

## KNOWLEDGE AND EPISTEMIC VALUES

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- I. NEUROMEDIA: Imagine you had the functions of your smartphone miniaturized to a cellular level and accessible by your neural network. Would you know more (or less)?
  - i. Intuitive answer: Yes and No – it depends on your conception of knowledge.
  - ii. Do we have different conceptions of knowledge?
  - iii. If so, what value do states that fit either conception have?
- B. Strategy: Work backward—ask not what knowledge is but how our concept(s) of knowledge has developed (Craig; Williams).
- II. RECEPTIVITY
  - A. Suppose we are looking to sort the good apples from the bad apples. Someone gives us a machine and tells us to use it to do the sorting. If the machine is reliable, then most of the apples we sort into the good pile, will in fact be good. This will be the case whether we have evidence to think it is so or not.
  - B. In order to procure food and avoid predators, organisms need information that allows them track or represent their environment with at least some accuracy. Thus for many animals it makes sense to attribute to them the capacity for forming informational bearing states, states that can be accurate, or inaccurate and which are causally connected to the animals stimuli and behavior. In human animals, we might call these states beliefs, and say that human beliefs can be true or false; with the true ones often if not universally being useful for satisfying our needs and desires.
  - C. But of course having accurate information, while important, it is not enough because it isn't enough to be lucky. Gloss: we need accurate information that has been reliably produced. Why? Because an agent whose beliefs are the products of reliable mechanisms is more likely to have true beliefs in the future.
  - D. So here is a picture:
    1. So for purposes of describing our cognition, we need a concept **R** that functions to pick out a particular kind of cognitive informational processing. **R**'ers are reliable information trackers: to **R** that p is to have information that p, and for that information to have been reliably produced --- that is, grounded or stably attuned to the organism's environment.

- i. This could be understood in terms of safety (S's belief couldn't have easily been false) or possibly, (a modified form of) sensitivity (were P false, one would not still believe P).
- E. Why is R'ing valuable: Because it increases our stock of true beliefs.
- F. Would Neuromedia allow us to increase our **R** states? Undoubtedly—if the processes used are reliable.

### III. REASON-GIVING

- A. Imagine you want to buy a good apple from people with an apple-sorting machine. Unless there is some reason you can appreciate to think that their apple-sorting machine is reliable, the fact that they have one is of little use to you. Where the issue isn't simply acquiring information but exchanging it, the mere fact that a belief has been reliably produced is of little use.
- B. One of the facts, as Craig has emphasized, that the informational tracking picture leaves out is that humans are social creatures who work most effectively in groups. We need each other to survive. If we are to coordinate our efforts we must *exchange information*.
  - i. TRUST-TAGS: But how do I recognize whether you have accurate information if I don't already trust you? I can't just look and see the truth in your brain. And neither can I just look and see that your informational states have been produced by reliable mechanisms. In such cases, I need to be *given some publically appreciable evidence*—that is, made aware of some fact that I can recognize as a reason to believe that your mechanisms are reliable.
- C. So we have a need, in general, to erect standards for the public sharing of evidence – standards for when to count certain facts as epistemically relevant, or relevant as reasons for belief. And we need a concept that allows us to distinguish people who meet those standards from those who don't. In short, we need a concept **A** according to which **S A's** that p just when S has reasons for believing that p and those reasons meet the standards that sanction S's belief that p. Such a concept functions to solve a social-coordination problem.
  - 1. If they are to function for this purpose, these standards must be *irenic*: they can be accepted from more than a single point of view.
- D. The hypothesis that to be in a state of A is to know would explain the thought that knowing can be an achievement. It is credit-worthy to give reasons that meet our epistemic standards.
  - i. Is A'ing valuable? . It increases epistemic trust and thus indirectly, if our standards are good ones, our true beliefs.
  - ii. But would Neuromedia allow us increase our A states? Under the assumption of a background of shared trust in standards, probably, yes. Without that assumption...unclear.

#### IV. UNDERSTANDING

- A. Suppose you want to learn about why your apple tree is not producing good apples. You Google it and the first website you look it (the National Apple Research Center) is a source of scientific expertise on apples. It tells you the correct answer, call it X. But there are many other websites (e.g. the nefarious Center for Apple Research) that came up during your search that would have told you the wrong answer, and many others (e.g. Mystic@apples) that would have given you the right answer but for the wrong reasons. So you could have easily been wrong about X or right about it, but for the wrong reasons.
  - i. In believing X on the basis of citable reasons that you can cite, are you in an A-state? Yes.
  - ii. In believing X on the basis of a reliable source, are you in a R-state? Yes. (Unless Safety is a requirement for R'ing. But even if it is (and so you are not in an R-state) your R-status is not an achievement one way or the other
- B. Something is missing even if you are in R and A states. You've failed to achieve something credit-worthy. Consider the difference between knowing (a) the right answer; (b) being able to give reasons why that is the right answer; (c) knowing what follows from that answer, how it fits into the bigger picture, and – importantly—*knowing what questions to ask* so that more true answers are forthcoming.
- C. This is tricky to model. Suppose we say that S **U's** that p to the degree that S believes truly that p, that belief has recognizable coherence-properties, and S can deduce that belief's actual and counterfactual consequences both singly and in conjunction with other possible premises.
- D. Is U'ing valuable? Yes, in two ways: it increases our chances of being in A and U states; but it also of final value.
- E. Would Neuromedia increase our U'ing? Not obviously.

#### V. Upshots

- A. R, A and U have each been identified with knowledge, or more plausibly: justification. But perhaps there is no unique best realizer of the justification-role here. Or perhaps it depends on the domain of knowledge in question. *Or perhaps what is important is the concepts themselves.*
- B. Seeing the differences in their function help to say something about their respective value, and the fact that we can increase our ability to pursue one but not the other.
- C. They highlight a difference important to the Moderns: knowledge-as-passive and knowledge-as-active.