

Phil. 270/570, 2/28 11/4 (updated 11/11): Conservatism, 3: A Flexible Look at Evidentialism and Huemer's Phenomenal Conservatism

A Flexible Look at Evidentialism

New reading: KDR, "Ought We to Follow Our Evidence?," PPR 2000:
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2653824>

The evidentialist thesis at issue [O2]: What we epistemically ought to believe is what fits our evidence

My very abstractly described case: pp. 697-698, 699.4

Three questions; three senses of "ought"?: bottom of p. 700

Argument against O2, highlights:

"Well, it all depends on what you mean..." (698.5)

"But there's also some sense, I suppose..." (698.6)

"Perhaps I should simply understand 'epistemically ought' as picking out *that* sense...And it's no surprise, then, that..." (699.2)

Goal: to "show just how special is the sense of 'ought' which yields the answer that Feldman wants" (699.9)

Response (an attempt to stand up for the sense on which O2 is special, I suppose) and rejoinder: 701-702

-Part 1 of "Ought We..." attacks just the particular form of evidentialism (O2) that Feldman defends (but by extension, other too-particular versions of evidentialism as well), but leaves it open that evidentialism itself, and particularly, a flexible or pluralist form of it (roughly: what we ought to believe is what fits some relevant body of evidence, where which body is relevant is relevant can vary), might be right. Part 2 starts going after evidentialism itself: When it comes to our beliefs that skeptical hypotheses are false, it doesn't look like our justification can follow what fits our evidence on any good understanding of what the relevant evidence might be.

Huemer's Phenomenal Conservatism

1. Huemer's PC: If it seems to S that p, then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that p. (p. 30.5)

Reason for the "at least some degree of" qualification: CPC, n. 1, p. 30

The real thing (more thorough-going PC): 3H, p. 25bot, incl., for the contrast with Huemer, fn. 30 on pp. 25-6. Appearances are where (all) of our epistemic justification for our beliefs comes from!

2. The nature of seemings/appearances

H: "I take statements of the form 'it seems to S that p' or 'it appears to S that p' to describe a kind of propositional attitude, different from belief, of which sensory experience, apparent memory, intuition, and apparent introspective awareness are species. This type of mental state may be termed an 'appearance'." (p. 30.7)

H: Appearances are not beliefs: CPC 30.9-31.2; nor dispositions or inclinations to form beliefs: CPC 31.3-31.8

3H, p. 27bot.-29top, including note 35: I take appearances to be inclinations to believe, responding here mainly to H's first argument. ("all-in" appearance claims)

But note the context-sensitivity of "appears" and "seems" claims (end of n. 35, at very bottom of 3H, p. 29), with "all-in" appearance claims (3H, p. 29top) being one important type. This can be used to respond to Huemer's second argument (CPC 31.5): One can appeal to an early-in-processing disposition to believe to non-trivially explain a later-in-processing disposition to believe

Applying conservatism (It's seeming to you / appearing to you / you're being inclined to believe that P in some relevant way gives you justification for believing that P) directly to the likes of I am not a BIV may go more smoothly for that last option?

3. Note Huemer's playing the role of Reid to Bonjour's "semi-skeptic"!, hinting at Reid's charge of arbitrary partiality in the paragraph that straddles pp. 31-32 of CPC (where he opponents as those who favor appearances from certain sources, without yet explicitly complaining of this procedure), and really getting into it in a way that can be seen just by looking at the headings at the bottom of CPC, p. 32: "Discriminate" "Privileging."

4. Huemer's "Self-defeat" attack on non-PC-ers: introduced at CPC, p. 31.1, and then the main topic of the whole paper, moving forward. It's this argument that most clearly hints at Huemer holding to a more thorough-going PC than his official "Principle" advances