STRUCTURES OF KNOWLEDGE











RECAP







RECAP

- Knowledge as JTB and the Gettier Problem
- Scepticism and the Infinite Regress Foundationalism as a response
- Reason vs Experience as the ultimate source of our knowledge and thus stopping the regress
- Kant we need both in order to have knowledge
- Other possible responses to the Infinite Regress: Anti-foundationalist



ANTI-FOUNDATIONALIST

- R & E have failed to provide us with a conclusive response to the Infinite Regress
- Maybe it is this demand for certainty for the foundation of our beliefs that is the **problem**
- In real life, we don't actually demand such certainty



- 2 traditional anti-foundationalist theories: Coherentism and Reliabilism
- Basic approach: our beliefs can **never** be absolutely justified and justification <u>need not</u> be an all-or-nothing affair.
- Instead, justification is of **degrees**, not something that one has or has not - some beliefs are <u>better</u> supported than others
- But none are so certain as to be immune from revision

02 COHERENTISM

WHAT IS IT?



COHERENTISM

- There is **no ultimate foundation** for our knowledge
- Instead, beliefs are justified by other beliefs...
- which are in turn justified by still other beliefs...
- in such a way that no set of beliefs is the sole justification for the rest
- Essence 1: a belief is justified if it fits in or coheres with the rest of the belief system
- Essence 2: this justification is by **degrees** the better the belief fits in with the system, the better justified it is
- Metaphor: a **web** of beliefs
- What does it mean to cohere?
- 3 Cs: Consistent, Cohesive, Comprehensive

CONSISTENT

- Beliefs should **not contradict** each other
- Unlike Foundationalism, beliefs can be in tension with each other without outright contradiction
- E.g. 1) Newtonian vs Einsteinian Physics

 Foundationalist would only allow for one or the other (or none!) but the Coherentist can allow for both (Newtonian subsumed under Einsteinian)
- E.g. 2) Heliocentrism vs Geocentrism both the Foundationalist and Coherentist would only allow for one or the other (or none) because **the dispute here is a significant point in the theory**
 - More consistent = more coherent = more justified

COHESIVENESS



- Consistency is <u>not sufficient</u> for a belief system to be coherent
- i.e. not enough to not contradict each other
- They must be mutually supportive
- E.g. The belief is "there is a table in front of me".
- 1) I am in a room with a table, there are pink elephants in the room
- 2) I can see the table, I can feel the table
- More cohesiveness = more coherent = more justified

COMPREHENSIVENESS

- A belief system is more coherent the more comprehensive it is, i.e. the wider the scope of beliefs
- More comprehensive = more coherent = more justified
- E.g. ceteris paribus, a belief system that is able to explain the workings of the natural world is more coherent than one that is only able to explain a contained ecosystem like a leaf litter community
- Ultimately, the other two criteria are more important

REVISION OF BELIEFS

- Beyond the 3Cs, coherentists allow for the revision of our beliefs:
- We do so when the **cost** of keeping a belief/a set of beliefs is more than switching to a new one
- E.g. believing in Santa Claus
- When we were young, we had no good reason to disbelieve in the existence of Santa Claus
- But later on, more and more discrepancies creep in as you learn more about the world
- At this point, we would revise our belief that he exists
- To not do so would mean doubting the rest of our belief system, for example, beliefs about science and how flight works
- In doing so, we are trying to modify our belief system about the world to make it more coherent

CONSERVATISM ABOUT REVISION

- Costs more to revise those beliefs which are at the centre of our web of beliefs than those at the sides
- So we tend to be conservative about our revisions in beliefs
- Intuitive: we do tend to more readily change our minds about those beliefs on the fringes in the light of new evidence
- E.g. Santa Claus doesn't exist vs the Solar System is Geocentric
- Further, it explains why we are more likely to revise our perceptual beliefs than our a priori beliefs
- Centre: A Priori
- Sides: A Posteriori

REVISION STILL POSSIBLE



- Difficult to revise =/= immune to revision
- Coherentist: **denies** that beliefs are ever selfjustifying or incorrigible
- Sometimes, we do need to make fundamental revisions to our belief-sets in the light of overwhelming new evidence.
- E.g. the shift to Heliocentrism and other paradigm shifts
- Is this an advantage over Foundationalism?



02 COHERENTISM

HOW GOOD IS IT?



ADVANTAGES



- There are several:
- 1) Intuitive
- 2) Accounts for a wide variety of knowledge
- 3) Predictive power

INTUITIVE

- Coherence is one of the ways that we normally check whether we should adopt a belief or not
- E.g. investigation, be it CSI or journalism
- Not about being absolutely certain who is the perpetrator
- But seeing which claim the body of facts best supports – i.e. coherentist justification
- We do think that most, if not all, of our beliefs are liable to revision as our knowledge progresses
- E.g. Scientific paradigms





WIDER SCOPE OF BELIEFS

- Coherentism doesn't reject what cannot be absolutely certain
- Starting Point: <u>assume</u> that we **do** have knowledge and then **provide a** rationale for why we do have such knowledge – i.e. coherent!
- This in turn allows us to know which beliefs to adopt into our belief system and which to revise
- Absolute certainty is thus not achieved under Coherentism
- But in rejecting the need for absolute certainty, it is able to account for a **much wider scope** of knowledge than Rationalism ever could
 - *Note*: Coherentism can still appeal to reason and experience as the sources of knowledge!





On 9 August 1965, Singapore separated from Malaysia to become an independent and sovereign state. Singapore's union with Malaysia had lasted for less than 23 months. Image reproduced from The Straits Times, 10 August 1965, p. 1.

- E.g. "Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965."
- Foundationalist: historical knowledge is built on historical sources and historians' interpretations of such sources; **these are always open to doubt.** So such claims are **not knowledge**.
- Coherentist: such claims **are knowledge** because it fits in with and are supported by existing beliefs such as that historians don't generally lie, we have a huge national day parade each year in both countries and our passports are different.
- Such justification can be extended to other bodies of knowledge like science, social science etc

PREDICTIVE POWER

- Even without absolute certainty, I can still have predictive power
- E.g. Might not know if other people are truly sentient beings
- But it is more coherent to believe that they are sentient than not to
- Doing so then allows me to **predict** what they will do in certain situations:
- 1) People will generally eat when they are hungry.
 2) Frank hasn't eaten for a few days and that he knows that there is food in the kitchen.
 3) Hence, Frank will try to get food from the kitchen.





OBJECTIONS

- There are however several objections:
- 1) Some beliefs cannot be revised
- 2) Plurality of systems





SOME BELIEFS CANNOT BE REVISED

- Coherentism allows for the revision of all beliefs, even those at the centre
- Yet some beliefs seem so basic, so fundamental to our belief system that they seem immune to revision
- E.g. Cogito, math and other a priori truths, as well as the incorrigibility of one's beliefs regarding sense data
- Rejoinder: but beliefs about sense data *are* corrigible (cue e.g. paprika vs bbq-tasting crisps, little sperm men)
- Objection: concede point on beliefs regarding sense data, but what of a priori ones?
- Rejoinder: concede that there are certain beliefs that are immune to revision while allowing the others to be revised

PLURALITY OF SYSTEMS

- Nothing about coherentism prevents there being
 two or more equally coherent belief systems
 which nonetheless contradict each other
- Equal coherence = Equally justified.
- Problem: how do we choose between them since they cannot be both true?
- E.g. Islamic belief system vs Christian belief system (Jesus as prophet vs Jesus as Christ)
- E.g. Contrastive Underdetermination in science





RELIABILISM

WHAT IS IT?





RELIABILISM

- Both Foundationalism and Coherentism argue that beliefs are justified via appealing to further beliefs
- Reliabilism eschews this approach
- Reliabilist: a belief is justified when it is the result of a reliable process/method
- i.e. one that is likely to produce a true belief
- Importantly, we do not need to know how this method/process works to trust that it does work
- i.e. **no need to have conscious access to the justification** in order to have knowledge
- Upshot? One doesn't need explicit understanding of justification for one's belief; what matters is that it was reached in an appropriate way





- E.g. 1) a farmer might have all sorts of false beliefs about why one should wait until Orion (the star) has disappeared over the horizon before planting (e.g. it is a signal from the hunter god). Nonetheless, it still gives the right result and hence reliable!
- E.g. 2) a sea-captain might think that a compass works because the fairies in it are always pointing it to the North but this false belief does not make the compass any less of a reliable method
- Why are such beliefs justified?
- Because they are the **products** of a reliable, truthconducive, method







RELIABILISM

HOW GOOD IS IT?





ADVANTAGES

- As with coherentism, there are several advantages:
- 1) Intuitive
- 2) Accounts for a wide variety of knowledge

INTUITIVE APPEAL



- Many of our knowledge claims are the results of reliable mechanisms that we don't necessarily have explicit understanding of
- E.g. Science and the Scientific Method
- E.g. Al and how it works but we can trust its diagnosis on cancer
- E.g. Math and the Mathematical Method (Axiom-Theorem)
- *Note*: like Coherentism, Reliabilism also can appeal to reason and experience





WIDER SCOPE OF BELIEFS

- Reliabilism is able to account for a wide variety of knowledge that is not possible under Foundationalism
- Because Reliabilism allows for some **uncertainty**
- A reliable method is merely one that is **likely** to produce true beliefs, i.e. not guaranteed
- So AAP statements and math can be accounted for by both the Rationalist and Reliabilist
- But the Reliabilist can account for a whole range of knowledge like scientific,
 historical, social scientific and ethical knowledge that the Rationalist can't





PROBLEMS

- There are several problems:
- 1) How reliable is reliable enough?
- 2) Luck and the Problem of Induction



HOW RELIABLE IS RELIABLE ENOUGH?



- Reliabilist: a method is reliable if it is truthconducive
- But how likely must a method be to produce a true belief for it to be reliable?
- E.g. our sight seems like a reliable method to produce perceptual beliefs
- But it has failed us before
- How often must it fail for it to not be reliable?
- Seems subjective



• Rejoinder: add some **qualifications**

- E.g. Sight is a reliable method but not if - I am viewing in bad conditions, the object is far away,
 - I am having a migraine,
 - I am dizzy after taking an antihistamine etc
- So be more precise and say that sight is reliable only under certain conditions
- Objection: But there are all sorts of possible factors that can affect reliability
- Not clear that we can list them all without using blanket terms such as "too far away" (object) or "insufficiently attentive" (perceiver)





- Yet these terms are very vague just what is too far and what is sufficient attention?
- In fact, it can quickly devolve to just become "too far to be reliably judged" or "too inattentive to form reliable beliefs"
- In other words, our attempt to define how reliable a method needs to be has ended up with us simply using the word to define itself
- i.e. a reliable method is that which is reliable.
- Hence, we still don't know what it means for a method to be reliable enough

LUCK AND THE P.O.I.

NOT SURE IF I'M REALLY GOOD

- A mechanism can be reliable repeatedly by luck such that in the future, it could cease to be reliable.
- E.g. we could be repeatedly lucky in using our sight to navigate the world until one day, our luck runs out, and we start bumping into each other when we walk even though we don't intend to
- In other words, Reliabilism suffers from the Problem of Induction
- Just because a method has proved reliable in the past is no guarantee that it will continue to do so in the future



SUMMARY

COHERENTISM

Beliefs are justified by how much they cohere with other beliefs

RELIABILISM

Beliefs are justified if they are produced by a reliable method

WEAKNESSES

Equally coherent systems, Luck and the P.O.I.

STRENGTHS

Wider scope of beliefs for both coherentism and reliabilism



HOMEWORK



Structures of Knowledge Worksheet



Chap 3 of TB pp. 71-82







THANKS

Does anyone have any questions? youremail@freepik.com +91 620 421 838 yourwebsite.com



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