

A Priori seminar 27/4/18

Attending: Crispin Wright, Giacomo Melis, Peter Sullivan, Alisa Mandrigin, Josh Thorpe, Xintong Wei, Jose Pereira de Conceicao, Paul Conlan, Sam Symons, Giovanni Merlo

Presenting: Crispin Wright

Reading: Wright "Logical Non-Cognitivism"

- **Giacomo** asked Crispin to unpack a bit what he says in footnote 3 of the paper, regarding the thought that "normativity requires that we be mindful of the norms". **Crispin** responded that he is endorsing what he takes to be Ramsey's suggestion to Wittgenstein that logic is a normative science. The idea is that, contrary to the Tractarian conception of logic as a network of relations between propositions that hold independently of anyone's inferential activities, and which does not aim to account of its availability to human agents, the normativity of logic requires that we provide an account of how agents may be constrained by the rules of logic. **Giacomo** further wondered whether this is so because we need to account for how we can be guided by logical norms in our practice. He then worried about the distinction between norms of action and norms of being, where the former are norms that one is in the position to consciously follow (norms that can guide one's actions), and the latter are not (they are beyond the agent's grasp and hence are not available for guidance). The worry is that if being mindful of the norms requires that we may be guided by the relevant norm, then we are ruling out norms of being from the outset. **Crispin** agreed, but clarified that even norms of being will require someone who is mindful of the norms, even if just an external observer who judges whether the agent is acting rightly or wrongly (rather than the acting agent herself).

Quine

- **Peter** wondered how Crispin is understanding his opponent as thinking of L as it occurs in (ii) (page 2 of the handout). Perhaps the distinction between (ii) and (v) is not as clear-cut as it may seem. **Crispin** suggested that we can give him a choice, he can think of it as a theorem, or as a metalogical theorem, but either way we need an epistemology of it **Peter** replied that the more we flag (v) as a new judgement, the less (ii) ever was. We've committed ourselves to certain general logical principles, and yet even with that commitment in place at (ii), this consequence appears as a new judgement at (v). How are we thinking of it? **Crispin** replied that if we think of (ii) as a theorem, then we can think of (v) as the higher-order judgment that (ii) is indeed a theorem. We may think of it as an auxiliary hypothesis, in Quinean terminology.

Inferential accounts of basic logic

- **Giovanni** asked about the propositions on page 1 of the handout; how are the variables in the propositions to be interpreted? Doesn't making those judgments require that we think of P and Q as schematic letters for all propositions, and that we consider that MP or conditional Proof hold for all propositions? **Crispin** answered that this is a crucial question, and answering it undermines inferential accounts of basic logic, along the lines highlighted in objection (iv) of the paper (pp. 11-12).
- **Giacomo** expressed agreement with Crispin's suggestion that saying that inferences can be blind (as those performed by very young children and animals) does not help with accounting for the justification to believe that modus ponens is valid. In a context where we

are wondering about our grounds to believe that Modus Ponens is valid, we're already operating at a reflective level and it is in some sense irrelevant as to what children and animals do. Young children and animals wouldn't even be able to ask, and comprehend, the question "is MP valid?" **Crispin** suggested in response that *if* in some cases there are inferences made on the basis of some premises where you must justify your inference from those premises, and some where you don't have to, and *if* this is the case for all agents regardless of epistemic capability, it would be interesting to say what the difference is.

- **Peter** commented that in the paper you suggest denying *tortoise* (see bottom of page 2 in the handout) means accepting that some inference is knowledge yielding even though it is blind. Broome has an objection to this, but it might be worthwhile making clear what denying *tortoise* amounts to. **Crispin** suggested that the inference in question has to be a real inference. In cases where the movement of thought is 'blind' there is no thought supervising it. Broome talks of 'mental jogging' (where you just move from one thought to another)—there is no competence in play. In these cases you'd better know what you're doing insofar there is an actual ability being exercised. **Peter** further commented that Broome might also be drawing to our attention the connectedness that must be in place in the case where you're inferring cannot be captured by association and causation. **Crispin** suggested that there is a possibility that these points dovetail. If we admit a category of blind inference which is warrant inducing we'd have to take on these concerns.
- **Josh** suggested that In the Lewis Carroll case it's really obvious there's an infinite regress there. But *Tortoise*, as Crispin points out, is a different case: there is no appeal to a suppressed premise that, once made explicit, would generate the regress. Rather, *Tortoise* only says that knowledge of the validity of the relevant rule is needed to accomplish knowledge by inference. It's not so obvious that there's a regress. **Crispin** commented that Josh has it right in general, but the point is that if *Tortoise* holds, then the rule-circular justification of MP is not good: justifying MP in that way would presuppose knowledge of MP.
- **Josh** suggested that in understanding 'blind inference', one could start off with blind knowledge and then bootstrap oneself to reflective knowledge. **Crispin** replied that bootstrapping is problematic, of course. **Josh** wondered exactly what is problematic in this case. **Crispin** replied that there's a problem with what exactly you believe. Say you come to believe (*v*) (see handout). You need some justification for that higher-order claim. On traditional internalist views, you can have that because justification iterates. But if the knowledge you start with is blind, how can you do that? **Josh** wondered what exactly 'non-blind' knowledge would be. Is it just knowledge that you have higher order knowledge of? **Crispin** replied that it's whatever justifies the claim that "I have knowledge of *p*", but it does seem to require reflection on the process by which one comes to know *p*. **Giacomo** further commented that non-blind knowledge requires seeing the epistemic reasons *as* epistemic reasons, which you cannot do in the blind case. **Crispin** suggested that we stipulate (to fix ideas) that blindness be that there is no attendant belief for your inference, but nevertheless you have made an inference.
- Two putative features of blind-inference have been briefly mentioned. **Peter**: blind inferences are incompatible to sensitivity by undermining through the suggestion that one of the premises is false. **Crispin**: blind inferences cannot establish general conclusions, unless the premises are general themselves. Blind inferences involve no implicit generality in the process.

Logical Non-Cognitivism

...the reason why [the steps in a logical inference] are not brought into question is not that they 'certainly correspond to the truth' -- or something of the sort, -- no, it is just this that is called 'thinking', 'speaking', 'inferring', 'arguing'. There is not any question at all here of some correspondence between what is said and reality; rather is logic *antecedent* to any such correspondence; in the same sense, that is, as that in which the establishment of a method of measurement is *antecedent* to the correctness or incorrectness of a statement of length."
(Wittgenstein *RFM*, I, §156)

Project: (i) To supply some motivation for the non-cognitivism about (basic) logical truth that Wittgenstein's 'antecedence' claim requires, while stopping short of support for the claim itself.

(ii) To offer some resistance to the idea that intuition (rational insight) is the source of our knowledge of propositions like these:

(i) If a conditional and its antecedent are both true, then so is its consequent

(ii) When it is true that if P is true, so is Q, then if P is true, so is Q

(iii) If Q can be shown to follow from P, then if P is true, so is Q

(iv) This inference pattern is valid:

$$\frac{\{A_1, \dots, A_n\} \vdash A ; \quad \{B_1, \dots, B_n\} \vdash \text{if } A, \text{ then } B}{\{A_1, \dots, A_n, B_1, \dots, B_n\} \vdash B}$$

(v) If Q is true on a certain set of assumptions, then if all but one are true, Q is true if the last is true.

(vi) This inference pattern is valid:

$$\frac{\{A_1, \dots, A_n\} \vdash B}{\{A_1, \dots, A_{n-1}\} \vdash \text{if } A_n, \text{ then } B}$$

I. Of what importance is our (apparent) knowledge of such propositions? Suggestion: it is only because we have such knowledge — or judge that we do — that logic is enabled to be a “normative science” (Ramsey.)

II. How is basic logical propositional knowledge (BLPK) accomplished?

(a) Can an empiricist story be told? Take Quinean empiricism as the most developed candidate. For Quine, our knowledge of the kinds of proposition illustrated is of a piece with our knowledge of any well-entrenched hypothesis in a successful empirical theory.

Set-up: Let \mathcal{Q} be a theory that is to be tested against experience and let L be its underlying logic. Testing \mathcal{Q} will involve the derivation from it in L of conditional predictions telling us what observations we should expect relative to certain specified initial conditions. Let $I \rightarrow O$ be a particular such conditional prediction. A body of evidence, E, will then count as confirmatory if it provides, or appears to provide grounds for accepting both I and O but *recalcitrant* — Quine's favoured term — if it provides, or appears to provide, grounds for accepting I but rejecting O. But recall that according to the standpoint of Quine's holistic

empiricism, every element contributing to such a verdict of overall recalcitrance is potentially open to revision. The potential suspects therefore include not only

- (i) the theory, \mathfrak{S} , itself;
- (ii) the logic L that mediates the derivation of the testing conditional, $I \rightarrow O$;
- (iii) the claim that E does indeed corroborate both I and not- O and
- (iv) the *bona fides* of the evidence E ,

but also

- (v) the claim that the relevant testing conditional is indeed an L -consequence of \mathfrak{S} .

What is the warrant for (v)?

(b) Can BLPK be accomplished by deductive inference? Looks unlikely, but consider Boghossian's (erstwhile) suggestion:

| | | | |
|-----|-------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | (i) | P | Assumption |
| 2 | (ii) | If P, then Q | Assumption |
| 1,2 | (iii) | Q | (i), (ii) <i>modus ponens</i> |
| 1 | (iv) | If (if P, then Q), then Q | (ii), (iii) conditional proof |
| | (v) | If P, then if (if P, then Q), then Q | (i), (iv) conditional proof |

— *rule-circular inference*.

Informal version:

“Look, remember how we explained the conditional. A conditional statement is true provided that if its antecedent is true, so is its consequent. Right? So suppose you're given that a particular statement is true, and that so is a conditional statement in which that statement features as the antecedent. Then it follows that the consequent is true, no? And that will hold no matter which statements you are concerned with. See?”

Objections: (i) “Can't we do that for *tonk*?” Thus: —

| | | | | |
|-----|---|-------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| | 1 | (i) | P | Assumption |
| | 1 | (ii) | P <i>tonk</i> Q | (i) Tonk-Intro. |
| | | (iii) | If P, then P <i>tonk</i> Q | (i), (ii), conditional proof |
| and | | | | |
| | 1 | (i) | P <i>tonk</i> Q | Assumption |
| | 1 | (ii) | Q | (ii) Tonk-Elim. |
| | | (iii) | If P <i>tonk</i> Q, then Q | (i), (ii), conditional proof |

Objections: (ii) “Rule-circular-reasoning is (viciously) circular.” Consider

Tortoise: Acquiring knowledge by inference requires knowledge of the validity of the (rules of) inference employed.

Objections: (iii) “Rule-circular reasoning is no good in any case for the acquisition of *reflectively-authenticated* —justified claims to —knowledge”

Objections: (iv) “Whatever may be the epistemic force of rule-circular (better now : *blind*) reasoning in certain instances, it is not available for the kind of schematically general reasoning illustrated by the above routines for *modus ponens* and conditional proof.”

We should sustain objections (iii) and (iv).

(c) Can BLPK be accomplished by intuition/rational insight?

Well, if not, how on Earth else? But there are familiar objections:

(i) The objection from naturalism and mysteriousness—no prospect, it seems, of a natural-scientific account of the workings of the alleged faculty.

— But do we need such an account? Intuition will be a *sui generis* capacity if it exists at all; why expect that we should be able to ‘make sense’ of it in terms that apply to other, radically different cognitive capacities that we have?

(ii) Postulating special faculties is a “cheap shot”, available for any area of discourse with ‘propositional surface’ — comedy, ethics, culinary taste, etc. If it is sometimes bad, why is it good for BLPK?

(iii) Even should there be no good reason to demand a natural scientific account of its workings, don't we at least need evidence, before postulating such a capacity, that these judgements of ours are *getting something right*? But here we have no independent check. (Contrast bats, bees and homing pigeons.)

(iv) The hard-line inferentialist objection — the Squeezing Argument. A Williamsonian response.

(v) When we assent to the putative objects of BLPK, what exactly are we assenting to? The Chess analogy — a codification of what we regard as acceptable practice vs. a judgement of logical truth/validity.

(vi) vs. someone who just insists it is the latter: *Be honest*— is the basis really an immediate “seeming that P”, or is it not rather a bit of rule-circular reasoning?

(vii) Intuition and “Why do you think so?” — there should be a close analogy with perception and episodic memory.

III. If BLPK is chimerical, what then?

A gloss on Wittgenstein's idea: What the antecedence doctrine involves:

- That our most basic logical judgements belong to the *apparatus of enquiry* rather than composing a *separate topic of enquiry*— they need to be fixed and dependable if there is to be such a thing as empirical enquiry, just as a unit of length needs to be fixed if there is to be such a thing as determination of length,
- That it is not the responsibility of logic to correctly reflect internal relationships of truth-dependency, incompatibility, etc. among propositions that are fixed independently of our inferential practices. Which propositions are true is not settled, from a metaphysical perspective, in advance of their integration in a system of inference.

That we have no basic propositional logical knowledge is no case for heartache if there is nothing, strictly, to *know*.

An alternative: the most basic principles of logic *are* answerable to independently determined truth-values among the propositions that they allow us to connect by inference. However that we have alighted on the correct such principles is something that lies beneath and out of reach of enquiry. (Cf all “cornerstones” of enquiry.) We have at best a *rational entitlement* to these principles.