet formed any belief about the matter and where we are wondering what belief on the topic is such that she has adequate grounds for it ready to hand. This is often of special interest from the first person point of view, where I am wondering what answer to a given question is most strongly supported by what I already know or justifiably believe about the matter. But where S has already shown his hand and formed a belief on the issue we are much more likely to be interested in whether conception C. applies. If we know that S believes that p and we want to know how rational he was in so believing, we don't just want to know what basis he had available to him; we want to know whether he actually used it. Suppose I am assessing candidates for a high level executive position and I want to know, of each of the candidates, how rationally they form beliefs about matters relevant to a corporate decision. In that case I will want to know what they typically *go on* in forming beliefs, whether they come to believe that p only on the

basis of grounds sufficiently indicative of the truth of p. I am interested in how reliably they form beliefs, and so naturally I am interested in what sorts of grounds they use for settling questions. Suppose that in compiling a track record for S I come across a case in which S had adequate grounds for believing that p and did come to believe that p, but on some basis that did not at all support the supposition that p is true Would I mark that case positive or negative? Negative, obviously. I am not interested here in what Foley calls "epistemic luck"; I am interested in getting at S's belief forming habits, whether he *habitually* comes to the right belief; and one doesn't do that by luck, epistemic or otherwise. There can be no rule, procedure, practice, or habit of forming the belief that p when one has sufficient evidence that p, whether one forms the belief on that basis or not. Where we are interested in a subject's belief forming habits or tendencies, as we often are, we cannot ignore "historical" questions in assessing the rationality of S's beliefs.

Thus far we have been considering the issue of source-relevance, within the objectivist camp. It seems clear that the lesser interest of the ahistorical conception, for actual beliefs, will carry over to Foley's subjectivist version of an ahistoricism. Now it is time to turn to the subjective-objective contrast, exemplified here by the differences between A. and (B. and C.). Why would one be interested in determining whether S's belief is one that he would, on F-reflection, deem to be supported uncontroversially? Not in order to determine how well S is doing as a truth seeker. F-rationality does not, ipso facto, indicate that. It is compatible with S's having all F-rational beliefs that she has all or mostly false beliefs. To be sure, one might assume that S's deepest epistemic standards are truth conducive ones, so that if she believes in accordance with them she will believe mostly truths.[7] But if that is the game, one would be better advised to determine whether S believes in accordance with truth conducive standards, and avoid the detour through what S would judge on sufficient reflection. (Provided it is possible to determine whether S forms beliefs in accordance with truth conducive standards; and Foley never suggests any reason for doubting this.) Nor would we be interested in F-rationality if our aim were to determine whether S has (or is using) adequate grounds for this particular belief; for F-rationality fails to guarantee that the grounds are in fact adequate.

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[7] In many passages Foley makes it explicit that he supposes that the deepest epistemic standards of most people are such as to win the approval of the epistemically enlightened. And it may well be that his position illegitimately acquires a certain degree of plausibility from that assumption, one that certainly can be questioned.

Might one get interested in F-rationality from a concern with whether S is violating any intellectual obligations in believing as he does? One might if one were assuming that S violates an intellectual obligation in believing that p iff one would not take it, on F-reflection, that one has an uncontroversial argument for p. But this assumption lacks plausibility for more than one reason. For one thing it is implausible to suppose that belief is under direct voluntary control as it would have to be if one were to be under an obligation to believe, or refrain from believing, that p in a particular situation. For another, it is implausible to suppose that something as recherché as what I would judge on F-reflection could determine what my obligations are. And, indeed, Foley himself is at pains to point out that "to say that a person believes something that is not epistemically rational for him or to say that he fails to believe something that is epistemically rational for him is not to say that he has not been as good an epistemic agent as he might have been" (13). In other words, it would be a mistake to suppose that judgments of F-rationality should be made in order to confer praise or blame for doxastic conduct.

But then where does the interest in F-rationality lie? So far as I can see, only in attempting to determine how consistent, well integrated, or single minded a person is, as far as belief is concerned; i.e., in attempting to determine whether a person's actual doxastic practice carries out the person's deepest standards for belief. But this is surely of minor interest, from the standpoint of what Foley recognizes as the basic epistemic goal, compared with determining whether the person is a reliable belief former or whether this particular belief was formed on adequate grounds.[8]

Let's summarize this discussion of the comparative interest of alternative conceptions of epistemic rationality. The key to the whole matter is the fact that, as Foley acknowledges and even insists, the basic epistemic goal is "now to have true beliefs and now not to have false beliefs" (8). Hence our interest in a concept of the rationality of belief, or more generally in a mode of epistemically evaluating beliefs, will be in direct proportion to its relevance to this goal. Most directly relevant is the evaluation of beliefs as true or false. Next down the line comes the consideration of the likelihood of a belief's being true, relative to some publicly accessible body of evidence, or relative to what the subject has or to what is available to him, or relative to the basis of the belief. The comparative interest of these varieties will depend on other considerations, some of which have been made explicit in this paper. At the bottom of the list comes a purely

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[8] I ignore the answer Foley gives in 3.3 to the question "why we should be interested in being epistemically rational", viz. that "it is rational for us to be epistemically rational" (173). Foley himself immediately adds: "Indeed, this is trivially so".

subjective conception, whether S believes that it is acceptable for him to believe that p. And just above that, but significantly below all the other altenatives listed, is F-rationality, whether S would take it, on F-reflection, that he has an uncontroversial argument for p. This is of little interest, relative to the epistemic goal, just because it has no determinate implications, in itself, for (the likelihood of) the truth or falsity of the belief.

Despite these shortcomings, Foley's account of epistemic rationality might still be defended as the best available, provided all the more objective conceptions were simply inapplicable, whereas Foley's is applicable. It might be claimed that we are seldom, or never, able to determine whether the basis of a belief is an adequate one, whether the subject has adequate grounds for the belief, and so on; but we are generally able to determine whether a belief is F-rational. This would be analogous to the line that subjective probability is the best we can do since more objective probability statuses are opaque to us, and analogous to the line that more or less probable beliefs are our highest reasonable aspiration since we cannot attain certainty. However it is noteworthy that Foley does not mount this defence, and advisedly so. For whatever may be the difficulties in determining the objective adequacy of S's grounds for his belief that p, they are certainly no greater than the difficulty of ascertaining whether S would judge, on F-reflection, that he has an uncontroversial argument for p. To answer this latter question we would have to determine whether S would make this judgment as the outcome of a prolonged and highly artificial course of thought — one that involves no alteration in S's initial belief structure and standards, and one that continues until no prolongation would alter the result. Needless to say, it is difficult at best, and impossible at worst, to be reasonably confident that a course of reflection has satisfied these conditions. And to the extent that we cannot appeal to the results of an actual course of thought, we are faced with the staggering task of judging what such reflection would yield if it were to be undertaken. F-rationality can hardly be recommended on the ground that it is more feasible to determine whether it applies.

I conclude from all this that, despite the originality, ingenuity, and systematic power of Foley's theory, the basic concept of epistemic rationality he develops has little to recommend it as a fundamentally important concept for epistemology.