

Thursday, 3/26/20: Siegel (cont'd), Putnam (starting) Readings 11; 12,13 Phil. 270

Siegel: General comments: Though it is quite well-written, Siegel's paper is in a way hard to get a good grasp of, I think, largely because she does not end up endorsing any clear and strong conclusions. She's raising "challenges," in the first instance, against (some forms of) "dogmatism" ("broad dogmatism," in the terminology we're using), but we find later, especially in her last section (sect. 5, pp. 219-), that she thinks her challenges really apply to a very wide bunch of theories of justification (and not to all forms of dogmatism). And what's more, I, in the end, come away with the feeling that Siegel herself is quite sympathetic to dogmatism. At any rate, instead of: *Here's my argument against such-and-such theories; those theories FAIL!*, we get the more subtle *Here's a challenge that many theories face; and here's some thoughts about how tough a challenge it is, but also how various theories might best meet that challenge.*

Siegel considers two ways for the dogmatist to avoid (rather than meet) her challenge. In 4.1 (pp. 212-215), she addresses the possibility of the dogmatist accepting "elevation" and arguing that it isn't so bad; in 4.2 (pp. 215-216), she considers the possibility of the dogmatist claiming that there is a defeater in cases where it is implausible to suppose elevation occurs. In both cases, Siegel seems not too on-board with these avoidance strategies. We will at least largely pass over these sections, but will ourselves talk about whether some elevation might be OK in the cases Siegel has in mind when we discuss Angry-looking Jack.

As for how theories can best meet her challenge, Siegel's main advice, which we reach toward the very end of the paper, at 219.8-9, is for theories "to incorporate an etiological constraint." And, yes, that seems a good idea to meet the challenges Siegel raises. But just what kind of constraint would be best?

In that light, we can look at the case of Angry-looking Jack (handout for last time).

But my perspective is that the forms of dogmatism/conservatism we should have been considering all along should have had room for such constraints (and dogmatism as Siegel formulates it can have such room if "defeaters" is construed broadly enough), but figuring out just how to formulate our constraint, and even whether to include any such constraint, is a bit of a fool's errand, as we're into territory where, so far as I'm concerned, you can take the notion of "epistemic justification" in various ways to yield various answers. There's no "correct" answer – though there may be, at least for various purposes, better and worse ways to flex the notion of "epistemic justification." In Angry-looking Jack, the belief that Jack is angry looks like a good candidate for being one that gets designated as non-innocent (and so not as i-u-p-g). But you can also, so far as I'm concerned, start legitimately ignoring the etiology of the belief, insofar as that's not now open to (or easy to) Jill to see by reflection, and think, "Well, she messed up in the past, but what's poor Jill supposed to do *now*? She seems to be doing alright to me."

The Basic Skeptical Argument Based on “Skeptical Hypotheses”

-skeptical hypotheses are proposals as to what our situation is that explain how we might be going wrong with respect to the things we take ourselves to know

-global (BIV, evil genius [deceiving God]) vs. local (CPMs, fake barns, unreliable radio reports) hypotheses, and the dream argument’s intermediate status (Russell’s?)

-The basic skeptical argument here is: something I call the “Argument from Ignorance” (AI)

The Argument from Ignorance (AI)

1. I don’t know that $\sim H$

2. If I don’t know that $\sim H$, then I don’t know that O

So, C. I don’t know that O

[where ‘H’ is a skeptical hypothesis and ‘O’ is something we would ordinarily take ourselves to know]

-(Substantively) “Moorean” responses attack premise 1. Putnam-*inspired* responses to BIV-skepticism do so by providing a proof that $\sim H$ (and thus they make this knowledge “hard” to come by).

Putnam himself and Skepticism

-Putnam giving “an argument...that shows we are not brains in a vat” (p. 32.7)

-but he only even mentions skepticism at 31.2, and in such a way as to indicate a lack of interest: he seems more interested in “raising issues about the mind/world relationship”

-but then there’s later (1994) material (about his argument being directed against “internal skepticism”) cited and discussed in 13.

-See 13: pp. 70.2-73.4 for Putnam’s own attitude here. As I note there, many grasped after Putnam’s argument as an anti-skeptical weapon, and, as noted above, he later seemed to think so, too – well, in a way. It’s complicated. But at any rate, from here on, for convenience, I’ll just write as if Putnam himself is attacking skepticism

Refuting the Skeptic. Putnam’s response falls into a long tradition in which anti-skeptics attempt to refute the skeptic, to prove that the skeptic wrong (see 13: pp. 66.9-67.6). This is done by means of arguments for anti-skeptical results [often, for the likes of O; but also often, and in Putnam’s case, for $\sim H$], that, in order to be “proofs”, start from premises that do not “beg the question” against the skeptic. Since it’s the “external world skeptic” who is typically in question, the premises available for such a “proof” are limited to two classes: a) simple obvious facts about one’s own states of consciousness (what’s transpiring in one’s own mind); and b) clearly intuitable claims about facts that are metaphysically necessary. Think Descartes here. {13’s fn. 14: Thus, after presenting a Putnam-style argument, Colin McGinn writes (one presumes with a good deal of irony): “In effect, I can achieve the anti-sceptical result Descartes needed God to vouchsafe by exploiting considerations about what determines content. Ah, the wonders of analytical philosophy” (McGinn 1989: 113).} But, as the writer quoted just let on, Putnam’s proof is fueled not by God, but by, specifically...

Semantic Externalism: the contents of at least some of one's thoughts are not completely determined by 'internal' facts about what is going on inside one's head, but are at least partially determined by such 'external' facts as the nature of the items one has been in contact with. Illustrated by: Putnam's Twin-Earth example. **Causal Constraint:** You cannot think with certain concepts unless you have been causally connected in the proper way with items that fall under that concept. (See 13: p. 70.9)

-Since this is supported by thought experiments, rather than by observation of the world, they can seem the kind of *apriori* claims available for use in proofs against the external world skeptic

Semantic Externalism Applied to the BIV Hypothesis

-Perhaps BIVs aren't falsely thinking such things as that they're seeing trees or that they're not BIVs, but are thinking such true things as that they're "seeing" trees-in-the-image and that they are not BIVs-in-the-image? We can call forms of SE that imply this "high-grade" SE

-Or perhaps they're not having truth-evaluable thoughts at all? (37.6-.7)

Dilemma Argument (as rendered at 13: p. 74.3; this seems in a sense the argument Putnam has most in mind, and seems what he's getting at around the middle of 12: p. 33):

If I am a BIV, then by 'I am not a BIV,' I mean that I am not a BIV-in-the-image (or some closely related true thing), which is in that case true. On the other hand, if I am not a BIV, then by 'I am not a BIV,' I mean that I am not a BIV, which is in that case true. Thus, whether I am a BIV or whether I am not, my use of 'I am not a BIV' is true. Either way, it's true; so, it's true: I'm not a BIV.

Compatibilist Argument (suggested at 12: p. 32.4; explained here at 13: p. 74.5):

[The Compatibilist Argument] combines a negative externalist claim about what a BIV does not (or cannot) mean or think—that by 'tree', 'hand', 'vat', etc., the BIV does not refer to trees, hands, vats, etc.—with a positive claim to the effect that we do have the thoughts in question—the thoughts that the BIVs cannot have. These together imply that we are not BIVs.

How Strong a Form of Semantic Externalism Do These Arguments Need?:

-Dilemma argument seems to require "high-grade" SE, which Putnam himself seems to have doubts about (12: p. 37.6,.7 again). The Compatibilist Argument has a big advantage here in that it requires only a very modest form of S.E.: it can be fueled just by the causal constraint. Well, so long as we use Putnam's BIV scenario. But....

Next time: into 13 and problems for the Putnam response, then on to readings 14 and 15

When we learn that SE is true, does the certainty we seem to have about our own thoughts seep out into the world, or does the uncertainty of the world seep into our grasp of our own thoughts?