

## Book Review

# Judgement and Agency

Reviewed by Maximiliano Emanuel Korstanje, University of Palermo, Buenos Aires, Argentina & CERS, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

### KEYWORDS

Aptness, Belief, Credibility, Epistemology, Ethics, Reality

### ABSTRACT

In this book Ernest Sosa explores the limitations of current scientific project and its over-emphasis on causality. Ernest Sosa's book not only offers a valid, smart, and innovative argument about the possibilities to use the epistemology of Ancient World to overcome the conceptual limitations posed by postmodernism (without falling in pragmatism) but also confronts with the current hegemony of instrumentalism which ushers into "psychologism". A must-read book which will very well pass the time proof.

Judgement and Agency

Ernest Sosa

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After premiering the Matrix Saga, an hot debate on what is reality has taken into place within philosophy and social sciences (Irwin, 2002). While some voices emphasized on the allegorical nature of reality, paragraphing Morpheus "after all, what is reality?", others scholars devoted considerable attention to doubt as the necessary mediator between wonderland and real-world (Erion & Smith, 2002).

In this context, Senior philosopher Ernest Sosa, who does not need previous presentation, brings a new valuable book into the foreground. In this new book, which is entitled *Judgement and Agency*, he explores not only the account of human knowledge but also its intersection with ethics.

In contrast to current literature in epistemology, Sosa reminds the importance of Ethics as pre-configurator of social reality. In this respect he starts from the premise that action, perception and knowledge should be defined as manifestations of competence. Sosa adheres to the ground-breaking hypothesis that points out any subject performance which is framed within the fields of intentions are previously conditioned by imagination. Doubtless, what differentiates humans from the rest of creation seems to be the ability to prefigure the future goals to achieve.

As this backdrop, Sosa's project is formed in fourth independent parts, which are finely-ingrained into a common-threat argument. One of the chief goals of this book is to expand the current understanding of reification process, which means the intersection of produced-knowledge and individual negotiations of agencies to accept such a knowledge as part of reality.

The first and second introductory chapters review in-depth the theoretical contributions of Davidson and Grice, who unveiled the intersection of judgement and aptness. Sosa, rather, alerts not always judgement seems to be apt unless one ignores the “principle of randomness”. To sum, any action as well as its derived performance produces some effects which escape to what the subject has certainly planned. Rather, in some counter-examples, while agency is unable to control its environment, no less true is sometimes prefixed goals may be unwittingly achieved. Therefore, Sosa exerts a radical criticism the role played by *causality and contingency in the current social sciences*. Both concepts cannot be understood beyond the principle of rationality, which trivializes “deviant causation” to explain our being-in-this-world. To put this in other terms, Sosa writes,

*The problem is posed by deviant causation, wayward causation that give rise to counter-examples, whether the analysis targets action, perception or knowledge. Time after time, a kind of luck or mere coincidence derive from deviant character of the causation, incompatibility with appropriate success and relevantly creditable perception, action or knowledge (p 14).*

As this backdrop, Sosa understands knowledge within the fields of perception, which is cognitively oriented to reach teleological goals. In this respect, it is important not to lose the sight the concept of reality, as it was formulated by epistemologists, corresponds with a much deeper cultural system, where often any full-fledged intentions of agency are subordinated. In this vein, the concept of “desire” should be seriously reconsidered. At some extent, Sosa adds, the current epistemologists not only misjudge the real roots of knowledge but also take for granted laws which are resulted from imagination instead of causality.

In order for philosophers not to take the wrong turn, one might remind two type of knowledges coexist within social system: *judgmental and functional*. While the former is based on an individual or collective affirmation which is aimed at undermining dissonance, the latter escapes to the monopoly of human desire. As stated, it is note-worthy that this book discusses to what extent, agency gives credibility to events previously precluded as true, while in some contexts, true is rejected despite the subject is sited on it.

Since performing with full aptness asks for knowing what one is accomplishing, such a knowledge used to guide performance should be considered apt. However, not all acts that sounds apt, philosophically speaking, come from perception. This is the main dilemma, produced in modern epistemology, Sosa intends to unpuzzle.

The part II contains chapters 3-4-5 where he develops a theory of competence, which means the notion of fully apt performance. Since this theory of competence, as it was formulated by Sosa, contemplates *aptness* beyond human will, Sosa distinguishes *apt belief from fully apt belief*.

The Part III, which is formed by 6-7-8-9 chapters, dissects the roots of human knowledge as a derived form of conceptualization of virtue. In fact, instead of envisaging knowledge in the logic of instrumentality which is oriented towards means-and-ends, Sosa argues convincingly that Aristotle did the correct thing in connecting knowledge with virtue.

In Part IV, author gives an explanation of Pyrrhonian epistemology discussing matters already touched in the books as the human credibility, reliability, agency, aptness and action. Sosa holds the thesis that not only knowledge but action are co-determined by factors that sometimes eludes causality and reasonability. The concatenation of events, though organized by cognition, does not depend upon interpretation. Contrariwise, in support to virtue epistemology Sosa warns that knowledge is insensitive to convened beliefs, unless by the fact that the significance of events are given by the virtue which is inherent in each person. What is perceived about events do not speak of the properties of events, but only of the internal world cultivated by agency. This is the reason behind, Sosa confirms that each agent develops a consonant structure that leads towards ethic.

To cut the long story short, this masterful work evinces an attempt to enhance author's argument in view of all criticism he received over recent years (an apt belief associates to what is true because competent, in which case virtue epistemology cannot be dissociated from the meaning of competence. Quite aside from this, Sosa's development inscribes in what David Harvey (1989) dubbed "postmodernism", which exhibits an state of knowledge fragmentation originally caused by the decentralization of capitalist economies after 70s decade. Still, if this state of decentralization remains unregulated, the concept of reality as an unique and immutable entity broke into thousands of pieces, each one adjusted to peoples' perception. For this reason, it is not surprisingly upon the destruction of an all-encompassing model of reality, the inflation of risks surfaced making social ties weaker.

It is important not to lose the sight if the cultural project of Enlightenment offered an unique and stable vision of reality, Sosa engages with allegories of individualism, but trying to construct a new interesting bridge with the lost world of Enlightenment and ancient Ethics.

Over recent years, professor Geoffrey Skoll (2014) discussed to what extent the epistemology of social sciences (in capitalist societies) rest on the needs of producing a third object (dialectics) to explain things otherwise would not be digested. This type of "fetishism" which allows the center to mark but in the same action be unmarked, paves the pathways for the exception of law, which is conducive to human exploitation. Since the explanation (justification) of our acts always lies outside of our mind, the responsibilities of elite are endorsed to workforce, which legitimate such an state of exploitation (Korstanje 2015).

Last but not least, we feel Ernest Sosa's book not only offers a valid, smart, and innovative argument about the possibilities to use the epistemology of Ancient World to overcome the conceptual limitations posed by postmodernism (without falling in pragmatism) but also confronts with the current hegemony of instrumentalism which ushers into "psychologism". A must-read book which will very well pass the time proof.

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*Maximiliano Emanuel Korstanje is Associate professor at University of Palermo, Argentina. He is the Editor in Chief of the International Journal of Safety and Security in Tourism. With more than 650 published papers in peer review journals, Korstanje is concerned in the study of risk, capitalism and mobility. He co-edits 10 journals, and is a member of the editorial board for 25 specialized journals. From 2010 his biography has been a point of entry in Marquis Who's Who in the World. He was awarded as Outstanding reviewer 2012/2013 for Emerald Group Publishing, UK. Because of his contribution to the sociology of tourism, Korstanje has been nominated for three honorary doctorates.*