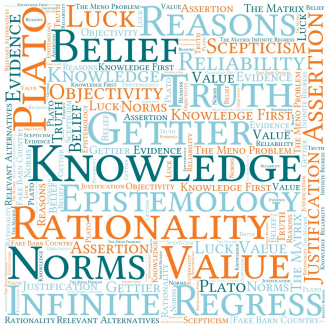

Knowledge, Reason & Belief

Jake Chandler

9. The argument from ignorance (ctd)

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

Last week

- Reminder that any of our 3 positions on the argument from ignorance (AI) will incur an explanatory debt: explaining why some claim seems false in spite of being true
- An overview of a common way of paying that debt, by appealing to rules of good conversational practice (the WAM)
- Closure denialism:
  - Dretske's motivations
  - How Sensitivity leads to failure of closure
  - Dretske's suggested WAM
- Mooreanism, the Safety requirement & a large chunk of Sosa's appeal to an alleged mistake in logical reasoning

Introduction

This week

- Three things on the menu
  (1) The remainder of Sosa's argument
  (2) A WAM on behalf of the sceptic
  (3) A fourth, popular, 'contextualist' option based on the idea that the contents of knowledge claims vary according to the context of assertion
- For expository reasons, I will present (3) before (2)

Mooreanism (ctd)

Reminder

- Sosa (1999), defending Mooreanism, tries our 1st strategy:

  > Our (mistaken) intuitions that we don't know that the sceptical alternative is false are due to a common error in logical reasoning

- He argues:
  - The JTB analysis of knowledge ought to be supplemented by a condition he calls 'Safety', rather than with Sensitivity
  - The resulting analysis validates the Moorean claims that we both know that the ordinary claim is true and that the sceptical alternative is false
  - But Safety can easily be confused with Sensitivity and the latter would entail we *don't* know that the sceptical alternative is false
- We essentially covered the first point; now, we'll cover the rest

Reminder (ctd)

- So that we're on the same page, remember that Sosa suggested replacing Sensitivity with its contrapositive

  > Safety: Had S believed that P, it would have been the case that P

- Remember also that Sosa thinks that this condition should be understood as follows:

  > $B(P) \mathrel{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} P$ is true iff 'in the actual world, and *for quite a distance away from the actual world*…our belief that we are not radically deceived matches the fact [that we] are not radically deceived'

Sceptical alternatives: Safety vs Sensitivity

- We have seen that Sensitivity allows us to count as knowing the truth of ordinary claims, *but not* the falsity of sceptical alternatives
- Safety, however, allows us to count as knowing *not only* the truth of ordinary claims, *but also* the falsity of sceptical alternatives:

  > Those worlds in the neighbourhood of the actual world in which $B(O)$ are all worlds in which O ($\Rightarrow K(O)$)

  and also

  > Those worlds in the neighbourhood of the actual world in which $B(\neg H)$ are all worlds in which $\neg H$ ($\Rightarrow K(\neg H)$)

Sosa's argument: wrap up

- So, in Sosa's view
  - Safety yields the true, Moorean result that we do know $\neg H$
  - Sensitivity would yield the false conclusion that we do not
- But remember that we saw that, while counterfactual conditionals do not contrapose, indicative conditionals do
- Sosa suggests that
  (1) Because of this feature of indicatives, we are prone to get muddled up and think that counterfactuals also contrapose
  (2) We tend to evaluate Sensitivity by considering its contrapositive and that leads us astray

Contextualism

Sosa's argument: concerns

- Some worries:
  - Regarding (1): *Do* we really get muddled up? What's the evidence? Why don't we get muddled up *the other way round* and judge that indicatives *don't* contrapose?
  - Regarding (2): Even if we *do* get muddled up and somehow think that counterfactuals contrapose, why would we tend to evaluate Sensitivity by considering its contrapositive?
- Finally:
  - It isn't clear that what Sosa has in mind for Safety really corresponds to $B(P) \boxrightarrow P$
  - If if doesn't, then Safety isn't the contrapositive of Sensitivity in the first place

Some context-sensitive expressions

- Consider an assertion of the sentence:

  'I am hungry now'

- Clearly, due to the pronoun 'I' and adverb 'now', the content of the assertion varies according to context, depending on
  - who the speaker is
  - when the assertion is made
- So 'I am hungry now' can be true when asserted in one context but at the same time false when asserted in another
- *This* context-dependence is completely uncontroversial, but it has been also argued that many *other* expressions are (perhaps less obviously) in the same boat

Further context-sensitive expressions?

- One case in point is gradable adjectives, both absolute ('dry', 'empty', 'flat') and relative ('tall', 'near') :

  'Sam's car is old'

  might be claimed to be true when uttered before a road trip across Russia, but false when uttered at a vintage car show, and

  'The box is empty'

  might be claimed to be true when uttered in the context of a magic trick, but false when uttered before a physics experiment
- Another candidate is quantifier phrases:

  'Everyone is wearing their Winter clothes'

  might be claimed to be true when uttered in December in Germany, but false when uttered at the same time in Australia

How about 'knows'?

- It has become increasingly popular to suggest:

  (Epistemic) Contextualism (antonym: Invariantism): The truth conditions of knowledge attributions vary with the attributor's context
- Key proponents: later Unger (1986), Lewis (1996), Cohen (1987, 2013), DeRose (1995, 1999),…
- This suggestion is thought to help with the AI, it allows us to say:
  (i) When uttered in the context of the argument from ignorance, the sceptic's concluding claim is true (as are his two premises)
  (ii) When uttered outside of that context, the same claim is false
- A failure on the audience's part to appreciate (ii) then allegedly explains the discomfort experienced in relation to the conclusion

In greater detail

- In what *precise way* is 'knows' thought to be context sensitive?
- It has been suggested that attributing knowledge involves
  (a) attributing a *gradable property* to the knower (e.g. Cohen)
  Example: If S knows that P, then S's evidence entails that P is probable
  (b) making a *universal quantified* statement (e.g. Lewis)
  Example 1: If S knows that P, then S's evidence is inconsistent with every alternative to P
  Example 2: If S knows that P, then, were any alternative to P to be true, S wouldn't believe that P
- The context-sensitivity of 'knows' is then claimed to derive from that of gradable adjectives or quantifier phrases

In greater detail (ctd)

- On pains of doing no better than a 'bare' WAM, the contextualist *also* needs a story as to *how* the context yields the result that an utterance of

  'I know that O'

  is true in ordinary contexts but false in the context of the AI
- Lewis, who requires inconsistency of evidence with all alternatives, proposes:

  Any alternative made salient (e.g. mentioned) in the conversational context is included in the quantifier's scope ('Rule of Attention')
- In the context of AI, alternative H is explicitly mentioned; outside of that context, it typically isn't

Gettier cases

- Lewis claims his own proposal sheds light on Gettier cases
- Consider Clock and its de-Gettiered counterpart (Clock*), in which the clock didn't stop
- Lewis: whether *S* can be said to know *P* hinges partly on whether *S*'s evidence can be said to eliminate all alternatives to *P*
- In both cases the evidence is the same (the clock's displaying '12'), but what counts as 'all' alternatives can be argued to vary:
  - Clock: the alternative in which it isn't 12 but the clock says it is isn't included
  - Clock*: that alternative is included (because made salient by the fact that the clock stopped)

Problem: semantic blindness

- Schiffer (1996; see also Conee 2013) complains:

  > If the meaning of 'knows' were indeed context-dependent, it would be surprising that competent speakers didn't realise this

- Compare indexicals such as 'I' or 'here': any competent speaker is aware of the context-dependence of their meaning
- Since the contextualist *requires* lack of awareness regarding 'knows' for the AI, he can't dig his heels in and claim awareness
- Response: gradable adjectives and quantified phrases are context dependent but speakers aren't immediately aware of this (Cohen 2013)

Problem: semantic blindness (ctd)

- Counter: even if we grant that they are context dependent, the situation seems disanalogous.
- Regarding gradable adjectives:

  'Sam's car is old.' (uttered in the roadtrip context)

  'Sam's car isn't old.' (uttered in the vintage car show context)

- Competent speakers might possibly be convinced that there is no contradiction by someone's claiming the respective contents are:

  'Sam's car is old *for something meant to get us across Russia*.'

  'Sam's car isn't old *for a display piece on a vintage car show*.'

- Similar comments apply to quantified phrases
- No such move seems available for 'knows'

Problem: Conee on quantified phrases

- Conee (2013) offers an interesting objection to contextualism about quantified phrases
- Assume that Mr. Robinson says, at the meeting:

  'Everyone is here.'

- Mr. Stickler interjects:

  'You spoke falsely. Not everyone is here: *the Pope* isn't here.'

- According to contextualism, the meaning of 'everyone' is different in the two assertions
  - Stickler's assertion 'not everyone is here' is true'
  - But Robinson's assertion 'everyone is here' is *also* true

Problem: Conee on quantified phrases (ctd)

- Apparent upshot: Stickler's assertion 'you spoke falsely' is false
- Conee finds this problematic (do you agree?)
- If he is onto something, epistemic contextualism seems in similar trouble

Scepticism

Loose talk

- Conee's isn't the only person to voice doubts about contextualism wrt quantified phrases or absolute gradable adjectives
- Bach (2000) :

  > In these cases, contextualists confuse what is said with what is meant (what the speaker intends the hearer to infer)

- On this view, what is *said* in uttering the following is *false*:

  'Everyone is wearing their Winter clothes'

  'The box is empty'

- What is *meant* however, may be *true*:

  'Everyone *in Germany* is wearing their Winter clothes'

  'The box is empty *of rabbits*'

- Part of what is meant is not said, but left implicit

Loose talk (ctd)

- Note that, on this view, Dretske's 'conversational abomination'

  'The refrigerator is empty, but has lots of things in it.'

  is *inconsistent* (during the last seminar: how the invariantist could suggest why Dretske might be mistaken in thinking otherwise)
- Some putative further cases offered by Bach:

  'Jack and Jill are married [to each other].'

  'Jill got married and [then] got pregnant.'

  'Otto has [exactly] three cars.'

  'Felix has always been an honest judge [since he's been a judge].'

  'Adele hasn't had lunch [today].'

  'You're not going to die [from this cut].'

Why speak loosely?

- Bach writes:

> 'We hardly ever mean exactly what we say. I don't mean that we generally speak figuratively or that we're generally insincere. Rather, I mean that we generally speak loosely, omitting words that could have made what we meant more explicit and letting our audience fill in the gaps. Language works far more efficiently when we do that. Literalism can have its virtues, as when we're drawing up a contract, programming a computer, or writing a philosophy paper, but we generally opt for efficiency over explicitness. In most conversation, though, spelling things out is not only *unnecessary*, it just *slows things down*, given the articulatory bottleneck in linguistic communication. It is often *misleading* too, insofar as it guards against something that doesn't need to be guarded against.'

WAMs for sceptics

- Unsurprisingly, the *sceptical* invariantist's response to *epistemic* contextualism proceeds along the same broad lines
- What follows ≈ early Unger's line sketched in Week 2
- In connection with our zebra scenario, you ask me:

> 'Do you know whether that's a zebra?'

- The invariantist will claim that, in responding with the following, what I *say* is *false*:

> 'I know that's a zebra'

- What is *meant*, however, is claimed to be true
- What might that be? Perhaps be something like:

> 'I know *that if this is an average zoo, then* that's a zebra'

WAMs for sceptics (ctd)

- Why didn't I say what I meant?
- Note: I presumably think that the hearer will share my assumption that the zoo is a normal one
- Hence, speaking the literal truth would have been:
  - at best *unnecessary*: the hearer would have concluded that it's a zebra either way
  - *longer* and harder to process
  - at worst *misleading*: it could have suggested that the hearer should worry that the zoo is not your average one

Next week

- Topic: experimental epistemology
- Required reading:
  - Beebe, J. 2012: Experimental Epistemology. In A. Cullison (ed.), *Companion to Epistemology*, Continuum, pp. 248–69. Sect. I & IV.
- Recommended reading:
  - Weinberg, J.M., S. Nichols & S. Stich. 2001: Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions. *Philosophical Topics* 29, pp. 429–460.
  - Weinberg, J.M., Gonnerman, C., Buckner, C., & Alexander, J. 2010: Are philosophers expert intuiters? *Philosophical Psychology*, 23(3), pp. 331–355.
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