

PHILOSOPHY 5340 – SEMINAR IN EPISTEMOLOGY

Topic 8: Michael Huemer on Direct Realism Versus Indirect Realism

Part 2: Chapter V of Michael Huemer's *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*: "A Version of Foundationalism"

1. What is Perceptual Knowledge?

1. Mike's first point here can be put as follows:

(1) "Perception is awareness in the form of perceptual experiences"

(2) "Knowledge is awareness in the form of beliefs"

(3) "A perceptual experience is not a belief, so perception itself is not a kind of knowledge." (93)

2. Mike's way of supporting this is by considering a case where a person sees something, but believes it is a hallucination.

Comments

1. Why is this a case of perception, given Mike's analysis of perception? The reason is that although the person takes himself to be hallucinating, he is in a state that represents there being a pink rat in front of him. (Thus it is, for example, a case where the person would believe that he was perceiving something pink were it not for the unusual nature of what he is seeing – namely, a pink rat.)

2. Consider a very different sort of case. It involves a world where one's experience can be of the black variety for either of two reasons: (1) No radiation at all is striking one's eyes; (2) A special type of radiation is striking one's eyes that is emitted only by a very rare material. Suppose now that one is inside an enormous sphere that is covered with the special material, and that contains no source of light. Radiation from the inside of the sphere strikes one's eyes, and produces a state in which one is directly acquainted with blackness. In this situation, one is **perceiving** the inside of the sphere, which looks black to one – though one does **not realize** that one is perceiving anything. But if one knows nothing of the existence of the special radiation, one will not be in an **intentional state that represents** there being a black surface in front of one. So there are **no apprehensions** of external objects, since there is no assertive mental representation of anything external.

Hence, Mike's analysis of perception entails the false conclusion that this is not a case of perception.

3. Mike asks what **perceptual belief** is. His answer is this:

"It is a belief that is directly based on a perceptual experience." (94)

The idea of being "**directly based**" is then explained as follows:

"In general, an apprehension, B, is directly based on another apprehension, A, when B is based on A, and there is no intermediary apprehension, C, such that A causes B through causing C". (94)

4. Mike then goes on to characterize the concept of **inference**:

“Inference is a particular species of the basing relation; it is the process by which one belief comes to be based on another belief.” (94)

5. Mike then points out what follows from these definitions:

“From what I have said here and in chapter IV (section 2), it follows that **perceptual knowledge**, if it exists, would be a form of **indirect awareness**, but **noninferential knowledge**. (All inferential knowledge is indirect awareness, but not all indirect awareness is inferential knowledge.)” (95; emphasis added)

2. Do We Have Perceptual Knowledge?

1. Here Mike points out that, on his account, one does not have perceptual knowledge that there is a tomato in front of one:

“For instance, when I look at a tomato on the counter, the visual experience I have will typically cause me to believe, at least, that there is a red, round thing there. (It is due to various background beliefs of mine that I accept the further proposition that the thing in question is a tomato. The latter belief, then, is not purely perceptual, because it is based on my perceptual experience *together with* background knowledge.)” (95)

Comments

(1) This is certainly right. But what **will** count as **pure perceptual** knowledge? Consider the following sequence of beliefs:

1. The belief that there is a tomato in front of one;
2. The belief that there is something physical that is red and spherical in front of one;
3. The belief that there is a red and round facing physical surface in front of one;
4. The belief that there is a physical surface that looks red and round in front of one;
5. The belief that there is something that has the properties of roundness and **sensible** redness.

I am not sure which of these beliefs Mike would select as the one that is involved in **pure** perceptual knowledge. In Chapter IV, however, he says, with regard to awareness: “We might also be said to be aware (directly and primarily) of the colors and shapes of the (facing surfaces of) physical objects around us, . . .” (80-1). This suggests that his view may be that it is beliefs of the third sort that are involved in perceptual knowledge – beliefs about the colors and shapes of facing surfaces. For if it were, instead, beliefs of the fourth sort – beliefs about how something **looks** – then it would be surprising if there were **no corresponding awareness** of how things look. But if there were an awareness of things looking a certain way, then awareness of the colors and shapes of facing surfaces would not be **direct**.

(2) It seems to me that if one picks any pair of successive beliefs from the above list, the following four claims are plausible:

1. **If one did not have the second of the two beliefs, one would not have the first.**
2. **One's having the first of the two beliefs is caused by one's having the second.**

3. If one did not think the second of the two beliefs was justified, one would not think that the first of the two beliefs was justified.

4. Consequently, the first of any such pair of beliefs is inferentially based upon the second.

(3) If this is right in the case of the third and fourth beliefs, then one does not have any pure perceptual knowledge about the shapes and colors of the facing surfaces of objects.

(4) If this is right in the case of the fourth and fifth beliefs, then one does not have any pure perceptual knowledge of physical objects at all.

(5) In short, given that Mike's account of perceptual knowledge entails the following thesis

All perceptual knowledge is noninferential knowledge

it needs to be shown that in the case of the following two beliefs –

4. The belief that there is a surface that looks red and round in front of one;

5. The belief that there is an instance of sensible redness that has the property of roundness.

– the first of these beliefs is **not based** upon the second, either because

(a) **One does not have the second of these beliefs at all, or**

(b) **One has that belief, but it plays no causal role in one's having the first belief, or**

(c) **One has that belief, and it does play a causal role in one's having the first belief, but one would still think that the first of these beliefs was justified even if one did not think that the second was.**

(6) I do not think that any of these three claims is plausible. In my own case, when I speak of a ripe tomato as being red, I am attributing to the surface of the tomato a power to produce in me, under certain conditions, experiences that involve instances of sensible redness. Whenever I acquire via perception, in normal circumstances, the belief that there is something red in front of me, I also acquire the belief that there now exists an instance of sensible redness with which I am acquainted. It seems clear that I would not have acquired the belief that there is something red in front of me had I not acquired the belief concerning an instance of sensible redness. Moreover, this counterfactual surely holds because of a causal relationship: the belief concerning an instance of sensible redness is part of the cause of my belief that there is something red in front of me. Finally, if I were to believe that I was not justified in believing there now exists an instance of sensible redness with which I am directly acquainted, I would not believe that I was justified in believing that there was something red in front of me.

2. The relation between the content of the perceptual experience and the content of the perceptual belief that is directly based upon it is as follows:

(1) The content of the relevant perceptual experience **entails** the content of the perceptual belief that is directly based upon it.

(2) The content of the relevant perceptual experience is **not identical with** the content of the perceptual belief that is directly based upon it.

(3) The content of the relevant perceptual experience is “**far more specific and detailed**” than the content of the perceptual belief that is directly based upon it.

(4) The relation of the content of the relevant perceptual experience to the content of the perceptual belief that is directly based upon it is that of “**determinable/determinate**”.
(95)

Comment: Since the experience is the more specific, and since it is the more specific that entails the less specific, this should really read “determinate/determinable”.

(5) Since determinates entail determinables, this account explains why the content of the perceptual experience entails the content of the perceptual belief.

Comments

(1) The claim that the content of the relevant perceptual experience is “far more specific and detailed” than the content of the perceptual belief that is directly based upon it seems to me problematic when the idea of content is tied to the idea of an intentional state, and to **the idea of a proposition**, as Mike does. Consider, in particular, the following passage:

"Thus, my perceptual experience might represent that there is a thing with a certain very specific color (one of the two million colors the visual system can distinguish), while my belief might represent simply that there is a red thing." (95-6)

If perceptual experiences represent the way the world is via states that are **intentional** – rather than via topological structures as in the case of pictures or maps – then propositions are involved, and they in turn involve concepts as constituents. Do I then have **two million color concepts**? Armstrong would say this, since he takes the ability to make relevant perceptual discriminations as **sufficient** for the possession of the concept in question. But if concepts are entities that can enter into propositions, then, to possess the relevant concepts, one has to be capable of forming propositions involving those concepts. But surely it is not true that one can now form **two million propositions** concerning the precise color that some object might have.

(2) If instances of sensible colors stand in spatial relations to one another, and if one can be directly acquainted with such spatial arrangements of instances of sensible colors, then one can, of course, refer to such arrangements, and one can form the belief that there is now a physical state of affairs that resembles – or stands in a mapping relation – to **this** complex array of sensible colors. But a direct realist is unlikely to be enthusiastic about **this** account of the representation that is involved in perceptual experience, since it makes awareness of a **complex mental item** part of the perceptual representation of the external world.

(3) If one does not have two million color concepts, then there would seem to be only two alternatives with regard to how perceptual experiences, broadly understood, **represent** the external world:

(1) Perceptual experiences represent the external world via a **mapping relation**;

(2) Perceptual experiences represent the external world via an **indexical**, intentional state that refers to a complex, **mental array** of colored shapes of which one is aware.

Either of these alternatives is perfectly congenial if one adopts an indirect realist view.

3. The view that Mike is advancing concerning the justification of perceptual beliefs is as follows:

“My position, then, is that our perceptual beliefs are justified *by* the perceptual experiences on which they are based. A perceptual experience can justify a belief in much the same way that a belief can justify another belief.” (96-7)

4. Mike then considers the objection that just as the entailment of one belief by another **cannot justify the entailed belief on its own** – it must also be the case that the entailing belief is justified – so, similarly, the entailment relation that holds between a perceptual experience and the corresponding perceptual belief **cannot justify the belief on its own** – something more is needed:

“But, it will be objected, one belief can only justify another belief if the first belief is itself justified. Similarly, therefore, shouldn't we say that a perceptual experience can only justify a perceptual belief if the experience, itself, is justified.” (87)

Mike's response is as follows:

"But the latter condition makes no sense. It does not make sense – it is a category error – to say that an experience is justified or unjustified." (97)

Comments

(1) But one of the **components** of a perceptual experience, according to Mike's analysis, is an **assertive** mental representation. Surely an assertive mental representation, **of whatever kind**, can be justified or unjustified. So even if one cannot speak of **a perceptual experience as a whole**, including the qualia, as justified or unjustified, one can speak of the assertive part of it as justified or unjustified.

(2) A way of making the problem vivid is as follows:

1. Alvin claims to have perceptual experiences of God. These experiences are characterized, first, by the assertive representative content that God exists, and, secondly, by forcefulness. Perhaps these experiences are, as Mike supposes proprioception is, ones that involve no qualia at all. Or perhaps they involve qualia, the nature of which does not matter on Mike's view, since qualia neither constrain nor are constrained by representational content. (Note that, if the two accounts of how perceptual experiences can represent the world that I have suggested are the only viable ones – that is, the **mapping** account and the **indexical, intentional** account – representational content is, in contrast, **seriously constrained** by the qualia involved in the perceptual experience.)

2. Alvin will, I think, be more than happy to follow Mike's lead, and to say that the experiences in question justify the belief that God exists, and when asked whether the experiences are justified, can likewise reply that that to ask how the experiences are justified is "a category error." (97)

3. So the question is how Mike can block Alvin's claim to have a justified belief that God exists.

4. Mike's only response, it seems to me, is to say that while belief in God is **prima facie** justified, it will turn out that there are **defeaters** for it – such as the argument from evil.

5. Perhaps one now feels secure against claims by the Alvin's of this world. But consider, now, Anthony, a sometime atheist who has recently become a deist. The

Anthony that I have in mind has changed his view not because of reflections on the complexity of living things, but because he has come to have experiences of Od ("Od" = "God" without the goodness.) The question is now, "What are the defeaters for the belief that there is an omnipotent and omniscient, **but not necessarily good**, deity?" I suggest that none will be found.

6. The conclusion, in short, is that while skepticism about the **external physical world may** be more easily answered if one embraces direct realism of the sort set out by Mike, precisely the same is true when one considers, instead, skepticism concerning **Od's existence**. This should, I suggest, give the direct realist, who embraces the version of direct realism that Mike is defending, pause.

7. One can, moreover, make things more troubling. Anthony's Od is a harmless bloke, as is belief in his existence. But imagine a different deity – **Jod**, understood as a deity who, like Od, has never in the past intervened in the affairs of earth other than by granting some people direct experiences of him, but who is going to intervene on December 31, 2007, at which point he will transport to a realm of eternal happiness all who have died while attempting to kill infidels – where infidels are people who do not worship Jod. If someone – call him Jim – believes that certain experiences are experiences of Jod, then on Mike's approach the following things will be true:

(a) Jim is noninferentially justified in believing in the existence of Jod.

(b) Neither Jim nor anyone else will have, before December 31, 2007, defeaters for the belief that Jod exists.

(c) It is strongly in Jim's self-interest to attempt to kill infidels.

(3) Another problem is this. It is logically possible for one to be a Berkeleian, or a Hindu who accepts the doctrine of maya, and to form beliefs to the effect that there is an infinite mind who directly produces just the sensory experiences one would be having if there were a mind-independent world. On Mike's approach, those beliefs would be non-inferentially justified. Moreover, Mike has no way of showing that the direct realist's beliefs are **more** justified. So direct realism does not refute Berkeleianism, or the Hindu doctrine of maya.

3. A Principle of Foundational Justification

1. Mike defines **foundational beliefs** as beliefs which "we are justified in holding and which do not depend on any other beliefs for their justification." (98)

2. Mike immediately goes on to point out that to say that foundational beliefs do not depend on any other **beliefs** for their justification is not to say that they do not depend on **anything** for their justification.

3. In particular, in the case of perceptual beliefs, Mike's view is that "perceptual beliefs certainly do depend on something else for their justification: namely, perceptual experiences." (9)

4. Foundational principles are principles that "state a condition or set of conditions under which a person has foundational (or noninferential) justification for believing a proposition." (99) Mike's view is that there is a single principle of foundational justification that can account for **all** foundational beliefs:

The Rule of Phenomenal Conservatism

"(PC) If it seems to *S* as if *P*, then *S* thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing that *P*." (99)

5. How is the sentence "It seems to *S* as if *P*" to be interpreted here? Mike does not offer any analysis. Instead, he says that one is to interpret "It seems to *S* as if *P*" in such a way that it is logically compatible with *S*'s **not believing** that *P*. He also refers to different types of cases where something seems to *S* as if *P*:

(1) **Perceptual seemings**: Here your perceptual experience involves its seeming to you that the external world is a certain way. But you may think that you are hallucinating, and so not believe that things are as they seem to be.

(2) **Memory-related seemings**: Here it seems to you that certain things happened, but you may distrust your memory, and so you may not believe that such things really happened.

(3) **Intellectual seemings (or "intuitions")**: Here, when you simply contemplate a proposition, it seems to you that it is true. But again, you may not believe that the proposition is true, for you may have good, or even decisive reasons for thinking that it is false.

Comments: 1. What Is it to Seem to *S* as if *P*?

(1) Given the centrality of this notion for the foundational rule of Phenomenal Conservatism that Mike is advancing, I think that he should have discussed possible analyses that might be offered.

(2) For it to seem to *S* as if *P*, it need not be the case that one is acquainted with any **qualitative** properties. The case of intellectual seeming illustrates this point, but recall also that perceptual experiences, on Mike's view, need not involve any awareness of qualitative properties – as is shown by his views on proprioception.

(3) In the case of perceptual seeming, where it seems to someone as if they are seeing a pink rat, but the person does not form that belief because he thinks that pink rats do not exist, and therefore thinks that he must be hallucinating, it seems to be true that if he did not think that there were no pink rats, he **would** believe that he was now seeing a pink rat. One type of analysis that this suggests is the following **counterfactual analysis**:

"It seems to *S* as if *P*" =_{def.}

"*S* has some belief *Q* such that if *S* did not believe that *Q*, then *S* would believe that *P*."

On this analysis, seemings are **blocked inclinations to believe**.

(4) The "pink rat" case also suggests an alternative, analysis, of the sort proposed by Frank Jackson in Chapter 2 of *Perception*. Jackson there uses the term "epistemic", following Chisholm, but here it will be preferable to speak of an **evidential** interpretation. The analysis in question can be put as follows:

"It seems to *S* as if *P*" =_{def.}

"*S* has *visually* acquired evidence that makes it likely that *P*."

(Compare Jackson, *Perception*, page 30.)

This evidential analysis would not, of course, apply to the case of non-perceptual seemings. But one might delete the restriction to visual evidence, so that one has

"It seems to *S* as if *P*" =_{def.}

"*S* has evidence that makes it likely that *P*."

(5) The account in terms of **evidence**, however, does not work when one is trying to capture a notion that is being used in a principle dealing with non-inferentially justified beliefs.

(6) There is, however, another, **epistemic** type of analysis, one that is in terms of **experiences**, rather than in terms of evidence:

"It seems to *S* as if *P*" =_{def.}

"*S* has experiences, some of which make it likely that *P*."

(7) The problem with this account is that we started out by asking **how** an experience can justify a belief, and this account of seemings involves the idea that experiences can make it likely that some proposition is true, **without offering any explanation of how this can be so**.

(8) The question that we seem to be left with, then, is whether there is any alternative to the '**blocked inclinations to believe**' analysis.

Comment: 2. Are Seemings a Matter of Degree?

Seemings seem to come in degrees. Given certain perceptual experiences, it may seem **very** likely to one that the world is a certain way. Given other perceptual experiences it may seem **more likely than not** that something is the case. Given still other experiences, it may seem **more likely that something is the case than it would be without those perceptual experiences**, but it may still seem less likely that something is the case than that it is not the case.

Comments: 3. A Consequence of the Absence of an Analysis: A World Full of Diverse Seemings, and Noninferentially Justified Beliefs

(1) The types of seemings that Mike lists – perceptual, memory-related, and intellectual – are related to fundamental areas of epistemology. But this immediately raises a question about other areas. It seems to most people, for example, that there are other human minds. According to the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, then, such people have a noninferentially justified belief that that there are other human minds. Similarly, it seems to most people that the regularities that have obtained up until now will obtain in the future. So, given the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, one has a noninferentially justified belief that inductive inference is sound.

(2) But it also seems to many people as if there is a force of gravity, and as if there are electrons, and so on for a variety of **theoretical** beliefs. According to the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, then, one can have a noninferentially justified belief that there is a force of gravity, and that there are electrons.

(3) More dramatically, it may seem to someone as if some **substantial scientific theory** is true – such as Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity. If the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true, then the person is prima facie justified in accepting that theory, and, if, as is likely, the person does not know of any defeaters for the Special Theory of Relativity, then the person will be noninferentially justified in accepting the theory.

(4) Or consider mathematical beliefs. Suppose someone notices that the numbers 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 are all equal to the sum of two prime numbers: $4 = 2 + 2$; $6 = 3 + 3$; $8 = 3 + 5$; $10 = 3 + 7$; $12 = 5 + 7$. The person then thinks about the generalization that for any even number greater than 2, the number is equal to the sum of two prime numbers – the Goldbach conjecture – and it seems to the person as if that generalization is true. So the person is prima facie justified in believing that generalization. But the person does not **know** of any defeaters for that belief, so if the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true, the person is noninferentially justified in believing that the generalization is true.

(5) Consider, next, a perfectly ordinary, non-theoretical belief – such as the belief that there are cars outside, which one cannot presently see. Given the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, it follows that one is prima facie justified in believing that there are cars outside, and, then, assuming that one has no defeaters for that belief, it follows that one is noninferentially justified in believing that there are cars outside.

Notice that this objection is not blocked by the fact that the belief that there are cars outside is **inferentially** justified, since a belief can be both inferentially justified and noninferentially justified. (Compare Mike's remark on page 102: "Foundational beliefs are defined to be beliefs that do not depend upon other beliefs for their justification; they are not defined as beliefs that are not supported by other beliefs.") Accordingly, if it seems to one as if there are cars outside, it is the case, if the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true, that one has a noninferentially justified belief that there are cars outside, regardless of whether that belief is also inferentially justified or not.

(6) The result seems to be that **Direct Realism conquers all in epistemology**. Consider any disputed question, and simply ask whether it seems to you as if something is the case. Does it seem to you as if there are external, mind-independent objects? Does it seem to you as if the past exists? Does it seem to you as if there are other human minds? Does it seem to you as if there is mind/body interaction? Does it seem to you as if you have contra-causal freedom? Does it seem to you as if past regularities will obtain in the future? Does it seem to you as if there are objective values? Does it seem to you as if there are other possible worlds – perhaps concrete ones, in the David Lewis style? Then, if the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true, and if it seems to you as if these things are so, then all is well: you are prima facie justified in believing that such things are so, and, in the absence of defeaters for the beliefs in question, you are also noninferentially justified in believing that these things are so. So David Lewis, for example, was prima facie justified in believing that there were concrete possible worlds, and, in the absence of defeaters, he was also noninferentially justified in believing in the existence of such concrete possible worlds. If challenged by a skeptic to **justify** that belief, Lewis need merely have appealed to the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism.

7. Next, Mike explains what he means by **prima facie justification**. Here he refers to the legal presumption that one is innocent until proven guilty, and says:

"Prima facie justification in epistemology works similarly. According to phenomenal conservatism, the epistemological default position is to accept things as they appear. The appearances are presumed true, until proven false. This means that when it seems as if P and no evidence emerges contravening P , it is reasonable to accept P ." (100)

Comments

(1) If, as I have just suggested, seemings are a matter of degree, then not all seemings should be viewed as making it reasonable to accept a given belief. One can have memories that lend **some support** to the proposition that some event took place, but not enough to make it more likely than not that the event took place.

(2) If seemings can be a matter of degree, then the Rule of Phenomenal Conservatism needs to be restated. A possible restatement is this:

(PC*) If it seems to S as if P is more likely than $\sim P$, then S thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing that P .

8. What sorts of things can undermine a prima facie justification, given the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism? Mike's answer is as follows:

"(Since, as I claim, phenomenal conservatism is the sole principle of foundational justification, 'evidence against' P would consist of other things that seem to be the case and that, directly or indirectly, either contradict or render it improbable that P .)" (100)

Comments

(1) If it seems to someone as if P is the case, can that person's non-inferentially justified belief that P be undermined by its being the case that P has an extremely low *a priori* probability – where probability is understood as **logical** probability, as **degree of confirmation**?

(2) If not, it seems that the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is open to yet another objection.

(3) But **if**, on the other hand, low *a priori* probability **can** undermine one's *prima facie* justification, will **any** beliefs survive? (Consider the *a priori* probability that there is something that is red and has a certain shape at some specific location: Isn't the logical probability of that simple state of affairs very low, given all of the other incompatible states of affairs that could have existed at the location in question?)

9. Mike believes that there are significant advantages in appealing to the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism:

"But I intend phenomenal conservatism to be a general principle of foundational justification. It explains not only why perceptual beliefs are noninferentially justified, but also why any other belief that is noninferentially justified is such. And this is important, for it means that my account of perceptual knowledge does not depend upon ad hoc principles of justification contrived specially to let in knowledge of the external world; I propose to account for perceptual knowledge by the same general principle that I apply to all other kinds of knowledge." (102)

Comment

I agree that this is desirable. The problem is that the general principle being appealed to appears to lead to **noninferentially** justified beliefs almost everywhere one turns, since there are seemings virtually everywhere. Nor will defeaters generally be available to undercut the prima facie justification.

4. In Defense of Phenomenal Conservatism

1. Mike holds that the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is "self-evident, once it is seen in its proper light." (103)
2. Mike emphasizes that the relevant notion of justification involved is, first, internalist, and, secondly, that it is epistemic, rather than prudential or moral.
3. In support of the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, Mike says, "Now, if my goal is to have true beliefs and avoid having false ones, and if *P* seems to me to be true, while I have no evidence against *P*, then from my own point of view, it would make sense to accept *P*. Obviously, believing *P* in this situation will appear to satisfy my epistemic goals of believing truths and avoiding error better than either denying *P* or suspending judgment." " (104)

Comments

- (1) Believing *P* in this situation may **appear** to satisfy one's epistemic goals better than either denying *P* or suspending judgment, but one should start by asking whether it is really likely to do so.
- (2) If one reflects upon the wide variety of propositions such that it seems to one as if they are true, it becomes clear, I suggest, that many of those seemings are related to one's evaluation of what one takes to be relevant evidence. In such cases, one is more likely to arrive at truth, it seems to me, by **scrutinizing the evidence itself**, and by asking whether it **really supports** the belief in question. To treat the belief as noninferentially justified because it seems to one to be true is, I suggest, a mistake.
- (3) One should also reflect upon the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, and if, as we saw earlier, what that principle leads to is an explosion of beliefs that are supposed to be noninferentially justified, the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism should be rejected.

4. Next, Mike asks what alternative there is to the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, and suggests, in effect, that there is none that is remotely plausible.

Comments

- (1) An alternative foundational principle that many philosophers accept, and that is not considered by Mike, is the **Principle of Direct Acquaintance**:
(DC): *P* is noninferentially justified in believing that a contingent state of affairs *S* exists if *P* is **directly acquainted** with *S*.

(2) A principle that is also very plausible, but which specifies circumstances in which beliefs are not noninferentially justified, rather than circumstances in which they are, is the **negative analogue** of the Principle of Direct Acquaintance:

(NDC): P is **not** noninferentially justified in believing that a contingent state of affairs S exists if P is **not directly acquainted** with S .

(3) This second principle is incompatible with the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism.

(4) If both (DC) and (NDC) are correct, they can be combined to give the following **General Principle of Direct Acquaintance**:

(GDC): P is noninferentially justified in believing that a contingent state of affairs S exists **if and only if** P is **directly acquainted** with S .

(5) As I have formulated the Principle of Direct Acquaintance, it covers only beliefs concerning **contingent** states of affairs. So one needs to consider whether it can be extended to beliefs involving propositions that are necessarily true, or whether some other foundational principle is needed in the case of beliefs of the latter sort.

(6) My own view is that one can be directly acquainted with such things as concepts and propositions, and with relations between concepts. So I would say that what makes one noninferentially justified in believing, for example, that the proposition that p and q entails the proposition that p , is that one is directly acquainted with the concepts of **conjunction** and **entailment**.

5. Mike also contends, "any attempt to deny the principle of phenomenal conservatism will be self-defeating, for all thought and reasoning presupposes the principle in a certain sense." (105)

Comment

There is nothing self-defeating about accepting a principle of Direct Acquaintance.

6. To support the claim that "the rule of phenomenal conservatism is presupposed in the practice of the dialectic" (107), Mike sets out three arguments, two of which are as follows:

"*Argument B*

1. $3 = 5$.
2. Therefore, I cannot know anything." (106)

"*Argument C*

1. There are seventeen inhabited galaxies in the Andromeda galaxy.
2. If there are seventeen inhabited galaxies in the Andromeda galaxy, then skepticism is false.
3. Therefore, skepticism is false." (106)

Mike contends that it is only by appealing to the rule of Phenomenal Conservatism that one can explain why arguments *B* and *C* are not serious arguments.

Comment

Other reasons can be offered for holding that arguments *B* and *C* are not serious arguments. In the case of argument *B*, one can hold that direct acquaintance with the relevant arithmetical concepts makes one justified in believing that the first premise of argument *B* is necessarily false.

Similarly, in the case of argument *C*, one can hold that direct acquaintance with the concept of direct acquaintance makes one justified in believing that the states of affairs that would have to exist for premises 1 and 2 to be true are not states of affairs with which one can be directly acquainted. So premises 1 and 2, if justified, would have to be inferentially justified, and no evidence is cited in argument *C*. So the argument is not a serious one for that reason.

7. A final contention that Mike advances in support of the principle of Phenomenal conservatism is this: ". . . it is impossible coherently to argue against phenomenal conservatism." (107)

Comments

(1) The following is a perfectly coherent argument against the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism:

1. It seems as if there are other minds.
2. If the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true, then one has a noninferentially justified belief that there are other minds, in the absence of defeaters.
3. There are no defeaters for the belief that there are other minds.
4. Therefore, if the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true, then one has a noninferentially justified belief that there are other minds.
5. One cannot have a noninferentially justified belief that there are other minds.
6. Therefore the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is false.

(2) To object to this argument that one can only be justified in accepting the premises if the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true is to no avail, since one can **add the supposition** that the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true, in which case the above argument becomes a *reductio* of that supposition.

(3) Another way in which one can coherently argue against the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is by advancing a restricted form of that principle, namely

The Restricted Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism

(RPC) If it seems to *S* as if *P*, and if *P* is, if true, necessarily true, then *S* thereby has at least prima facie justification for believing that *P*.

5. Questions and Objections

Objection 1: Phenomenal Conservatism is overly liberal in classifying beliefs as prima facie justified.

1. Mike's answer to this first objection involves a claim about the ways in which a belief can be unjustified:

"To sum up: a belief may be unjustified if (a) one forms it for reasons other than how things seem (e.g., self-deception), (b) one has evidence against it that one chooses to ignore, or (c) one has reasons for thinking one's belief-forming mechanism was unreliable (including that one was negligent in the investigation of the issue)." (111)

2. Mike's response appears to be, then, that there can be cases where it seems to *S* as if *P*, and thus where *S*'s belief that *P* is prima facie justified, **but where that prima facie justification is undercut** by other features that render *S*'s belief unjustified.

Comments

Let us consider some of the cases I mentioned, to see if this response is satisfactory.

(1) One was the case where it seems to Anthony as if *Od* exists, and Anthony believes that this is so. According to the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, Anthony is prima facie justified in believing that *Od* exists. Is Anthony guilty of any epistemological misbehavior that undercuts this prima facie justification?

If one were an indirect realist, one would say that Anthony needs **evidence** if he is to be justified in believing that *Od* exists, and that since he has none, his belief is irrational. But given the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, Anthony's belief is noninferentially justified, in the absence of defeaters, so the defender of that principle cannot complain that Anthony has no evidence supporting his belief that *Od* exists.

Moreover, given the way that "*Od*" was defined, no investigation that Anthony might undertake could generate any evidence against the existence of *Od*. So Anthony is surely not guilty of epistemological negligence.

What about Anthony's belief-forming mechanism? That mechanism, we may assume, was simply that of accepting any proposition when it seems to one as if it is true, and one has no contrary evidence. Those of us who reject the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism may object that this is an unreliable method, but the advocate of the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism can hardly raise this objection.

(2) A second sort of case involved the belief that there are other human minds. Here the objection is that it seems to many people as if there are other minds, and that the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism then generates the conclusion that the belief that there are other minds has prima facie justification, and thus that that belief is **noninferentially** justified, in the absence of defeaters. There are, however, no defeaters, and so, if the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true, the belief that there are other minds is noninferentially justified.

Are there factors that undercut the prima facie justification? Again, if one accepts the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, it is hard to see that there are. The believer in other minds need not, for example, be engaging in any self-deception. Is there some investigation that the person should have carried out, before coming to

believe that there are other minds? One might make this claim if one rejected the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, arguing that a belief in other minds, if justified, would have to be **inferentially** justified. But the advocate of the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism cannot advance this claim.

(3) A third sort of case involved a belief that there are now cars outside. Of course, one probably formed that belief because one thought that one had good evidence for the proposition that there are now cars outside. Nevertheless, if it now seems to one as if there are cars outside, then the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism entails that that belief is *prima facie* justified, and so **noninferentially** justified, unless there are defeaters for it. But there are no defeaters, so, if the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism is true, that belief, in addition to possibly being inferentially justified, is also noninferentially justified.

Given that we are, in this case, dealing with an uncontroversial belief that may be eminently justified, on the basis of evidence, it is hard to see how the defender of the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism can convict the believer of any epistemological misbehavior. So the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism appears to lead to the conclusion that **quite ordinary** beliefs that are inferentially justified are also noninferentially justified.

Objection 2: Richard Foley's argument against epistemic conservatism.

1. Richard Foley has offered an argument against a position known as Epistemic Conservatism, where this is the view that "*if a person believes that P, the mere fact that they believe it produces at least some degree of prima facie justification.*" (111)
2. The question is whether Foley's argument against Epistemic Conservatism can be converted into an argument against Phenomenal Conservatism.
3. At the heart of Foley's argument against Epistemic Conservatism is the idea that a decision to believe something that it is slightly irrational to believe should not make it the case that the belief is no longer irrational.
4. Mike argues that a shift from its not seeming to *S* as if *P* to its seeming to *S* that *P* can, by contrast, change a belief from one that is irrational to one that is rational.

Comments

- (1) Whether this is right seems to me to depend upon exactly what the analysis of "It seems to *S* as if *P*" is, and the problem is that we have not been given an analysis.
- (2) On some epistemic readings of "It seems to *S* as if *P*", I think that Mike's claim may be right.

Objection 3: Phenomenal Conservatism entails that some beliefs that are accepted on the basis of bad arguments may be justified.

1. This objection may be put as follows:
 - (1) A person may come to believe that *P* on the basis of a fallacious argument.
 - (2) As a result, it may seem to the person that *P*.

(3) The principle of Phenomenal Conservatism then entails that "*a foundational justification will arise in lieu of the failed inferential justification.*" (112)

2. Mike's response to this is to argue that one can be justified in accepting a conclusion that rests upon a fallacious argument, since one might be justified in thinking that the proof is not fallacious.

Comments

(1) I agree with the claim that Mike makes here.

(2) However, it seems to me that what then justifies the person in accepting the conclusion is that he can offer a **meta-argument** for the claim that the reasoning is probably valid, and this together with justified premises will support the belief that the conclusion of the argument is probably true.

(3) What is true, then, is that the belief in question may be **inferentially** justified.

(4) The principle of Phenomenal Conservatism entails, however, that the belief is **noninferentially** justified, and Mike's response does nothing to rebut the claim that that is objectionable.

Objection 4: It may seem to one person as if P , and to another person as if $\sim P$.

1. Mike's response is, first, that each person should believe what seems to them to be true, and, secondly, that there is nothing troubling in the fact that different things may seem true to different individuals.

Comment

What if one has no reason for believing that one is in a better epistemic position than the other person? Then it seems to me that the contrary seemings should cancel out, and that the reasonable thing to do is to **suspend belief**.

Objection 5: Can such disagreements be resolved, and, if not, isn't that an objection to the principle of Phenomenal Conservatism?

1. Mike's response is that the only possibility is for one person to change the other person's mind "by drawing their attention to some other things that seem true to them" and that support the first person's claim. (114)

Comment

Once again, it seems to me that if either person comes to see that neither person is in a better epistemic position, then that **in itself** gives that person a reason to suspend belief. But one can view that realization as an additional factor.

Objection 6: Phenomenal Conservatism entails that truth is relative.

1. Mike's response here is simply that what Phenomenal Conservatism entails is not that truth is relative, but that justification is relative, and that that is not objectionable.