Reading Assignment 5: The Safety Condition

Assigned Readings

1. E. Sosa. "How to Defeat Opposition to Moore". In: *Epistemology: An Anthology*. Ed. by E. Sosa, J. Kim, and M. McGrath. Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 280–293
2. D. Pritchard. "Anti-luck epistemology". In: *Synthese* 158.3 (2007), pp. 277–297

Helpful Hints

Throughout his article, Pritchard refers to the "brute" and "unreflective" knowledge possessed by chicken-sexers, and he assumes the reader is familiar with epistemological discussions of chicken sexing! Because many students have no idea what Pritchard is talking about, here is some background. Chicken-sexers are employed to quickly classify whether a chick (i.e., a baby chicken) is male or female. According to lore among philosophers, there are virtually no visual clues that can be used to sex chickens at a young age, but chicken sexers classify chickens quickly and reliably. Further, philosophers have been told that chicken-sexers cannot explain *how* they distinguish male from female chicks; after enough time, they just seem to *know* which is which.

Questions

Answer questions three, four, nine, twelve, and sixteen below.

1. Which premise of the skeptical argument below does Sosa reject? Explain why, according to Sosa, the premise in question fails.

   - P1: I don't know that I am not a handless brain-in-a-vat (BIV).
   - P2: If I don't know that I am not a handless brain-in-a-vat (BIV), then I don't know I have hands.
   - Conclusion: I don't know I have hands.

2. What is the "requirement the Mooreans have not [yet] met"? In no more than a paragraph, explain how Sosa argues one can both (i) endorse the safety condition as a necessary condition for knowledge and (ii) meet that requirement. Hint: Sosa's statement of the requirement/problem occurs several pages before his proposed resolution.
3. Sosa proposes a thought experiment involving a trash-chute that is intended to be a counterexample to Nozick's sensitivity condition. Devise an example analogous to Sosa's that might likewise show that sensitivity is not necessary for knowledge.
4. Why might Sosa claim that "sensitivity is doubtful as a condition for our being correctly said to have knowledge of [a] ... necessary truth A?" To do so, it might help define what a necessary truth is. In your opinion, is the safety condition a better characterization of knowledge of necessary truths?
5. Sosa claims that if knowledge were true belief satisfying the safety condition, then epistemic closure would still fail. Unfortunately, Sosa does not provide any examples to indicate why. Try to devise your own example of a failure of closure for safety. In other words, try to devise a thought in which the main character believes two propositions P and Q with the following characteristics:

   - Q is a logical consequence of P,
   - The person's belief in P is safe but her belief in Q is not,
   - The person has a safe belief that P entails Q

   Ideally, your thought experiment should also have the characteristic that the person believes Q *because* she infers it from P.

6. According to Darcy, what was "the point" of Gettier's counterexamples?
7. Pritchard argues that the examples of the lottery ticket and the archer support a particular definition of luck that he calls LE. State LE in your own words, and develop your own examples of lucky and unlucky events that could be used to support the thesis.
8. What makes epistemic luck "benign", according to Pritchard's terminology? Describe two types of benign luck, and illustrate each with an example of your own.
9. Give an example of a necessary truth that you know but which a small child does not. Explain why Pritchard believes that the conditions he calls "LTB" and "AL" fail to capture the sense in which your belief is not lucky. Hint: If you do not remember the definition of "necessary truth", you may wish to reread the instructor's notes on logical terminology.
10. What is the relationship between the safety principle and the definition of a "lucky" belief given in LTB (or AL)? Hint: It might help to phrase your answer as a conditional.
11. Sosa originally defined the safety principle to be the *contrapositive* of the sensitivity principle. State the contrapositive of the sensitivity principle, and explain (using the notes on logical terminology) why the contrapositive of the sensitivity principle is not logically equivalent to sensitivity. Finally, discuss similarities and differences between the version of the safety principle presented by Pritchard and the version proposed by Sosa.
12. According to what Pritchard calls "Neo-Mooreanism", we know "skeptical hypotheses" like "I am not a brain-in-a-vat that is being stimulated to believe that I have a body." Explain why, according to Pritchard, those beliefs will count as safe. Hint: Pritchard first introduces Neo-Mooreanism a few pages before he (very briefly) explains why the beliefs in question are safe. Importantly, Pritchard's argument contains the assumption that, in the actual world, our experiences are not fabrications of an evil demon.
13. Briefly summarize the difference between SP and SP*, and give your own example of a belief that is safe according to SP but not SP*. Which version of the principle does Pritchard defend?
14. Briefly explain the 'containment' strategy that some philosophers have used to respond the worry that, according to externalism, knowledge of propositions like "I am not a brain-in-a-vat" is no different than the 'brute' knowledge of chicken sexers. Why, according to Pritchard, does this containment strategy fail?
15. Towards the end of his article, Pritchard discusses a second way (not the one he prefers) of resolving the tension between the lottery and trash chute examples. Briefly summarize that resolution. Hint: Pritchard's discussion involves distinguishing 'near' from 'very near' possible worlds.
16. In no more than a paragraph, briefly summarize Hawthorne's lottery argument and what it is meant to show. Then identify which premise in the argument Pritchard rejects and why.