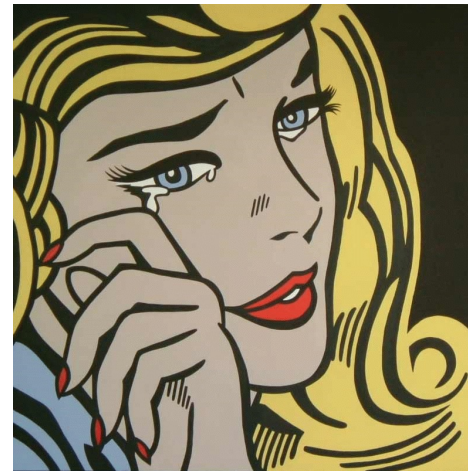


Philosophy 427

Intuitions and Philosophy

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Class 27 - DePaul, Sosa, and the end of intuition



Reflective Equilibrium

- We started the term by exploring the method of reflective equilibrium.
- That study led us to think about both the reliability and stability of intuition.
- We saw some specific work aimed at burning armchairs, and undermining our intuitions.
- We also raised worries about whether the proponents of x-phi and other empirical philosophy failed to establish normative, philosophical results.

Sosa and X-Phi

- Sosa examines two ways in which x-phi can relate to traditional philosophy.
 - ▶ 1. It questions assumptions about what people actually believe.
 - ▶ 2. It challenges the truth of beliefs that are generally held.
- As 1, x-phi is unobjectionable.
 - ▶ “mining the sciences.”
 - ▶ space-time
 - ▶ split brains
 - ▶ newton’s bucket!
 - ▶ But, we can modalize!

On Dreams

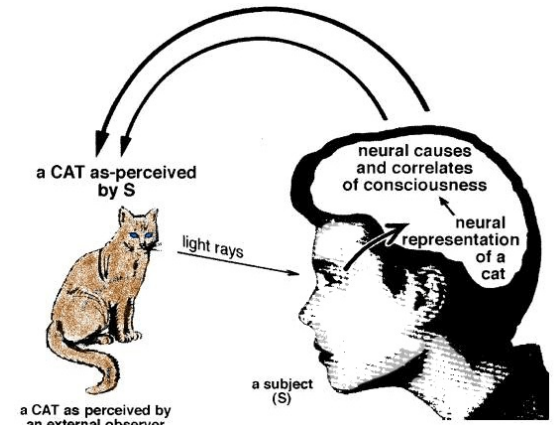
- Sosa wonders if experimental results can challenge traditional philosophical results
- Descartes motivates skepticism with the claim that we do not know that we are not dreaming.
- A presupposition of the claim is that waking experience and dreaming experience are intrinsically alike.
- But, experimental evidence could bear on the claim.
- “Perhaps to dream is much more like imagining than like hallucinating. If so, how might this bear on the traditional skeptical problematic?” (NK 231).
- Sosa declines to elaborate.

Intuition

- The area in which x-phi wants to do most damage, of course, is intuition.
- Sosa maintains Bealer's modal interpretation of intuition, and his embrace of fallibilism, but ditches the conceptual analysis.
 - At t , it is intuitive to S that p iff (a) if at t S were merely to understand fully enough the proposition that p (absent relevant perception, introspection, and reasoning), then S would believe that p ; (b) at t , S does understand the proposition that p ; and (c) the proposition that p is abstract (DR 259).
- He's worried in part about the subject matter not being natural kinds.
- He also wants to leave open the option to endorse intuition without endorsing concepts, or other abstracta (DR 260).

Minimal intuition

- No objectivity of necessity
- No commitment to ontological platonism
- No irreducible intentional grasp of ontological acquaintance
- “An intuited proposition is simply one that would be believed if understood, absent relevant perception, memory, introspection, and reasoning” (260).
- Sosa grounds intuitive knowledge in the reliability of our competence with intuitions.
 - ▶ The intuition is *rational* if and only if it derives from a *competence* and the content is explicitly or implicitly modal (i.e. attributes necessity or possibility) (NK 233).

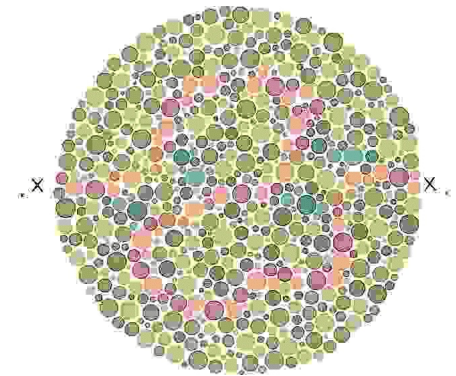


Access

- Reliabilism entails that we may not have access to why our intuitions are justified.
- We must depend on favorable circumstances in all sorts of ways, and these are often relevantly beyond our control (NK 233).
- The only other option is skepticism.

The problem of dissent

- Compare to color vision
- We explain the errors.
- “Even granting that intuition is systematically unreliable with respect to specifiable sorts of questions... introspection and perception are also in that way and to that extent unreliable” (DR 268)
- Nichols and Knobe explain differences in moral responsibility attribution by performance errors.
 - In the end, they find it most plausible to think that some performance error is responsible. Affect, they suggest, degrades intellectual performance in general, whether the relevant competence be memory, perception, inference, etc. Of course, that explanation will leave intuition affected as lightly as are perception memory, and inference, unless some further relevant difference can be specified” (NK 236).



Intuition, Perception, Introspection

- The problems raised by x -phi for intuition seem parallel to problems we can raise about perception and memory, and other sorts of evidence that we accept.
- “S ϕ 's that p *only if* S believes that p in virtue partly of these facts: (a) that S understands the proposition that p, and (b) that the proposition that p is true and of a certain sort s, one appropriate for ϕ ing” (DR 263).
- We can apply this general schema to perception, introspection, and intuition.
- Similarly, the effects that Shafir discusses on philosophical intuitions (S cites Swain, Alexander, and Weinberg) of priming, etc. may not call intuition into question.
- “The effects of priming, framing, and other such contextual factors will affect the epistemic status of intuition in general, only in the sort of way that they affect the epistemic status of perceptual observation in general... The upshot is that we have to be *careful* in how we use intuition, not that intuition is useless” (NK 237).
- Verbal disagreements

Two senses of 'Reflective Equilibrium'

- RE_m and RE_e
- Can Sosa's minimal intuition support RE_e ?
- Are the disagreements over the legitimacy of RE merely verbal?



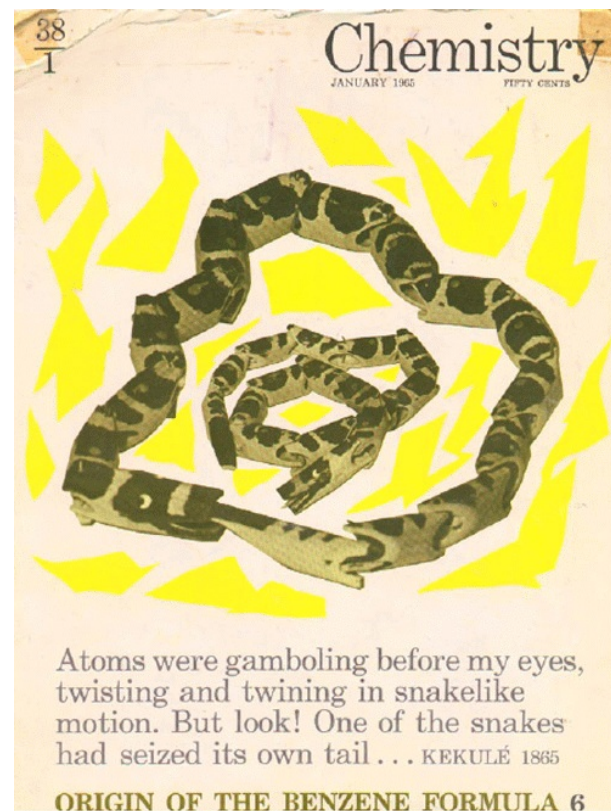
The genetic fallacy

■ Kekulé's dream

- ▶ “Kekulé wrote that he discovered the ring shape of the benzene molecule after dreaming of a snake seizing its own tail.
- ▶ This dream came to him after years of studying the nature of carbon-carbon bonds. Kekulé claimed to solve the problem of how carbon atoms could bond to up to four other atoms at the same time. While his claims were well publicized and accepted, by the early 1920s Kekulé's own biographer came to the conclusion that Kekulé's understanding of the tetravalent nature of carbon bonding depended on the previous research of Archibald Scott Couper (1831-1892); further, the German Chemist Josef Loschmidt (1821-1895) had earlier posited a cyclic structure for benzene as early as 1862, although he had not actually proved this structure to be correct”.

■ RE_m guides discovery.

■ RE_e, guides justification.



RE_m is benign

- It is just a counsel of prudence, a suggestion for how to work.
- It lacks any normative, justificatory role.
- Is this course an epistemology course or a methods course?
 - ▶ The right answer: it is an epistemology course!

DePaul defends reflective equilibrium, as an inevitable component of rationality.

Is he defending RE_e or Re_m ?

- “When one really focuses upon [(I) and (II)], it becomes...difficult to conceive of an alternative to reflective equilibrium, or more specifically, to conceive of a *rational* alternative to this method. In order to constitute a real alternative to reflective equilibrium... a method must either
 - ▶ (A) abandon reflection altogether, or
 - ▶ (B) direct the inquirer to reflect, but to do so incompletely, that is, to leave certain beliefs, principles, theories, or what have you out of account, or
 - ▶ (C) not allow the results of the inquirer’s reflections to determine what the inquirer goes on to believe.
- I maintain that a method of philosophical inquiry having feature (A), (B), or (C) would be irrational” (301).

The irrationality of abandoning RE?

- Option A (abandon reflection altogether) entails subordinating one's own beliefs to those of authorities.
 - ▶ Blind submission to external authority in order to give one's intuitions precisely no weight
 - ▶ Unless one's own beliefs are completely consistent with those of the authorities, one will be forced to accept (because emitted from authority) something that one does not accept.
 - ▶ That seems irrational.
- Option B (direct the inquirer to reflect, but to do so incompletely) entails some blind submission, which would lead to the irrationality mentioned in the argument against A.
 - ▶ It also includes cases in which reflection is acceptable.
 - ▶ In those latter cases, we don't have an alternative to reflective equilibrium.
- Option C (not allow the results of the inquirer's reflections to determine what the inquirer goes on to believe) violates the principles of doxastic involuntarism that I hold dear.
 - ▶ That aside, C entails reflecting, but not believing what one learns.
 - ▶ DePaul calls this the most obviously irrational option.

How to proceed

- DePaul's irrationality thesis is methodological.
- DePaul's interlocutor raises worries about what to do when we know that our intuitions, or prior beliefs, are wrong.
 - These worries are reminiscent of those raised by Cummins, explicitly, and others.
- DePaul dismisses the question.
 - Fats Waller on rhythm: "Lady, if you got to ask, you ain't got it."
- The question is what to do in cases in which I believe, or intuit, in contradiction to empirical results.
 - Do I humbly subordinate my beliefs?
 - Do I stubbornly maintain rationality?



Wither RE_e ?