Phil. 450: Discussion 5

Safety and Epistemic Luck

Readings: Sosa [1999] and Pritchard [2007]

1 Reading Comprehension

1. Suppose that Ada won the lottery yesterday and that a small piece of an airplane fell from the sky and destroyed the birdhouse in Bev's garden. One might call Ada "lucky" and Bev "unlucky." State Pritchard's definition of a lucky *event*, and then explain why both of the following events are "lucky" according to Pritchard: (1) Ada won the lottery, and (2) Bev's birdhouse was destroyed by a piece of debris from a commercial jet.

2. Give an example in which a person has a belief that is true by luck, i.e., give an example in which a person's belief satisfies Pritchard's condition LTB. Explain why the belief is "luckily" true.

3. State the safety principle according to Pritchard's definition of luck. Then answer question ten from the reading assignment, which asked "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."

4. Discuss question eleven from the reading assignment, which asked the following. Sosa originally defined the safety principle to be the *contrapositive* of the sensitivity principle.

    A. State the sensitivity principle (which is Condition 3 in Nozick's theory). Time permitting, state the revised version involving methods and explain why Nozick revised his initial formulation of Condition 3.

    B. 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.

Also, you might wish to consider Sosa's example in the end notes illustrating why a conditional and its contrapositive might not be equivalent.

C. Open Ended: Discuss similarities and differences between the version of the safety principle presented by Pritchard and the version proposed by Sosa. Are they the same principle? Apply the two conditions to a series of cases to assess whether Pritchard's version of the condition is satisfied in any circumstance in which Sosa's is not, or vice versa.

5. Imagine that you're holding a blue pen in your hand, and suppose you believe that you're holding a blue pen. Explain why your belief would count as knowledge according to each of the following theories:

   - Clark's "No False Lemmas" theory,
   - Goldman's causal theory,
   - Nozick's tracking theory, and
   - A theory that says safety is *sufficient* for knowledge.

6. Pick one of Gettier's original examples and explain why the protagonist in the example fails to have a safe belief.

7. Review your answers to question 12 from the reading assignment. Then discuss question 1 from the assignment.

8. Discuss question two from the reading assignment.

2 Be Creative!

1. Let P denote the proposition "Either Conor has at least ten coins in his pockets, or he doesn't have at least ten coins in his pocket." Suppose that P is a *necessary* truth and that you believe P. Does your belief count as knowledge according to the following theories of knowledge? Justify your answer.

   - Clark's "No False Lemmas" theory,
   - Goldman's causal theory,
   - Nozick's tracking theory, and
   - A theory of knowledge that says safety is *sufficient* for knowledge.

2. Let P denote the proposition "$17 + 15 = 32$" and Q denote the proposition "$17 + 15 = 22$." There is a sense in which Q seems like a "similar" proposition to P. Some philosophers (including Pritchard) have proposed that the safety condition should be modified as follows: "S's belief in a proposition φ is safe if in all nearby worlds in which S forms a belief in a proposition ψ that is *similar to* φ, the proposition ψ is true." Using this revised principle, explain why you might have a safe belief in P but a small child might not.

3. Discuss question five from the reading assignment. Then discuss the following open-ended question: Do you think that epistemic closure is plausible? Why or why not?

References

Duncan Pritchard. Anti-luck epistemology. *Synthese*, 158(3):277–297, 2007.

Ernest Sosa. How to defeat opposition to Moore. *Nous*, 33(13):141–153, 1999.