

Book Review

Knowing Our Limits

By Nathan Ballantyne.

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A Review By
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The one who knows best about oneself is to know well about one's own limit. Perhaps this could be the very sort of first thought that is sprung from the present book's title "*Knowing Our Limits*" written by Nathan Ballantyne. However, what message the writer tries to convey to us the readers is much more rather than being a straightforward maxim of living. It is conducted in a truly epistemological way of doing things. Moreover, the writer emphasizes that the appropriate answer to our limits can be found out by using an interdisciplinary epistemology for a construction of what is called "*regulative epistemology*" (p.2; Ballantyne's italic) which is the very thing that should now be included in professional epistemology tasks (p. 14). It is interpreted here, from my opinion, that one needs to know from a variety of academic disciplines before one could set oneself right up to have an epistemic criterion of knowledge and for one to complete oneself with knowledge of the limits.

Ballantyne argues that the main problem with epistemology is the question of limitations and incompletions. Those problems make human agents recognize themselves that they may not yet have access to perfect knowledge. He proposes that an integration of all forms of epistemologies is more important than to present from a single perspective. Ballantyne says the integration should be from three perspectives: "descriptive, normative, and practical" (p. 20). Moreover, scientists need professional epistemologists to guide a proper scientific inquiry, and professional epistemologists need those specialists to provide them with findings from scientific experiments (pp. 23-26).

Ballantyne points out that philosophical epistemology has warned us since the ancient times not to believe that we already have a perfect instrument of knowledge acquisition. However, even if it is necessary for us to understand full well about our imperfections in thinking about things, we still

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need a *metacognitive* method to guide us (*pp. 87-90*; his italic). One of those interesting metacognitive methods is a way of thinking about bias. Ballantyne refers to interesting psychological findings saying that one tends to view oneself as not having bias in making judgments, but judgments of others have more bias. Psychological findings suggest that one does not perceive one's own prejudice because the direct introspective mechanism of one's mental content tells that one is always sincere to report one's own thoughts. When such mechanisms are unable to function beyond one's own ideas, then one chooses to view the other's judgment as prejudice. Psychologists consider this as a bias in making decisions about bias, or the "bias blind spot" (*p. 130*). Ballantyne goes on to say that this kind of situation has not improved even though that one is trying to recognize that one oneself has bias, and to escape from it. However, the key point Ballantyne puts forward in this matter is to point out the suspicion of bias residing in a judgment is not related to be the very reason that we have justification to refute that judgment. It cannot be said that we are able to fully refute that decision. What we can do is only to change our mind not to refute any decision abruptly just because we have reason to suspect that it has bias (*pp. 130-147*). This reflective consideration is a good example to provide us a better understanding of Ballantyne's view of his regulate epistemology that it should be constructed from a variety of different academic perspectives.

Again, when academic interdisciplinarity is in fashion, should we allow situations of epistemic trespassers? For many academics, it has been considered not good at all for an academic with a good reputation in his/her own academic field to make a judgment or even to share his/her opinion in another field in which he/she is not an expert. However, Ballantyne considers that those trespassers are advantageous for the academics. He explains that each academic field should transgress to each other (*p. 217*). It can be considered again that Ballantyne emphasizes necessity of the integration of different approaches. Moreover, he knows well that this method sounds rather difficult for us not to be much confident with our own expertise, and for us to be open-minded to welcome different perspectives. Nevertheless, a successful inquiry cannot be done alone, academics should have more collaboration to achieve it. The accomplishment should have its first step with what Ballantyne calls a "greater doxastic openness" as a guide (*pp. 269-271*).

Many years ago, epistemologists saw a book-length monograph *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (2007) written by Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood. What was emphasized in their book was a revolutionary conception of moral virtues that included "epistemic goods" for being a better epistemic agent (Roberts and Wood, 2007: 8). However, the proposition

that Ballantyne wants to offer instead is “*inclusive* regulative epistemology,” and he differentiates his from the other’s “*radical* regulative epistemology” (pp. 18-19; Ballantyne’s italics).

Writings in epistemology of how we are to make agreement/disagreement have been published in a considerable number recently. Ballantyne’s book is distinctive from those writings because it is to analyze the problem with revisionary approach of regulative epistemology. Moreover, the use of language in his book is much accessible even to non-philosophers.

References

Roberts, Robert C. and Wood, W. Jay. (2007). **Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology.** Oxford: Oxford University Press.

