

FOREWORD

Epistemology or theory of knowledge has always been one of the most important - if not the most important - field of philosophy. New arguments are constantly brought to bear on old views, new variants are marshalled to revive ancient stands, new concepts and distinctions increase the sophistication of epistemological theories.

There are a great many excellent textbooks, monographs as well as anthologies consisting of articles in epistemology. Similarly, there are useful philosophical dictionaries which contain a great number of relatively short entries, and general philosophical handbooks which also touch epistemological issues. This volume of 27 essays grew out from the interest to see a handbook which is devoted entirely to the historical roots and systematic developments of theory of knowledge. It is not intended to compete but to supplement the already existing literature. It aims at giving both beginners and more advanced students as well as professionals in epistemology and other areas of philosophy an overview of the central problems and solutions of epistemology. The essays are self-contained and often rather extensive discussions of the chosen aspects of knowledge. The contributions presuppose very little familiarity with previous literature and only a few of them require the mastery of even elementary logical notation. This, we hope, makes the volume also accessible to the philosophically interested wider audience.

The contributors were asked to provide substantial, up-to-date, self-contained and balanced surveys of the various subareas and more specific topics of epistemology, with reference to literature. It was also suggested that each entry should be initiated with a short historical introduction to the problem area. Although the authors were asked to give a fair treatment to views which they themselves do not favour, they were also asked to voice their own views. This can be seen in the current volume, and as editors we have not even tried to create consensus where none exists. This way of proceeding is of course inevitable in philosophy. We have welcomed discussion and even passionate views, and only wish that we are not held responsible for the views of the contributors.

The volume starts with an historical introduction to epistemology, and there are sections for such traditional systematic topics as the sources of knowledge and belief, knowledge acquisition, truth and justification. Apart from these we have wished to give plenty of space for the various areas in the kingdom of knowledge, such as science, mathematics, the humanities and the social sciences, religion, and language. Similarly, we have wanted to give voice to some traditional and more recent special topics in epistemology, such as evolutionary epistemology, relativism, the relation between epistemology and cognitive science, sociology of knowledge, epistemic logic, knowledge and art, and feminist epistemology.

This volume has taken a long time to complete. We want to thank all contributors not just for insightful entries but also for their patience and understanding during the process. Our special thanks goes to Professor Jaakko Hintikka who has supported the project from the start, and to Professor Robert Audi who not only agreed to write one of the key entries but also gave valuable advice on the entire project.

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