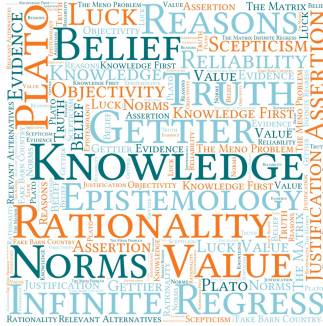




CAUSAL THEORIES

Knowledge, Individuals & Society

JAKE CHANDLER

Responding to Gettier: Causation + Reliabilism



The basic idea

- An influential early suggestion (Goldman 1967)
 - CAUSATION:** S 's belief that P was caused by the fact that P
- How this handles FORD and CLOCK:
 - My belief that that Smith owns an American car was not caused by the fact that he owns an American car
 - My belief that it is 12 was not caused by the fact that it is 12. Rather, it was caused by the fact that the clock stopped on '12'
- Note that CAUSATION obviously entails TRUTH

Objection 1: common causes

- Consider (Feldman 2003):
 - SMOKE:** 'Suppose Black sees a fire in the fireplace and believes that there is smoke coming out of the chimney. The smoke coming out of the chimney does not cause her belief that there is smoke coming out of the chimney. Rather, the fire causes both the smoke to come out the chimney and her belief that it is.'
- We seem to have a failure of necessity
- Rejoinder:
 - Allow for the belief to be either caused by P or to share a **common cause** with P
- This also makes room for knowledge of **future events**, which unless we countenanced backward causation, was ruled out

Objection 2: fortunate causes

- Consider (Goldman 1976):

FAKE BARNs: 'Fred drives past a cluster of barns on the side of the road. Unbeknownst to him, the cluster is part of a film set: only one of the barns is genuine whilst the others are elaborate props. Looking at the one genuine barn, he thinks to himself 'There's a nice barn'. He has a true, justified belief that there is a nice barn next to him, which is also caused by there being a nice barn next to him. He nevertheless fails to have the relevant knowledge.'

- This time: apparent failure of sufficiency

RELIABILISM

The basic idea

- Reliabilism about knowledge = a broad family of views that require for knowledge that the relevant belief be produced by a sufficiently reliable process
- The concept of 'sufficiently reliable process' is then understood in a variety of ways
- Here: analysis of reliability in terms of **counterfactual conditionals** ("Had it been the case that P , it would have been the case that Q ")
- Note: there are also reliabilist analyses of *justification*; this is something else

Sensitivity

- Nozick (1981) offers:
 - SENSITIVITY (1st pass):** Had it been the case that $\neg P$, then S would have believed that $\neg P$
- This is sometimes known as the **truth-tracking theory**
- How this handles FORD and CLOCK:
 - Had Smith *not* owned an American car, I would *still* have believed that (i) Smith has bought a Ford and that (ii) Fords are American cars and hence that (iii) Smith owns an American car
 - Had it not been 12, I would still have believed it to be 12
- Note that SENSITIVITY entails TRUTH (If P is false but S believes that P , it isn't the case that had P been false, S would have believed that $\neg P$)

Sensitivity amended

- There is an immediate issue here (Feldman 2003):

GRANDMA: Old frail Grandma sees grandson Johnny playing happily before her. She knows that Johnny is well and playing happily. But suppose Johnny were sick. The family would tell Grandma that Johnny is well and playing happily, but that he's doing this at a friend's house. They do not want to make Grandma worry. So, if Johnny were sick, she would still believe he's well.
- Patch (Nozick 1981):

SENSITIVITY (2nd pass): Had it been the case that $\neg P$ and S had still formed her beliefs using a process of the same type, then S would have believed that $\neg P$

Objection 2: 'Accidental reliability'

- This objection assumes we have at least an implicit grasp of the relevant type of process but claims a failure of sufficiency
- The counterexample (Pritchard 2014):

THERMOMETER: '[Y]ou find out what the temperature of the room is by looking at the thermometer on the wall...[It] is very reliable in this respect in that it will enable you to form accurate beliefs about what the temperature is. Suppose, however, that unbeknownst to you someone is playing a trick on you. The thermometer is, in fact, broken and is fluctuating randomly. Crucially, however, this isn't making the thermometer an unreliable indicator of what the temperature in the room is[:] someone is hidden in the room and adjusting the temperature of the room to match whatever reading is on the thermometer whenever she sees you look at the thermometer.'

Objection 1: the reference class problem

- Like most versions of reliabilism, SENSITIVITY (2nd pass) refers to the *type* of a process that produced a certain belief
- But any single process will be an instance of *many* different types (belong to different 'reference classes')!
- In the Clock case:
 - A reading of a clock
 - A reading of a stopped clock
 - A reading of a clock that stopped 12 hours ago
- We clearly don't want the relevant type to be of the last variety
- But until we find a principled way of picking out the right type, the proposals are arguably empty (Conee & Feldman 1998)

References

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