Edinburgh Research Explorer


Citation for published version:

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):
10.1093/mind/fzv089

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Published In:
Mind

Publisher Rights Statement:

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
This volume is the first of two planned volumes centred on and celebrating Crispin Wright's contributions to philosophy. The book has five parts; four feature largely original essays engaging with central themes and topics in Wright's work and the fifth is a substantial set of replies by Wright. As the title suggests, this volume is dedicated to issues concerning mind, meaning and knowledge, with the second volume to focus on philosophy of logic, language and mathematics. But it is a sign of Wright's range and comprehensiveness that the divisions are not nearly so neat.

This short review will give a very brief overview of the critical essays the volume collects, then offer some general remarks on the collection and on whom it might interest and why, and finally indicate its particular strengths.

The first section of the book focuses on rule-following and the normativity of meaning, a topic Wright first examined in connection with the philosophy of mathematics, dropped for a while, and then returned to. Paul Boghossian challenges Wright's initial view on which appealing to intention can make sense of rule following, and argues the problem is deeper and more intractable than Wright’s optimism makes it appear. Christopher Peacocke offers a positive account of rule-following, highlighting points of difference between his approach to the problem and Wright’s. Paul Horwich focuses on implicit rule-following, which he takes to be central, and argues that law-like regularities of word use ultimately ground which rules of use we’re following. He also elaborates on how he thinks these facts underpin meaning, truth-conditions and epistemic norms. In the final essay of this section, Akeel Bilgrami accepts that Wittgenstein taught us that intentions, in general, are normative, but argues against the
widespread view that meaning intentions are normative because intentions in general are; to put this point another way, when it comes to meanings, intending a meaning and living up to that intention are not as different as everyone supposes.

The second section of the book turns to the problem of self-knowledge, of making sense of how we can know our own mental states, when we do, in a distinctively immediate and authoritative way. This is a stand-alone problem in philosophy of mind and epistemology, but it also follows naturally as a concern for Wright given his intention-based answer to the rule-following sceptic. As Wright puts it in his reply to Horwich, if one thinks an appeal to “intuitively immediate self-knowledge...of our own intentions” can dispatch the sceptic, then “the real issue raised...is to understand better the nature of immediate (or recollected) intentional self-knowledge and how it is feasible.” (394-395) Wright’s own answer to this challenge is a constitutivist account on which avowals don’t report pre-existing mental states, which they either get right or fail to get right; they rather, very roughly speaking, constitute one’s being in the state in question. This section has just two critical essays, one by Barry Smith and one by Dorit Bar-On. Smith focuses on whether Wright’s account can make sense of a person’s knowledge of what she means in light of the apparent fact that meaning is at least often public. A person can’t, it seems, have immediate and authoritative knowledge of what she means if what she means is determined by how words are used in public space. Bar-On also raises challenges for Wright’s constitutivist account, and then proposes in its place a neo-expressivist picture on which avowals are expressive acts that are nonetheless truth-evaluable. This picture, she thinks, explains the distinct epistemic dimension of avowals by pointing to the fact avowals are fundamentally expressive, but
without adopting a full blown anti-realist expressivism that Wright and many others (rightly in her view) reject.

The third section, with contributions by Simon Blackburn, Stewart Shapiro, and Carol Rovane, focuses on Wright’s influential contribution to the debate between realists and anti-realists. Blackburn’s essay focuses on the deflationism of Hartry Field and of Paul Horwich, and explores what Blackburn takes to be an uneasy relationship between minimalism about truth and expressivism as a theory of normativity. Shapiro raises two critical challenges to Wright’s appeal, in *Truth and Objectivity*, to the notions of width of cosmological role and cognitive command, which Wright had thought can distinguish the objective from the non-objective. Rovane’s essay develops an alternative to Wright’s picture of the relation between irresolvable disagreement and relativism, one that construes relativism as committed to the idea that some truths are logically isolated from one another and hence “cannot be embraced together”.

The fourth section focuses on warrant, transmission failure, closure and skepticism, with essays by Jim Pryor, José Zalabardo, Annalisa Coliva and Michael Williams. Pryor and Zalabardo engage principally with Wright’s influential discussion of warrant and transmission failure. Pryor argues that Moorean reasoning does not suffer from the only credible form of transmission-failure on offer, while Zalabardo raises doubts about whether there’s a principled way to limit the transmission of warrant in problematic cases; there’s a better way, he thinks, to make sense of what is wrong with Moorean arguments. In their contributions, Annalisa Coliva and Michael Williams shift focus slightly to engage with Wright more squarely on scepticism. Coliva develops a middle position between Wright and Pryor according to which the right notion of
epistemic rationality is one that is partly constituted by acceptance of such claims as that there is an external world. Although we might have to assume there is an external world in order for our visual experience to give us warrant for the first premise of Moore’s proof, that here is a hand, this doesn’t mean that we need to have independent warrant for this assumption. In his essay, Williams argues that Wright’s response to the sceptic is much more complex than it first appears to be and gives too much away to the sceptic.

With a celebratory volume such as this it is easy for the work as a whole to lack focus. Such collections are not intended as works of intellectual biography, even in a thin sense, although in the present case most contributors include the warm introductions and conversational asides we expect in a festschrift, and Wright’s own substantial replies (four essays, which run to more than 100 pages) have just the right amount of autobiographical reflection. Nor however is a festschrift typically focused on some particular topic, as most anthologies are. Their unity is instead pinned down, narrowly, by the fact the issued discussed are all issues that some particular person was interested in and explored. This is not a complaint, either in the general case or with Coliva’s collection. What better way to celebrate someone than to focus on their interests, engage with them on those interests, and make space for them to say something both substantive and personal in reply? It does however bear on whom the book is for and how it will be used. The present volume should be cherished by students and friends of Wright, and together with the second, forthcoming volume, should be of considerable value to anyone who wants to engage with Wright’s philosophy as a whole, find connections between his approaches to this or that topic, and trace the arc of
his thinking over the decades. Beyond this, the book, or rather each of its parts, will be an excellent resource for people working on any of the specific issues discussed within it. E.g., anyone with a serious interest in scepticism and Moore-style arguments should benefit from Section IV, on warrant transmission, closure, transmission failure and scepticism, and from Wright’s replies. They are less likely to devote time and energy to the 125 pages on rule-following and the normativity of meaning, but so be it.

There is no space in this short review to say anything substantive about the 13 individual essays that make up the critical part of the book. They are all well-done, and written in a way that should engage those new to the issues while also offering something to experts. I will instead draw attention to three specific strengths of the book. First, Coliva’s introductory essay is excellent, with apt and informative summaries of each critical essay. The essay also gives a sense of the arc of Wright’s thinking on each topic over his career, as it highlights main themes, theses and publications. This is not done in so much detail that it will numb those who know Wright’s work well, but there is enough there to give helpful orientation to students or philosophers who pick up the volume with the hope of thereby gaining an introduction of sorts to Wright’s contributions to philosophy. Second, as befits this sort of volume, there is a comprehensive and well-organised bibliography of Wright’s publications and an excellent index (the entry for ‘Warrant’, for instance, subdivides into Acquisition of, Closure, Doxastic, Epistemic, Empirical, Evidential, First-time, First-level, Non-evidential, Pragmatic, Propositional, Second-level, Transmission, Testimonial, and Unearned). Given that the book treats of diverse topics, and so may well be read in bits and pieces by people interested in this or that topic, this is a very helpful addition.
Finally and most importantly, a great strength of the volume is Wright’s extensive replies, which are rich with context, insight and argument. Wright engages with the content of each of the critical essays in the course of a sprawling and conversational discussion of the general problematic explored in each section. The effect is powerful, and the reader gains a better sense not merely of Wright’s thinking on the issue in question, now and over time, but of the whole shape of the problem. Wright’s replies also do much to give unity and coherence to each section of critical essays, as in treating each set of essays as a whole he draws attention to points of similarity and difference among his critics, contrasts positions where appropriate, highlights animating assumptions and convictions, and so on. This volume is a fitting tribute and testament to the value of Wright’s work over nearly five decades.

Philosophy
University of Edinburgh
3 Charles St.
Edinburgh, EH8 9AD
United Kingdom

NICK TREANOR