

Thinking Through Social Epistemology: A Reply to Combes, Smolkin, and Simmons
Benjamin McCraw, University of South Carolina Upstate

I want to thank Richard Combes, Doran Smolkin, and Aaron Simmons for their gracious, penetrating, and excellent commentaries on my paper. They've offered me outstanding points to consider, objections to ponder, and directions to pursue. In what follows, I'll offer some thoughts of my own and respond to what I think are the truly insightful criticisms they raise for my model of epistemic trust (ET). Let me address Combes first.

Reply to Combes

Combes offers and affirms a view of trust that reduces it to propositional belief. Even if ET *includes*, *requires*, or *entails* propositional belief,¹ I still reject that ET reduces to belief-that. I deny, in other words, that “an irreducibly distinct attitude of trust supervenes on the belief that S’s prior track record supports confidence in S’s present and future testimony.”² Let’s go through Combes’ pro “trust-in as trust-that” points to see how I might refuse this supervenience or reductive thesis.

First, Combes agrees with my Baier-inspired tripartite analysis of trust as involving some *truster*, *trustee*, and the ‘thing’ with which the *truster* entrusts the *trustee*. However, he suggests that the only things that are “entrusted are specific judgments (e.g., ‘She will remain committed to me until death do us part’ or ‘Since its representatives promised, Congress will not call for new taxes’).”³ I can’t say that I find this plausible: when Jones says that s/he trusts his/her spouse to remain *committed* or that Congress won’t *call* for new taxes, then the natural reading here is that Jones trusts someone(s) to *do* something; namely, remain committed and refrain from calling for new taxes. These are *actions* (or *inactions*, in the case of Congress) rather than *beliefs about those actions*.

More likely, trusting one’s spouse just trusts him/her to *do* certain things and trusting Congress requires us to trust that they will *not do* certain things. I’m not sure how to *argue* for this point in any stronger way than to simply appeal to our commonsense practices and situations involved in reflection on trusting others. If we do that, I think, then it’s far more plausible to say that we trust others for ‘things’ other than beliefs (e.g. actions, attitudes, etc.). If this is the case, then there are other bases of trust (*simpliciter*) other than merely propositions (judgments) about the trusted person. Hence, if there are non-propositional entrusted “things,” then it’s certainly possible that other non-propositional states factor into the nature of ET (and, thus, the supervenience thesis will be false).

¹ My current view is somewhat weaker now than in my original statement in this article. There, I argued, in my first condition, that *H*’s ET in *S* that *p* require that *H* believe that *p*. However, I now think that may be overly strong and that it *could* (even if it never is) the case that one could have ET regarding some *p* that falls short of belief. Elsewhere (McCraw 2015a, 145) I’ve suggested that we weaken this belief component to requiring that one *accept* that *p* (noting that believing that *p* is compatible with accepting that *p*). However, accepting that *p* doesn’t entail the full belief that *p*. So my view is actually *further* away from Combes’ position defended here.

² Combes 2015, 78.

³ Combes 2015, 76.

Next, Combes focuses on the origin/cause of trust. He claims that since “trust does not magically appear *ex nihilo*, the question naturally arises, how then is it acquired? Trust is generated only if the truster believes that the trustee’s prior track record supports confidence in the trustee’s present and future testimony....”⁴ The claim here is that, given reflection on the genesis of trust, it turns out that *H* trusts *S* only if *H* has certain beliefs about *S* (namely: *S*’s reliability). In the first place, this isn’t inconsistent with my analysis wherein I claim that belief that *p* is a necessary condition for ET regarding *p*. What Combes, rather, needs is the following: *H* trusts *S* only if **and only if** *H* has certain beliefs about *S*’s reliability.⁵

This biconditional must be true if Combes’ supervenience thesis is even possibly correct. (Whereas simply saying that propositional belief is a necessary condition for trust will not be nearly strong enough and, in fact, be consistent with the account I defend.) But this biconditional is implausible: we can *believe* that *S* is reliable without trusting *S*. Suppose that I believe that both Plato and Xenophon present generally reliable histories of Socrates’ trial. Yet I take only the former’s account as the basis for my beliefs about Socrates’ *apologia* rather than the latter’s. Do I trust Xenophon with respect to Socrates’ trial? That seems deeply problematic since, *ex hypothesi*, my beliefs are grounded only in *Plato’s* dialogue. I may end up believing propositions that Xenophon states but I certainly don’t *trust him* if those statements never enter into my mind. So, it’s false that *H* believes *S* is reliable only if *H* trusts *S*. Therefore, the biconditional as well as Combes’ supervenience thesis turn out to be false.

Next, Combes wants to argue that I trust *S* only if I (take myself to) possess evidence that *S* is reliable. Combes says that “I as the truster must believe that the trustee is minimally reliable before I decide with whatever level of confidence I possess that what the trustee affirms is true.”⁶ I think this claim trades on the ambiguity of “must.” Consider the very next sentence:

It is precisely in the absence of any such evidence that trust is *misplaced*. To the extent that we are *rational*, we lose trust in people when it comes to light that either the trustee deceived us as to his or her *bona fides* or we ourselves have been *guilty* of inflating the epistemic value of his or her previous testimony.⁷

In my view, Combes is guilty of committing what I’ll call the Descriptive/Normative Conflation (DNC). What I mean is that there seems to be a collapse between when trust is placed and when trust is placed *well*. Look at the language in the second quote: trust is “misplaced” or “rational” or we find ourselves “guilty” of some cognitive sin. These, I think, most clearly apply to the *normative* evaluation of when trust is *good* rather than the

⁴ Combes 2015, 76.

⁵ Actually more than this is needed: supervenience isn’t mere logical equivalence. But I’ll pass over this point.

⁶ Combes 2015, 77.

⁷ Combes 2015, 77; emphases mine.

descriptive analysis of what it means to place trust in the first place (irrespective of whether it's well or poorly placed). If the sentence that follows provides the key to reading the quote beginning this paragraph, we should read the "must" as a normative, "you *should*" rather than a "this is logically/conceptually *required*." It's possible that we *must* trust in the normative sense if and only if we have good evidence-based beliefs regarding the person in whom we trust.⁸ That is, what Combes means to say, minimally, that is that *H* displays *epistemically good* ET in *S* only if *H* has evidence-based beliefs that *S* is reliable. Even if that normative claim is true, the descriptive claim on what ET is *simpliciter* won't follow. This is the core of what I call the DNC.

Furthermore, I think the DNC goes a long way to explaining much of the disagreement Combes has with my view, principally because it tends to reappear. For instance, he claims that:

- "While I may have no reason to doubt the stranger, I still remain ignorant of potential evidence to serve as a foundation for feeling any epistemic loyalty towards that individual."⁹
- "Yet does not my belief that the testimonials of some trustee *S* are by and large true ground my confidence in *S*, which in turn justifies my reliance on *S*?"¹⁰
- "Attributions of fidelity must be deserved."¹¹

Consider what's doing the work here: "*potential evidence*," "*justifies*," and "*deserved*"—these are all distinctly normative concepts linked to how Combes views the nature of trust. But, I clearly try to keep separate the normative questions regarding the *epistemic propriety* of ET with the descriptive task of saying just *what* ET is (no matter whether it's well or poorly placed). This is what I'm calling the DNC: trust can be placed even if one places it *poorly, without evidence, without justification, or undeservedly*. My point is most certainly *not* to give a catalog of problems in Combes' response—far from it. Rather, I think Combes tends to read my view as saying more on the *normative* question of trust's well-placed-ness. I'm not trying to heap criticism on him (at all) but simply trying to explain why we find our views so at odds. And I think the DNC helps in seeing why he views trust as he does and why that's so different from the view I defend.

Perhaps I'm not being fair: Combes makes a distinction between apparent and real trust: "if the supposed truster cannot...acknowledge evidence...that the trustee's present or future testimony is credible..., the trust is only apparent and not real."¹² The precise distinction between real and apparent trust isn't clear but I suspect he locates it in the

⁸ Although I disagree here—I don't favor an exclusively evidentialist model for the epistemic well-placed-ness of trust. However, the normative question is beyond the scope of my paper. I simply aim to analyze what ET in *S* is rather than getting into the interested but vexed question of when such trust is epistemically good.

⁹ Combes 2015, 77.

¹⁰ Combes 2015, 77.

¹¹ Combes 2015, 78.

¹² Combes 2015, 77.

distinction between mere trust behavior and the “genuine article.”¹³ Yet the grounds for drawing this distinction on trust behavior commits Combes to some implications that strike me as seriously problematic. For instance,

An infant or a companion animal may simulate the movements symptomatic of trust, but unless each is cognizant of the caregiver’s past successes at meeting its needs and wants, the activity observed reflects only the living creature’s present desires and nothing as intellectually sophisticated as actual trust.¹⁴

Combes, therefore, seems to endorse that (companion) animals and infants can’t *actually* trust. And, in doing so, he’s consistent: if trust reduces to evidence-based beliefs about the trustee, then animals and infants—in lacking such beliefs—can’t satisfy the supervenience base for trust. But there’s often a price in being consistent and I think that, in this case, Combes is too willing to pay a cost that’s far too high. It strikes me as *tremendously* counterintuitive that infants fail to trust in others. A child’s trust of his/her parents is frequently cited as a model upon which plausible accounts of trust must conform, explain, etc. Denying that children can trust, to my lights, is a cost that we should be very unwilling to accept and, on the view I defend, we have no need to pay it.

Combes certainly has a point that trusting behavior is not identical to placing actual trust in someone: we (unfortunately) know of false friends, con artists, etc. that can merely seem as though they trust us. Yet the way he draws the distinction here between falsely appearing trust and genuine trust seems to locate the in such a way that denies the possibility/actuality of infant-trust. So, while I think the real/mere-appearance distinction is crucial, it’s implausible to draw it as does Combes. And rejecting this placement undermines the reason to accept his supervenience thesis.

So, while my official line in the paper remains committed to the view that *H* places ET in *S* for *p* only if *H* believes that *p*, I reject Combes’ supervenience thesis that “epistemic trust is parasitic on believing that.”¹⁵ Certainly propositional trust—that is an important way that we place trust and accurately picks out many ways we use the term “trust.” Yet *that* sort of (epistemic) trust is not the specific sort of trust my account aims to model. I, therefore, think we should keep the various non-doxastic elements of trust—namely, the confidence and dependence elements—in the account. The mention of dependence here provides a segue to Smolkin’s commentary.

Reply to Smolkin

Now, let’s consider Smolkin’s response to my paper. Specifically, he argues that I need to reconsider my use of dependence or reliance in my account of ET. That is, we should reject my third condition on ET; namely, (3) *H* depends on *S*’s (perceived)

¹³ Combes 2015, 77.

¹⁴ Combes 2015, 77.

¹⁵ Combes 2015, 78.

communication for H's belief that *p*. Even more exactly, he contests how I construe dependence in (3) as involving both

- (a) "Epistemic trust involves some sort of epistemic lack on the part of the one who trusts" AND
- (b) "The person who is trusted causes the one who trusts to believe that *p*."¹⁶

Call these (3a) and (3b), respectively. Smolkin develops a series of counterexamples that push against accepting (3)—especially read as requiring (3a) and (3b)—as a necessary component of placing ET in someone.

Smolkin's first counterexample works against (3) more generally: arguing that trust *simpliciter* need not involve dependence/reliance. We should

[s]uppose your 20 year-old child is choosing whether to continue her university studies or to take some time off to work and travel. When asked what you think of her decision, you sincerely claim that you trust her to make a good decision. Here it seems that we have a case of trust without there being dependence in the sense of reliance....¹⁷

I agree that there's a sense in which you trust your child here, but I'm not convinced that sense is the one I'm trying to capture in my analysis of ET. In this scenario, I tend to read the 'trust' here as 'believe that she'll make a good decision'. I don't deny *that* sense of trust really is trust, but I don't think that sense is precisely the one my account of trust in someone intends to capture. So, while I think this is trust without dependence, I'm not sure it's the sense of trust that's germane to my specific target in the analysis I'm proposing.

The final three counterexamples object more to reading (3) as (3a) and (3b) rather than to reject that trust requires dependence (overall). Let's take each in turn. Streamlining Smolkin's case somewhat, let's say that you watch a baseball game on TV. Further,

[s]uppose that your team is leading by 7 runs; it is the final inning of the game; there are 2 outs; and you decide to turn off the TV and go to sleep. In the morning you wake up believing that your team won the game. Your spouse, who watched the entire game, then tells you that your team won.¹⁸

We should read this case as contesting (3b): you have the belief already and, therefore, my wife's assertion that the home team wins can't *cause* it. I'm not convinced that the counterexample succeeds, but I think my reasons for this assessment require some subtlety.

¹⁶ Doran Smolkin 2015, 10.

¹⁷ Smolkin 2015, 11; author's emphasis.

¹⁸ Smolkin 2015, 11.

Here's where I think Smolkin and I may have diverging intuitions: it doesn't strike me as obvious that this is a case of ET in your spouse for the belief that the home team won—at least, not in the sense that Smolkin reads it. What I mean is this: I gladly accept this as a case of placing ET in your spouse *dispositionally* but not a case where you place ET in her *for this belief*. That is, I accept that there's ET in your spouse here but it's about her in general or diachronically. At least, that's how I would assess the trust involved in this case. And that's because I would say that, in Smolkin's case, you see enough of the game to count as *knowing* (or maybe weaker states like having a *justified, warranted, epistemically well-grounded, etc.* belief) that your team won. So, even if this is trust in one's spouse (about which, again, I'm not sure that I share Smolkin's intuitive judgment), it's not a case of ET in for *this particular* belief. And supposing that this case doesn't cast doubt on the view that my *general* trust in my spouse (generally) involves depending on her, it won't actually contest (3b).

In the same general vein, Smolkin offers the third counterexample:

Suppose that you are a researcher, and that you have completed a rather rigorous study that leads you to conclude that *x* is the case. You publish your results. You believe that *x* is the case. Other researchers then take up the task of performing further, related studies to see if they can confirm your findings. Eventually, another research group publishes an article describing their study and confirming that they too find that *x* is the case. Although this article does not cause you to believe that *x* is the case—for you already believed that—it increases your confidence in your belief. Here too we have a clear case where there is epistemic trust in another without it being the case that the one who trusted causes the one who trusts to have some belief.¹⁹

Like the baseball counterexample above, Smolkin takes this to attack (3b): a case of ET in someone without that person (via their communication) causing the belief in question.

And, like above, I can agree that you have ET in the researchers and also that their article increases your confidence in the belief (or even the degree to which you believe *x* as well if you favor a credence model of belief). But, I still reject this is a case where you have ET in the researchers (via the article's communication that *x*) *for the belief that x*. Like your spouse above, it seems as though you trust in them *dispositionally* but that ET doesn't occur for *x* specifically.

More exactly, I accept his claim that “we have a clear case where there is epistemic trust in another without it being the case that the one who trusted causes the one who trusts to have some belief”. However, I read the first part of the claim (regarding ET in the researchers) referring most plausibly to trusting in them more generally where the second part of the claim (regarding their non-causing of the belief that *x*) refers mere to trusting for the *specific belief that x*. So, (3b) remains.

¹⁹ Smolkin 2015, 11-12.

The final counterexample, modifying the baseball scenario above, attacks both (3a) and (3b). Taking the situation from above:

Suppose that when you turned off the TV with your team comfortably in the lead, you thought there were only 2 outs in the 9th inning when in fact there were 3 outs and the game was over. So now you go to bed believing that your team won the game. The next day your spouse who you think watched the entire game confirms your belief that your team won the game. Here you surely epistemically trust your spouse that your team won the game, even though you already had sufficient evidence for that belief.²⁰

So, like the earlier version, the situation of the spouse telling you something you already believe runs against (3b). But, now, the shift is that you don't *actually* find yourself in an epistemically less-than-desirable position with respect to the belief in question; rather, you have all the evidential support needed for knowledge or having a justified, warranted, etc. belief that your team won.

Regarding the new counterexample and (3b), I'll leave my comments above as the answer here. Nothing in the modified scenario changes how Smolkin thinks it contests (3b), so there's no need to rehearse my answer from above here. But, I think the way the counterexample goes after (3a) is very interesting and pushes my account in a positive direction. His assessment is telling: "If this is right, then an epistemic gap need not be present for one to epistemically trust another; rather, what seems to be relevant is that you think there is an epistemic gap in the grounds for your belief, a gap that you think the one you trust can help bridge."²¹ I have two comments here.

First, I'm unconvinced that possession of sufficient evidence in the case is equivalent to lacking an epistemic gap. To put it the other way around, one can still have some epistemic lack and have sufficient evidence (regarding some belief). Only an evidentialist *must* tie these two epistemic statuses so closely together. So, I'm not sure I'm required to accept this as a counterexample to (3a). However, I think this first comment may be unfair and also likely false. That's because we should probably read Smolkin's "sufficient evidence" here simply as a placeholder for "whatever it is that confers positive epistemic status on a belief." And it's certainly much less clunky that the longer formulation. But, given this proviso, I agree with Smolkin: we *should* change (3a) to something like his preferred "H *thinks* that s/he lacks sufficient grounds for the belief that *p*."²² A closer formulation in my own language (though not changing the substance would be: "H *takes* him/herself to lack conclusive or sufficient evidence (or grounds in general) for his/her belief that *p* without S's (perceived) communication." Call this (3a').

²⁰ Smolkin 2015, 12.

²¹ Smolkin 2015, 12.

²² Smolkin 2015, 12.

I think Smolkin's modification actually fits neatly with some other points I want to make about my analysis. Consider my original formulation of the second condition in the analysis of ET: (2) "*S* communicates that *p*." There are good reasons to think that we can (or do) trust in a person even if that person never intends to communicate.²³ Hence, we weaken the condition to yield (2'): "*H* takes *S* to communicate that *p*" as the final version. Also, I alter an intermediate version of my fourth condition: (4') "*S* is in a (good epistemic) position to communicate that *p* with warrant."²⁴

Similarly we have reason to think that we trust folks who are in *bad* epistemic positions even though we *take them* to be authoritative or competent testifiers; yielding (4'') "*H* sees *S* as epistemically well-placed with respect to *p*."²⁵ I think Smolkin's considerations here to read (3a) as (3a') follows in precisely the same vein as my own modifications of (2) and (4) towards positions of *perceived* or *taken* communication and epistemic well-placed-ness. Thus, Smolkin's suggestion that we weaken (3a) to *perceived* lack of conclusive grounds follows the same sort of reasoning and something that fits with the spirit of the account offered. As such, I'm happy to modify my position on (3a) to include *taken* or *perceived* epistemic lack rather than *actual* epistemic lack. However, given my counter-responses to the other cases Smolkin provides, I still maintain (3a) as part of the analysis of ET.

Reply to Simmons

Aaron Simmons approaches my work differently than either Combes or Smolkin. Rather than a direct, critical commentary, he offers a sort of "encounter" or engagement with my view; extending it to relevant dimensions beyond the stated, limited role my analysis provides. Perhaps I can encounter his encounter and use his comments to extend *our* discussion since I take it that **now** we both are contributors to the dialogue. (I would, incidentally, say the same of the discussions arising out of the responses by Combes and Smolkin, too.)

Simmons is certainly right to suggest that I'm not offering any more (or less) than an *analysis* of ET: I'm not and don't intend to say that my model provides any *normative* guidance for when ET is well-placed. I may use "normative" here rather than "ethics" or "moral," but I suspect we are getting at something close to each other. And he worries that my model is "more and matter of sociology than social epistemology—i.e., of telling us simply what epistemic trust happens to be in our noetic communities, but not how our communities ought to function in relation to such trust and how best to cultivate it..."²⁶ I wouldn't call my aim "sociology," but that's just a quibble.

What I think should be noted is that an analysis of ET shouldn't be so separated from the normative enterprise of "social epistemology" as Simmons defines it. I couldn't agree more that we should get into the normative question of *well*-placed trust, but I want

²³ McCraw 2015b, 421.

²⁴ McCraw 2015b, 423.

²⁵ McCraw 2015b, 424.

²⁶ Simmons 2015, 15.

include in that overall enterprise the activity of analysis or clarification of the concepts, terms, theories, etc. involved in the normative work itself. So, while he's right to suggest my analysis has no direct or explicit normative (ethical/moral) content, I certainly want to affirm that working on clarification here is (or, at least, can be) an important step in giving that normative account. We should pair analysis with the normative-based inquiry. Missing one or the other leads to problem: without analysis, it's too easy/tempting to lose sight of what one is trying to explain, locate, uncover, etc. and, without the normative, it's too easy to lose sight of the importance of the topic and its role in our lives (=the *existential* worries that Simmons raises).

Simmons first emphasizes the role of justice in talking about ET (and perhaps vice versa). He suggests that "epistemology is always ultimately a moral concern"²⁷ and "*justification is already a matter of justice.*"²⁸ Again, I prefer "normative" to "moral" but I share the sentiment here: epistemology is an irreducibly normative field. To talk about knowledge, justification, warrant, etc. all, in my view, necessarily include important value-laden concepts. However, I'm not so sure that we should read "justification" here as so heavily social/political as Simmons.²⁹ Addressing the social context in which we find ourselves—always living a life with other persons—justification draws from the need to "justify" oneself (and one's conduct) in that shared, social life. While I'm worried that Simmons draws too strong of a relation between (epistemic) justification and (social) justice, I do think we can and should connect them—especially in the domain of social epistemology. For instance, there's good reason to think that our *concept* of knowledge has certain social grounds. Edward Craig argues that we have/use the concept of knowledge "to flag approved sources of information."³⁰ Thus, we have a crucial *social* role in helping tag reliable people that 'knowledge' advances.³¹ We also have good reason to think of our epistemic practices as having a key social aspect. I'm thinking of William Alston's "doxastic approach" to epistemology.³² For him, our doxastic practices have an important social component:

doxastic practices are thoroughly social: socially established by socially motivated learning, and socially shared. We learn to form perceptual beliefs about the environment in terms of the conceptual scheme we acquire from our society...the final outcome is socially organized, reinforced, monitored, and shared.³³

Now, Alston's motive for the social-embeddedness derives more from Reid and Wittgenstein than Simmons' use of Levinas, Butler, etc., so there are undoubtedly some

²⁷ Simmons 2015, 15.

²⁸ Simmons 2015, 16; his emphasis.

²⁹ I might point out that *justice* is, for Plato, a virtue for both the *polis* AND the individual.

³⁰ Craig 1990, 11.

³¹ I'm sure that *this* use of "social" may not track how Simmons does or wants to conceive of the social context, but I do certainly think it's *a* use of social features that bear significantly on epistemology. After all, we might take my comments here as *encountering* Simmons that go beyond his own claims/views.

³² Alston 1989, 1991.

³³ Alston 1991, 163.

crucial differences here. But, I still think we can agree that one's epistemology should reflect our social context and our living among other persons in some deep way(s).

I also think that Simmons is right to emphasize the relation(s) between trust and finitude; especially when we understand the later in terms of our limitations. Specifically, Simmons seems to suggest that "epistemic trust fosters the virtue of other-reliance as a result of appropriately understanding one's own epistemic limits."³⁴ Getting nearer to my normative views on ET, I would suggest a slight modification here: ET just *is* the "virtue of other-reliance" (plus my analysis' emphasis on confidence) in recognition that, epistemically speaking, no one of us can go it alone and that we can live well only if we rely on others. Too much here takes us too far afield and so I simply want to make the point that I see more agreement here than there may appear between Simmons and myself.³⁵

Finally, Simmons ends his encounter with sociality. Drawing on the prior points about justification and finitude, Simmons advocates "a conception of sociality as more fundamental than individuality" so that "epistemic trust finds a better foundation in a social ontology whereby responsibility is constitutive of selfhood and social relationships give rise to individual identities, now narratively articulated internal to a particular community of discourse."³⁶ He approvingly appeals to Keith Lehrer: "self-trust...is only possible due to the reality of other-trust as already implicitly assumed (not just epistemically, but existentially)."³⁷

I take the upshot of all this to be that, in response to our limitations/finitude and the social call to justify oneself (and one's doings/believings), we should model both the existence and epistemological assessment of self-trust based in other-trust. Trusting in others, thus, is more fundamental than the being and well-placed-ness of ET in oneself. Here, Simmons (and Lehrer) find themselves at odds with another philosophical direction, championed by Linda Zagzebski³⁸ and Richard Foley,³⁹ grounding the epistemic well-placed-ness of other-ET in self-ET. So, in which direction should we move: from self-trust to other-trust (along with Zagzebski and Foley) or from other-trust to self-trust (as with Simmons and Lehrer)?

I'm not going to give much defense here but what strikes me as most plausible is *both*. We shouldn't think of self-trust and other-trust as discrete stages leading from other to the other but, perhaps in even more Lehrer-ian fashion, as a kind of web or mutually supporting buttresses tracking our intellectual development. In a way, we *must* trust others: our very lives as children depend on those who care for us but, in another way, we *must* trust ourselves: our lives depend on utilizing our own faculties crucial to our general

³⁴ Simmons 2015, 16.

³⁵ Also, there's much I would want to say about Simmons' quick allude to philosophy of religion. But that's too big a topic to tackle responsibly in a quick response. Let me just note that I do use my model of ET here to inform some notions of how we can understand faith. See my "Faith and Trust" (2015a).

³⁶ Simmons 2015, 17.

³⁷ Simmons 2015, 17.

³⁸ Linda Zagzebski 2012.

³⁹ Richard Foley 2001.

cognitive function(ing). Similar considerations, I would suggest, hold for the *epistemological* question.

If we are to live well cognitively (including whatever intellectual goods there may be: knowledge, truth, understanding, etc.), we *must* trust others: as C. A. J. Coady notes: we can't possibly do the extent of "field-work" to get a sufficient store of knowledge, justified beliefs, etc.⁴⁰ Similarly, we *must* trust ourselves: we can't develop the skills, faculties, etc. used in trusting others well unless we have self-ET in those capacities that even open the door to other-ET, too. So, it seems to me that we shouldn't draw hard-and-fast lines from self- to other-trust or in the opposite direction. Our social, finite lives require each and call for each consistently; without *both*, it's hard to see how we could ever be in a position to justify our beliefs, actions, or even our lives (lived with others).

Conclusion

Again, I want to offer my most sincere thanks to Richard Combes, Doran Smolkin, and Aaron Simmons. If the aim in this space is to think through *social* epistemology, then their discussions further precisely *that* aim. I only hope to do their thoughts some justice and to try to further the dialogue somewhat.

Contact details: bmccraw@uscupstate.edu

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⁴⁰ Coady 1992, 82.

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