

PHL B20 LECTURE NOTES 2: LUCK, CAUSATION, AND KNOWLEDGE

[I'll beautify this shortly: for now I thought you should have something to sink your teeth into.]

** The concept of luck

Lottery tickets: given that I bought the ticket, there are no truths we are assuming that make it certain that I won. I was just lucky. If we find some truths to change that impression (the fix is in), the appearance of luck goes away. However we may find some further truths to restore the impression (the fix was done somewhat sloppily) the appearance of luck may return (tho we might change our sense of the probabilities).

** As applied to luck in belief

"S isn't just lucky her belief that P is true"

Given that S believes that P (and some other truths we are assuming) it is certain that P.

"S is just lucky her belief that P is true"

Given that S believes that P (and some other truths we are assuming) it is not certain that P.

** Causation of belief

If C explains E, then, given that C (and some other truths we are assuming) it is certain that E.

Why does S believe that P? Because P. So given that P (+ assumptions) it is certain that S believes that P.

More generally, when there is causality, then no matter how closely you look at the history (or at which branch), it is certain it will go the way it did (given the initial state).

** Causation and luck

If S's belief is caused by P, then given that P (+ assm) it is certain that BsP. Why does this show that S isn't just lucky that her belief is true?

It does rule out the kind of luck resulting from interrupt-reintroduce history. After all, in such a case, if we play the history forward from P, then once the interruption occurs, it stops being certain that BsP. Moreover, if we trace the history backward from BsP, once the reintroduction occurs, it stops being certain that P.

But when there is causality, we can zero in with arbitrary precision to arbitrary intervals and never see this happening.

At each stage, we can push the story forward and inevitably reach BsP. We can then tell that story backward and inevitably reach P.

** Luck and randomness

Susan the diamond identifier's belief that the stone she is looking at is a diamond is caused by the fact that the stone she is looking at is a diamond. So in this sense it does not appear to be a matter of luck.

On the other side, given that BsD, there are some truths we can assume that make it not certain that D. If we accommodate the fact that there are a lot of non-diamonds that might just as well have been taken from the bag, we see possibilities in which the stone Susan is looking at is not a diamond.

Note that in the roll-out variant of the story, it's a bit easier to ignore the randomness that led her to be looking at a genuine diamond.

**** Luck and authority**

Why might we not want to treat the merely lucky as authoritative?

* Consider what happens if we bring inconvenient truths to their attention:

To Smith we say: you know actually Jones is just frontin'

-- Ah well maybe it's not true that either J or B

To vase guy we say: you know actually that's a mirror image

-- Ah well maybe there's not really a vase there then

To typo guy we say: you know that story just got printed that way thanks to a typo

-- Ah well maybe there's not really a forest fire in BC

To Susan we say: you know that bag has 95% fakes in it

-- Ah well maybe it's not a diamond

Their belief is not 'monotonic' under expanded true belief.

>> If I endorse S as an authority on /that P/, I also endorse S as an authority on /whether P/. So by this I mean that someone who is uncertain whether P can go to S for the answer. But if there are truths S could (in my view) easily encounter that would enable them to abandon their belief, that person is not a stable source of insight on whether P.

* Consider what happens if we try to exploit their reasoning power for cooperative reasoning or action on related issues

We ask Smith: how much did Jones pay for that Ford? -- we get a false answer. Or: how long has Brown been in Barcelona? -- dunno. Or: so if Jones didn't get the Ford (i) that money was going to go to Brown (ii) who has a fondness for tapas? -- I don't have any opinion on either (i) or (ii).

We ask vase guy: can you get that for me? -- *crash*

We ask typo guy: so the Globe and Mail is in general a tightly run ship? -- we get a false answer.

We ask Susan: on the basis of that one stone, you would estimate the whole bag to be how much? -- false answer. Or: and so that next one you are looking at is also a diamond? -- false answer.

>> If I endorse S as an authority on /that P/, I often also endorse S as an authority on issues that are in my view closely related. But if I am aware of truths that their belief seems to presuppose false, my view is that this is a bad bet.

*** Now of course this all depends on what my interests are. With Bullwinkle, we don't care about such niceties.

*** Note that I will never believe that my own belief is true by luck. When I believe that I believe that P, I do not take myself to be aware of any truths that should make me uncertain whether P. So this stuff is compatible with the logic of knowledge.

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** Goldman: problems with his account.

++ Bad on the data: doesn't predict any of the sensitivity to probabilities we observe with the diamond stuff; the forest-fire case is a bit odd: surely if we take up a relief fund we haven't done anything wrong; too stringent, most cases of testimony we have no real idea; completely dead on Bullwinkle

++ bad on the logic of knowledge: how does it explain why it is incoherent to affirm 'P and I don't know that P' or 'Bill knows that P but I don't'?

++ doesn't work as advertised:

>>> really eliminate subjectivity because the notion of causation has to do with what we are ignoring for the time being

>>> labeling problem: since outside of 'perception' the 'reconstruction' is driving the train it is not really a physical theory. eg perhaps when I reason from what someone is doing to what their aims are, there may be nothing strictly "causal" if they freely chose those rather than other means to their aims. alternatively someone who thinks that God is revealed in the color yellow.

++ Various conceptual and technical issues:

>>> how do we cut up 'information'? when Smith sees Jones driving a Ford why doesn't this carry the information that either Jones is driving a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona?

>>> what is 'perception'? at mo's house, this is Mo's bicycle. Seems like I know this by perception, eh? Well some strange stuff happened yesterday: actually some thieves stole it and then a kid came by and leaned an identical bike where Mo's was and then then some second thieves stole the bike from the first thieves and third thieves stole the kid's bike then later the second thieves by barest chance leaned Mo's bike in the very same place

>>> circular? reconstruction needs to be knowledgeable;

>>> incomplete: reconstruction plus direct evidence need to be a "good" inference

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Stanley-Hawthorne

'reason for acting': a belief someone has that they give to justify their action.

A-K principle: treat P as a reason for action only if you know that P.

Isn't this trivial? it says 'believe that P (and also justify actions with it) only if you know that P'. By the first-person logic of knowledge that rule is impossible for me not to follow.

S-H might think this objection doesn't work because maybe they reject the 1P logic of knowledge. I think they think that high probability is enough for belief: eg I believe my lottery ticket will lose. But this seems wrong: if I believe it will lose, then I should say 'this will lose'. And this represents me as knowing it will lose. And if I take myself to know it will lose I should throw it out.

By the third-person logic of knowledge, A-K rule is possible for someone not to follow (tho by the 1P logic it is impossible for them not to try to follow, or seem to be following from their perspective).

A-K principle for the third person is not plausible. Supposing Susan didn't know it was a diamond, is it not OK for her to write down a certain value for that stone in the ledger book? Or if Joe is mistaken by factors beyond his control does that show he was wrong to act as he did?