

2019/2/12 KBNS A Priori

Attending: Giacomo, Fiona, Moritz, Sonia, Xintong, Jose, Crispin, Peter, Indrek, Asgeir, Paul, Giovanni, Carrie, Jonathan

Presenting: Paul

Reading: McHugh and Way 'Against the Taking Condition'

## 1.2 Distinguishing the taking condition from similar conditions

(Consequence Condition) Inferring  $q$  from  $p$  entails taking  $p$  to support  $q$ .

(Commitment Condition) Inferring  $q$  from  $p$  commits you to taking  $p$  to support  $q$ .

(Negative Condition) Inferring  $q$  from  $p$  entails not taking  $p$  not to support  $q$ .

**Carrie** suggested that we can formulate a condition in terms of trust (roughly in line with Crispin's work on trust and entitlement):

(Trust) Inferring  $q$  from  $p$ , commits you to trust that  $p$  supports  $q$ .

It is not as strong as the taking condition but also not as weak as the commitment or negative condition. Since (Trust) is less cognitively demanding, it might avoid some of the objections against the taking condition. Trust is something we can do without awareness.

**Crispin:** trust is acceptance and it might not involve conscious commitment. We have the notion of implicit trust. The norm of trusting is less demanding than belief. Trust on no evidence wouldn't necessarily be problematic.

**Crispin** asked whether (Trust) involves concepts-grasping. **Carrie** replied that it is not necessary, at least for some cornerstone propositions, trusting those propositions need not be very intellectual. **Crispin** added that (Trust) seems vulnerable to the problem of deviant causation.

**Peter:** Taking condition cannot just be 'treating as'; how is trust different from 'treating as'?

**Paul:** It seems that trust doesn't work in merely hypothetical inference, whereas you can treat the  $p$  as true in hypothetical inference.

**Carrie:** what one trusts is the link between  $p$  and  $q$ , that  $p$  supports  $q$ .

**Crispin:** the notion of hypothetical inference is when you commit to the inference but not to the hypotheses from which you proceed.

**Giovanni:** can one infer without really believing in the inference? Suppose that I don't believe modus ponens, but just reason along with you, is that an instance of inference?

**Crispin:** the claim that  $p$  supporting  $q$  can be relativized to a system of inference. I take  $p$  to support  $q$  in that system, but I don't need to infer along with it without investment in that game.

**Carrie:** I don't think that's an inference in Boghossian's sense. In that case it is merely a description of the rules of the system. It is like describing the game without playing it.

## 2.1 Explaining what is wrong with invalid inference

**Crispin:** explaining invalid inference is not the motivation for the taking condition. The question is not what goes wrong in invalid inference, rather why it is being wrong. The question concerns us is what makes a transition of thought inferential, it doesn't have anything to do with invalid inference. Suppose that my thought moves from  $p$  to  $q$  by free association, Boghossian's question is what makes the transition not an inference.

Peter: McHugh and Way give a normative answer to a descriptive causal question. Valid here just means good. The move to a normative characterization of the question is not a rival to Boghossian's, but a valid answer if we take the question of inference to be a normative question.

## 2.2 Moorean argument

(IMP) It is either impossible or seriously irrational to infer  $q$  from  $p$  and to judge, at the same time, that  $p$  does not support  $q$ .

The Taking Condition provides an explanation of the impossibility:

“Inferring  $q$  from  $p$  entails believing that  $p$  supports  $q$ . But someone who believes that  $p$  supports  $q$  and believes that  $p$  does not support  $q$  has contradictory beliefs. And it is impossible to have contradictory beliefs.” (p. 321)

The group agreed from previous discussion that the claim that it is *impossible* to infer  $q$  from  $p$  and to judge that  $p$  does not support  $q$  is implausible.

**Giacomo:** the thought here is that you don't need taking condition to explain the irrationality of inferential akrasia. You can appeal to weaker condition such as the negative condition.

**Crispin:** the negative condition does not give an explanation to the impossibility/irrationality of inferential akrasia.

## 2.3 Deviant causation

**Crispin:** in the previous session we considered the thought that the difference between deviant and non-deviant causation has to do with self-knowledge. When there is genuine inference,  $S$  will be in a position to know the origin of  $p$  and  $q$ , e.g., that  $S$  takes  $p$  to support  $q$  and comes to believe  $q$  on the basis of  $p$ . In deviant cases, there won't be such self-knowledge.

**Giovanni:** what's preventing one to have self-knowledge in the deviant cases?

**Peter:** The thought is that if it is inference you would have self-knowledge; not that if you don't infer you wouldn't have self-knowledge.

**Carrie:** is inference a success term? If you infer does it mean that you've done something right and well? Moreover, is inference something that if you've done it then you would be in a position to claim that you have done it?

**Jonathan:** I think inference is something you can do badly.

**Crispin:** If one accepts the premise but denies the consequent, that transition of thought cannot be an inference.

**Jonathan:** If you infer, then you succeeded in inferring regardless whether that is good.

**Carrie:** if inference is not a success term, why is there any epistemic achievement associated with inference?

**Crispin:** if your premises are bad, but your inference is good, you achieve something because had your premises being true, you would know the conclusion.

**Jonathan:** If inference requires self-knowledge, then it is a counterexample to anti-luminosity argument. Inference would be a luminous condition—whenever you infer, you will be in a position to know that you infer.

**Crispin:** if you infer, you can have self-knowledge that you believe the conclusion on the basis of premises. The knowledge is available to you. It is weaker than luminosity.

**Peter:** if one has inferred  $p$  from  $q$ , and was asked 'why do you think  $p$ ?'. Suppose she answered 'because  $p$ '. Is that a piece of self-knowledge? A genuine inference seems to manifest some basis of that inference, even if the reasons are lost to the person.

**Giacomo:** this is the contrast between motivating reasons and normative reasons.

## 2.6 Impossible inference

The group discussed whether one can make inference from Peano's Axioms to Fermat's last theorem. It is a semantic entailment.

**Peter** asked what would be the distinction between mere causation and inference when one made the transition of thought from Peano's Axioms to Fermat's last theorem. Can the distinction be made in normative terms such as in the commitment condition?

**Crispin:** there is no real psychological distinction between the two.

**Peter:** What makes the difference is whether you are answerable to those kinds of commitment.

## McHugh and Way – Against the Taking Condition

(Taking Condition) Inferring necessarily involves the thinker taking his premises to support his conclusion and drawing his conclusion because of that fact

### 1. Preliminaries

#### 1.1. What is Taking

Taking is a kind of representation – taking  $p$  as supporting  $q$  is representing  $p$  as supporting  $q$ .

How should we understand representing  $p$  as supporting  $q$ ? Plausibly to represent  $p$  as supporting  $q$  is to *believe*  $p$  supports  $q$ :

Alternative interpretations:

Intellectual seemings (or another representational state that falls short of belief)

Taking is *sui generis*

#### 1.2. Distinguishing the Taking Condition from Similar Conditions

The Taking Condition should be distinguished from the following condition (which is entailed by the Taking Condition):

(Consequence Condition) Inferring  $q$  from  $p$  entails taking  $p$  to support  $q$ .

This condition does not attribute an explanatory role to the taking, so is weaker than the Taking Condition. This is consistent with the premises supporting the conclusion in virtue of reasoning from the former to the latter.

Two further weaker conditions:

(Commitment Condition) Inferring  $q$  from  $p$  commits you to taking  $p$  to support  $q$ .

(Negative Condition) Inferring  $q$  from  $p$  entails not taking  $p$  not to support  $q$ .

Neither of these conditions make it such that you take  $p$  to support  $q$ : One can be committed without following through on one's commitments, and one can take the negative condition without taking the positive condition to be true.

## 2. Is the Taking Condition Worth Saving?

Why should we think the Taking Condition is worth saving, what motivations can we find for it?

### 2.1. Explaining What is Wrong With Invalid Inferences

The Taking Condition gives a way to explain what goes wrong in an invalid inference – when one makes an invalid inference, one wrongly takes one's premises to support one's conclusion.

This is unsatisfactory – we can equally say that in making an invalid inference, one fails to satisfy a norm of inference (say a norm of truth preservation), and that is what goes wrong.

- Question – is truth preservation the norm we want here – can we have an otherwise invalid inference which preserves truth?

Further, the Taking Condition fails to explain what is distinctively wrong with invalid inference – one goes wrong if one wrongly takes  $p$  to support  $q$ , and one also goes wrong if one infers  $q$  from  $p$ .

### 2.2. Moorean Arguments

We can motivate the Taking Condition by observing the following – It would be odd to infer  $q$  from  $p$  while also holding that  $p$  does not support  $q$ . Call this condition *Inferential Akrasia*. The Taking Condition explains the oddness of this phenomenon.

- Note – This does seem odd, but not *quite* irrational – if  $p$  provided negative support for  $q$ , it would be flatly irrational.

Characterise this phenomenon thus:

(IMP) It is either impossible or seriously irrational to infer  $q$  from  $p$  and to judge, at the same time, that  $p$  does not support  $q$ .

So Inferential Akrasia is either impossible or irrational.

The Taking Condition provides an explanation of the impossibility:

“Inferring  $q$  from  $p$  entails believing that  $p$  supports  $q$ . But someone who believes that  $p$  supports  $q$  and believes that  $p$  does not support  $q$  has contradictory beliefs. And it is impossible to have contradictory beliefs.” (p. 321)

But this does not seem to be the best explanation. First, why think that contradictory beliefs are *impossible* as opposed to irrational? The idea must be that to have such contradictory beliefs is so irrational as to be impossible. If so, why not just apply this to Inferential Akrasia in the first place?

Secondly, one does not need to appeal to the Taking Condition to get this explanation, the Negative Condition would be enough.

Suppose we need only explain the irrationality:

“Inferring  $q$  from  $p$  entails believing that  $p$  supports  $q$ . But someone who believes that  $p$  supports  $q$  and believes that  $p$  does not support  $q$  has contradictory beliefs. And it is highly irrational to have contradictory beliefs.” (p. 322)

Having contradictory beliefs looks like an example of high irrationality, and this is not the only way to be highly irrational. Inferential Akrasia could instead be taken as a basic form of irrationality, or fall under a rational constraint against akrasia. Or, if inference aims at true beliefs, Inferential Akrasia might fall under the rational constraint against taking unreliable means to your ends. We need not assume irrationality involves contradictory beliefs

- Question – Is this actually an argument against the Taking Condition as an explanation of the irrationality?

A better argument is to compare Inferential Akrasia and Doxastic Akrasia – believing that  $p$  but also believing you have no reason to believe that  $p$ . The explanation of Doxastic Akrasia surely can't be that believing that  $p$  entails believing there is a reason to believe that  $p$  (on pain of infinite regress)

So, there are other competing explanations of Inferential Akrasia, as characterised by (IMP).

### 2.3. Deviant Causation

One might motivate the Taking Condition by noting that it rules out deviant causal chains. But merely adding the taking belief is insufficient for this – the taking belief must also play the right causal role.

One might argue that the Taking Condition still rules out many cases of deviant causation (c.f. the example on p. 324), and is thus a starting point to a solution to the problem of deviant causal chains

in inference. But the Taking Condition only rules out the easy cases, and there are other proposals which do that, and any solution to the harder cases is ipso facto going to resolve the easy cases.

## 2.4. Agency

Is the Taking Condition required to vindicate the idea that reasoning is an exercise of agency:

“In general, it might be assumed, doing X with the aim of achieving Y requires you to believe that doing X promotes Y.

So, if you infer q from p with the aim of acquiring a true belief about whether q, you must believe that inferring q from p promotes acquiring a true belief about whether q.

And you can believe that, we might think, only if you believe that p support q. Thus when you infer q from p, you must do so partly because you believe that p supports q.” (p. 325, reformatting mine)

But this way of understanding inference seems untenable:

It suggests that any inference depends on some prior practical reasoning, about whether one’s inference promotes or achieves the aim in question (e.g. reaching truth), and surely if theoretical reasoning is done with an aim, so is practical reasoning, and a regress looms. So another account of what it is to infer with an aim must be given, but this is not the aim of the paper. Rather,

“The crucial point for present purposes is that, since it is hard to see how an account could appeal to means-end beliefs without setting off a regress, any account that does so must be rejected. And in that case, the above argument for the Taking Condition fails.” (p. 325)

## 2.5. Inductive vs. Deductive Inference

The Taking Condition allows us to distinguish inductive and deductive inferences.

But we don’t need the Taking Condition for this – inductive and deductive inferences are distinguished by different normative standards or by different sorts of arguments.

Boghossian suggests that there is a psychological distinction between deductive and inductive inference. But this is not enough to vindicate the Taking Condition:

“...it doesn’t follow that in every case of inference, you must be either reasoning inductively or deductively. It seems entirely possible to reason while having no view on whether your premises entail your conclusion or merely make it likely.” (p. 326)

## 2.6. Impossible Inferences

The Taking Condition provides a way to understand why some inferences are impossible (say from Peano Axioms to Fermat's Last Theorem) – the reasoner cannot take those premises to directly support their conclusion.

The suggestion is that this takes one psychological impossibility to explain another.

Why it is impossible to take Peano to support Fermat rather than the inference being impossible? An explanation of why support is impossible would explain why the inference is impossible.

## 3. Some (Now Familiar) Problems

### 3.1. Overintellectualisation

#### Taking as Believing

If taking is believing, reasoners must have beliefs about, and therefore a concept of, the relevant notion of support that the Taking Condition is supposed to pick out.

#### Taking as Less Than Believing

“The overintellectualisation worry concerned the content of the attitude of taking—and the concepts which entertaining such contents requires. Thus, insofar as an intuition that your premises support your conclusion has conceptual content—and this is surely the most natural construal—the view that taking is an intuition fares no better with this worry.” (p. 319)

### 3.2. What Makes the Taking Belief Rational?

#### Taking as Believing

If taking beliefs are essential to inference, it seems the taking belief must be rational for the inference to be rational.

But what makes the taking belief rational? Taking beliefs look like beliefs that would ordinarily be acquired inferentially:

An example taking belief

“[T]he belief that the fingerprints on the weapon support the conclusion that the butler did the deed.”

This looks like it is acquired from the belief that the fingerprints are on the weapon together with a more general principle like “Fingerprints on the weapon support the conclusion that they did it”, and this looks a lot like an inference.

The taking belief does not seem to be a perceptual belief – support relations are not the sort of thing we observe.

We might acquire beliefs in general non-epistemic principles non-inferentially, but this is no help either – the taking belief is a *particular belief*, so a general epistemic principle will not do unless we make an inference from that principle.

Appealing to a non-inferential basing relation between beliefs won’t help – Firstly, considerations against the taking condition seem to apply as much to a basing relation. Secondly it is plausible that basing involves a disposition to reason:

“[I]f you base the belief that  $p$  supports  $q$  on belief in a general principle, you are disposed to reaffirm that  $p$  supports  $q$  on the grounds of the principle, if the question of whether  $p$  supports  $q$  comes up.” (p. 318)

This suggests the Taking Condition entails that you are disposed to believe that the principle supports the claim that  $p$  supports  $q$ , but what makes this belief rational without basing it on inference?

### Taking as Less Than Believing

“The worry here was that it was hard to see what could make taking beliefs rational, if not further inferences. The view that taking is an intuition does have an advantage here, since intuitions can arguably rationalise without themselves requiring rationalisation in turn.” (p. 319)

### 3.3. What Does the Taking Belief Do?

#### Taking as Believing

The taking belief is, according to the Taking Condition, what one draws one’s conclusion *because of*. But it is not clear how this works.

The content of the taking belief cannot be a further premiss, for Lewis Carroll reasons

The taking belief might be an enabling condition on making an inference, e.g. by playing a role in the application of a rule of reasoning. But it is unclear how this would be done.



## Taking as Less Than Believing

The same problems remain if we replace beliefs with intuitions.

### 4. What Remains of the Taking Condition?

The problems suggested for the Taking Condition do not appear to infect the Negative or Commitment conditions, and some of the arguments for the Taking condition support them. But the Commitment Condition is *much* weaker than the taking condition and lacks the philosophically interesting upshots of the Taking Condition.