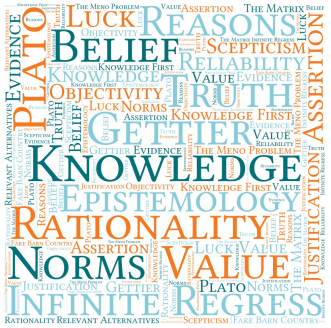

Knowledge, Reason & Belief

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8. The argument from ignorance

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

Last week

- The essentials of the Clifford vs James exchange
  - Clifford's Rule and the shipowner example
  - James' two injunctions and illustration of associated tradeoff
  - The charge that Clifford's position could be self-defeating
  - James' meta-rule and associated worries
  - James on intellectual freedom
- First few slides on scepticism:
  - Pyrrhonian vs academic scepticism
  - A fun (!!) argument to the conclusion that the former collapses into the latter (appealing to Knowledge Norm)
  - The argument from ignorance and some possible responses

Introduction

This week

- A review of the pros and cons of 2 of our 3 responses to the argument

Reminder

- Let:
  - O = Some 'ordinary' claim that you take yourself to know is true
    (Example: 'The animal in the enclosure is a zebra')
  - H = Some 'sceptical' hypothesis inconsistent with O, whose truth would just as well predict your perceptual experience
    (Example: 'The animal in the enclosure is a cleverly painted mule')
- Typically, our grounds for belief fall short of entailing the truth of that belief: for most O, we have an H

Reminder (ctd)

- The sceptic offers:
  (1) You're not in a position to know $\neg H$
  (2) If you're not in a position to know that $\neg H$, then you're not in a position to O

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  (3) You're not in a position to know that O
- The premises seem OK:
  (1): If H were true, things would seem exactly as they do now
  (2): It seems wrong here to claim that one is in a position to know that O, but is not in a position to know that $\neg H$ (e.g. that one is in a position to know that the animal is a zebra but not that it isn't a cleverly painted mule)
- But the conclusion seems disconcerting!!

Reminder (ctd)

- Some options:
  - Scepticism: Accept (1), accept (2) and hence accept (3)
  - Mooreanism: Accept (2), deny (3) and hence deny (1)
  - Closure denialism: Accept (1), deny (3) and hence deny (2)
- Recall that DeRose points out that *everyone* has explaining to do:
  - Sceptics: why it seems we do know O even though we don't
  - Mooreans: why it seems we don't know $\neg H$ even though we do
  - Closure Denialists: why it seems we can't *both* know O *and* fail to know $\neg H$ even though we do

How to do the explaining

- Some possible lines:
  - A common fallacy of reasoning yields a mistaken judgment
  - We are confusing the fact that we aren't warranted in asserting a statement with that statement's being false (Warranted Assertability Manoeuvre, aka WAM)
- The second option deserves a brief explanatory detour
- I'll follow DeRose (1999), who clarifies the general idea by contrasting a 'good' WAM with a 'bad' one

Good WAM vs Bad WAM

A candidate good WAM

- DeRose's example isn't helpful, imo, so here is one of my own
- Assume that I've polished off *all* the cookies but tell you

  'I've eaten some of the cookies.'

- Tempting claim: I have lied to you and spoken *falsely*
- Proposal that yields this result: 'some' means 'not none but not all'
- But this proposal seems implausible, as the following doesn't seem *inconsistent*

  'I've eaten some of the cookies: indeed, I've eaten all of them!'

- Better proposal: 'some' just means 'not none'
- Since this entails that I didn't speak falsely, but it seems tempting to say that I did, we have some explaining to do

A candidate good WAM (ctd)

- A conversational principle that we can reasonably expect people to abide by:

  Maxim of Quantity: 'Be as informative as is required by the purposes of the exchange!' (Grice 1975)

- By saying that I ate some of the cookies, I generate an *expectation* that I am not in a position to make the stronger claim that I ate all of the cookies
- My assertion conversationally implies that I didn't eat all the cookies, whilst falling short of entailing it
- So: we take my claim to be false, even though it is true, because it has an implicature that is false

A clearly bad WAM

- Say that I tell you:

  'David Bowie died a bachelor.'

- Clearly this is false, since he was married when he died and

  'S is a bachelor' is true iff S is an unmarried male

- But say that I perversely wanted to defend an alternative semantics for 'bachelor' that makes the statement true:

  'S is a bachelor' is true iff S is a male

- I then try to explain away the apparent falsity by means of a WAM, appealing to the following conversational principle:

  Rule of Bachelorhood Ascriptions: 'Only say someone is a bachelor when they aren't married!'

A clearly bad WAM (ctd)

- This is not convincing:

  > The WAM does not proceed from general, independently supported principles; rather, it postulates some *ad hoc* rule specific to the case at hand

- DeRose calls such shallow manoeuvres 'bare WAM's'

Closure Denialism

Dretske

- Dretske (2013) offers an admirable defense of closure denialism, nicely summarised in Hawthorne's (2013) opening paragraphs
- He notes it isn't a popular move, with Feldman (1999), notably calling it 'one of the least plausible ideas to gain currency in epistemology in recent years'
- Dretske holds that we know O to be true and that we indeed have good perceptual reasons to endorse it
- He then notes that any perceptual reasons we may have for believing O are nevertheless not reasons for believing $\neg H$
- He then worries what *other* reasons we could have to believe $\neg H$
- Finding none, he concludes that we don't know $\neg H$

Closure and Sensitivity

- Dretske also endorses an *analysis* of knowledge that further supports his rejection of closure
- We won't discuss the specifics here, but it is for our purposes similar enough to Nozick's, which also invalidates closure
- Recall Nozick's defending, as a condition for knowledge

  > Sensitivity: Had it been the case that $\neg P$, then S wouldn't have believed that P
  >
  > (Note: this was actually his 1st pass attempt, but the comments will carry over)

- It turns out that one can fail to meet that requirement wrt $\neg H$ even though one meets it for O: imposing it invalidates closure

Closure and Sensitivity (ctd)

- Sensitivity yields knowledge of the truth of ordinary claims:

  Had it been the case that $\neg O$, it would have been the case that $\neg B(O)$ ($\Rightarrow K(O)$)

  E.g.: Had there not been a zebra in the enclosure, I wouldn't have believed that there was, since, had there not been a zebra there, would have been, say, a goat and I can tell a goat from a zebra

- But it yields *lack of* knowledge of the falsity of sceptical alternatives:

  Had it been the case that $\neg\neg H$, i.e. H, it would still have been the case that $B(\neg H)$ ($\Rightarrow \neg K(\neg H)$)

  E.g.: Had there (not not) been a cleverly painted mule in the enclosure, I would still have believed there wasn't, because, since cleverly painted mules look exactly like zebras, I would still have believed that there was a zebra there

Dretske's WAM

- OK, so, if it is independently plausible to require Sensitivity, we have a prima facie reason to reject closure
- But it still really does seem *very* bad to say:

  'I know that there is a zebra in the enclosure but also don't know that there isn't a painted mule there instead.'

- Closure would explain why this is so: it must be false
- Since Dretske is happy to say that it is true, what's wrong with asserting it?

Dretske's WAM (ctd)

- He hints at a WAM:

  '[T]here are logical abominations (self contradictory) and *conversational* abominations (perfectly consistent, and therefore possibly true statements, that violate conventional expectations). To say that S knows that there are cookies in the jar but doesn't know he isn't hallucinating them is certainly to say something absurd, but why suppose its absurdity is such (i.e. logical) as to render the statement incapable of being true? To demonstrate logical incoherence would require a theory about what it takes (and doesn't take) to know something, and we are back to where we started: assessing the status of closure.'

- Here he seems to suggest that he doesn't owe an explanation of why the abomination is conversational in nature

Dretske's WAM (ctd)

- Elsewhere, he does gesture at a possible account, but his remarks are sketchy:

  "'The refrigerator is empty, but has lots of things in it" is also an abominable conjunction. It might, nonetheless, be true. There may be no food or other items normally stored in refrigerators inside (thus making the refrigerator empty in the normal way of understanding what isn't in empty refrigerators), but it may, nonetheless, be filled with lots of gas molecules…The abomination in saying a refrigerator is empty but has lots of things in it comes…from a violation of normal expectations.'

Dretske's WAM (ctd)

- He continues:

  > 'In describing an object as a refrigerator (and not, say, a metal container) one is led to expect that the things that are in (or, in the case of its being empty, not in) it are the sorts of perishable items normally stored or preserved in refrigerators. To then include (second conjunct) gas molecules as things in refrigerators is to flout this entirely reasonable expectation…Why isn't it ridiculous, for exactly the same reason, to say one knows one has hands but doesn't know one isn't a handless brain in a vat? The second conjunct introduces possibilities normally assumed to be irrelevant (not counted as possibilities) by someone who asserts the first conjunct.'

- What do you reckon? Good WAM or bare WAM?

Mooreanism

Sosa's Moorean line

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

  Our intuitions 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
- Let's look at this in greater detail

Introducing Safety

- So Sosa first argues that the following requirement

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

  is a preferable alternative to

  Sensitivity: Had it been the case that $\neg P$, then S wouldn't have believed that P

- Note:
  - You'll see he uses the standard notation $B(P) \mathbin{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} P$
  - The shorthand for Sensitivity is then $\neg P \mathbin{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} \neg B(P)$
- In logical terminology, $B(P) \mathbin{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} P$ is the contrapositive of $\neg P \mathbin{\Box\!\!\rightarrow} \neg B(P)$ (and vice versa)

Contraposition

- Now, for a very common type of conditionals, contrapositives are logically equivalent
- This is indeed the case for ' indicative conditionals' (notation: $\rightarrow$)
- But, importantly, the equivalence fails for counterfactual conditionals: Safety $\neq$ Sensitivity
- To illustrate the difference, assume that we know that
  - Somebody played 'Babycakes' on the jukebox at the bar
  - Hewan *has* to hear this tune when she goes to this bar
  - Nobody else but her can stand the tune

Contraposition (ctd)

- The following *indicative* conditionals are contrapositives of each other and are intuitively equivalent (they are also both true):

  'If Hewan didn't play 'Babycake', then someone else did.'

  'If nobody else played 'Babycakes', then Hewan did.'

- The equivalence doesn't hold for *counterfactual* conditionals, since the first sentence below is false but the second, its contrapositive, is true:

  'If Hewan hadn't played 'Babycakes', then someone would have.'

  '(Even) if nobody else had played 'Babycakes', then Hewan (still) would have.'

Sosa against Sensitivity

- In support of replacing Sensitivity with Safety, he first claims that Sensitivity is too stringent a requirement:

  Rubbish: 'On my way to the elevator I release a trash bag down the chute…Presumably I know my bag will soon be in the basement. But what if, having been released, it still (incredibly) were not to arrive there? That presumably would be because it had been snagged somehow in the chute on the way down (an incredibly rare occurrence)…But…I would still predict that the bag would soon arrive in the basement.'

Sosa in favour of Safety

- He then needs to show that Safety delivers the goods wrt Gettier
- That it does *anything whatsoever* might be surprising:

  Surely Safety trivially follows from Belief and Truth, no?!

  In other words: If $B(P)$ and P, then surely $B(P) \boxdot\!\!\rightarrow P$

- It turns out, however that Sosa thinks that this is not the case
- His view appeals to the notion of distance (dissimilarity) between possible worlds (ways the world could have been):

  $B(P) \boxdot\!\!\rightarrow P$ 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'

Sosa in favour of Safety (ctd)

- So understood, Safety supposedly handles Gettier cases as follows:
  - Clock: Possible worlds in which I believe that it is 12 o'clock but it is not (worlds in which the clock has been stopping and starting and falsely indicates '12') intuitively count as 'nearby'
  - Ford: Possible worlds in which I believe that Smith was promoted but he wasn't (worlds in which he is still lying about his Ford but didn't get promoted) intuitively count as 'nearby'

Next week

- Topic: Finishing off Sosa + sceptical and 'contextualist' responses to the argument from ignorance
- Required reading:
  - Pritchard, D. *WTK*, Ch. 13, final section titled 'Contextualism'.
- Recommended reading (ctd on next slide):
  - Cohen, S. & E. Conee 2013: Is Knowledge Contextual? In M. Steup, J. Turri and E. Sosa (eds) *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology, 2nd Edition*. Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 60–83.
  - DeRose, K. 1995: Solving the Skeptical Problem. *The Philosophical Review* 104(1), pp. 1–52.

Next week (ctd)

- Recommended reading (ctd):
  - DeRose, K. 1999: Contextualism: an explanation and defense. In J. Greco and E. Sosa, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, Blackwell Publishers.
  - Rysiew, P. 2016: Epistemic Contextualism. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition)*. Sections 1–4.

References

- DeRose, K. 1999: Contextualism: an explanation and defense. In J. Greco and E. Sosa, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, Blackwell Publishers.
- Dretske, F. & J. Hawthorne 2013: Is Knowledge Closed under Known Entailment? In M. Steup, J. Turri and E. Sosa (eds) *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology, 2nd Edition*. Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 27–59.
- Sosa, E. 1999: How to Defeat Opposition to Moore. *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, pp. 141-53.