

Knowledge and Practical interests

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Outline

The Standard “Intellectualist” Story

Pragmatic Encroachment

The Knowledge-Action Principle

An Argument for Interest-sensitivity

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The Standard Intellectualist Story

According to the standard Intellectualist story about knowledge, only **Intellectual** facts are relevant to whether one knows or not that something is the case.

The Standard Intellectualist Story

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The Standard Intellectualist Story

- ▶ What do I mean by **Intellectual** facts?
- ▶ Roughly, facts that have to do (or track) the **truth** of what is believed.
- ▶ They are **truth-conducive** facts.
- ▶ Justification and evidence are “Intellectual” facts in this sense.

A challenge to the Standard Intellectualist Story

- ▶ Today, we will go over a few reasons to challenge the Standard Intellectualist Story.

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Low Stakes

Bank Case A

My wife and I are driving home on a Friday afternoon. We plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit our paychecks. But as we drive past the bank, we notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Although we generally like to deposit our paychecks as soon as possible, it is not especially important in this case that they be deposited right away, so I suggest that we drive straight home and deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning. My wife says, "Maybe the bank won't be open tomorrow. Lots of banks are closed on Saturdays." I reply, "No, I know it'll be open. I was just there two weeks ago on Saturday. It's open until noon."

Low Stake

- ▶ In this scenario, does he know that the bank is open on Saturdays?

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- ▶ Many want to say that in this kind of situations, one can know.
- ▶ Ok, now consider the following variation.

High Stakes

Bank Case B

My wife and I drive past the bank on a Friday afternoon, as in Case A, and notice the long lines. I again suggest that we deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning, explaining that I was at the bank on Saturday morning only two weeks ago and discovered that it was open until noon. But in this case, we have just written a very large and important check. If our paychecks are not deposited into our checking account before Monday morning, the important check we wrote will bounce, leaving us in a very bad situation. And, of course, the bank is not open on Sunday. My wife reminds me of these facts. She then says, "Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?" Remaining as confident as I was before that the bank will be open then, still, I reply, "Well, no. I'd better go in and make sure." (913)

High Stake

- ▶ In this scenario, does he know that the bank is open on Saturdays?

High Stake

- ▶ In this scenario, does he know that the bank is open on Saturdays?
- ▶ In this case, it is more tempting to say that he does not know that the bank is open on Saturday.

Diagnosis

- ▶ But observe that as far as evidence, justification etc are concerned, the two cases are exactly the same.

Diagnosis

- ▶ But observe that as far as evidence, justification etc are concerned, the two cases are exactly the same.
- ▶ **The only thing** that changes is how important is to the subject that the bank be open on Saturdays.

Another example

Low Stakes

Five minutes ago, Hannah made three sandwiches and placed them in the refrigerator. She told Sarah that she placed the peanut butter sandwich on the left, the tuna sandwich in the middle, and the almond butter sandwich on the right. Hannah then departed just as Sarah's friend Almira arrived for lunch. Sarah knows that Almira has no allergies. Almira says: "I'd love an almond butter sandwich." And so Sarah opens the refrigerator door, points to the sandwich on the right, and says: "The sandwich on the right is an almond butter sandwich. You can have it."

Another example

High Stakes

This case is just like Low Stakes, except here it is Sarah's nephew Algernon who is visiting for lunch, and he has a severe peanut allergy. He asks Sarah for a sandwich. Sarah knows that the peanut butter sandwich would be fatal to Algernon, but that the almond butter sandwich would be harmless. She also knows that he would slightly prefer the almond butter sandwich to the tuna sandwich. When Sarah goes to the fridge, she can tell, by visual inspection, which is the tuna sandwich, but she cannot tell, by visual inspection, which is the peanut butter sandwich and which is the almond butter sandwich. So she gives him the tuna sandwich.

Diagnosis

- ▶ But observe that as far as evidence, justification etc are concerned, the two cases are exactly the same.

Diagnosis

- ▶ But observe that as far as evidence, justification etc are concerned, the two cases are exactly the same.
- ▶ As in the example before, **the only thing** that changes is how important is to the subject that the bank be open on Saturdays.

Looking more closely at the cases

- ▶ Let r be the proposition that the sandwich on the right is the almond butter sandwich.

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Looking more closely at the cases

- ▶ Let r be the proposition that the sandwich on the right is the almond butter sandwich.
- ▶ Here are some differences between the low stake cases and the high stake cases.
- ▶ In Low, it seems appropriate for Sarah to assert that r to Almira, since Sarah knows that r .
- ▶ In High, however, the situation seems rather different.

Looking more closely at the cases

- ▶ Here we are inclined to say that it is appropriate for Sarah to give Algernon the middle sandwich rather than the sandwich on the right, since she knows that the middle sandwich is the tuna sandwich.

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- ▶ Here we are inclined to say that it is appropriate for Sarah to give Algernon the middle sandwich rather than the sandwich on the right, since she knows that the middle sandwich is the tuna sandwich.
- ▶ However, she doesn't know that the sandwich on the right is the almond butter sandwich—it might instead be the fatal peanut butter sandwich.

Looking more closely at the cases

- ▶ And so, in Low, we are inclined to say that Sarah knows that r , whereas in High we are inclined to say the opposite.

Looking more closely at the cases

- ▶ And so, in Low, we are inclined to say that Sarah knows that r , whereas in High we are inclined to say the opposite.
- ▶ And yet Sarah's evidence bearing on r appears to be the same in both cases.

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- ▶ Other facts, such as non-intellectual facts (—i.e., non truth conducive facts) seem relevant too.
- ▶ In particular, facts concerning how high are the stakes of the subject seem relevant, in this case, to whether the subject knows.

- ▶ People have taken these cases to show that truth conducive facts may not be the only relevant facts to whether one knows or not.
- ▶ Other facts, such as non-intellectual facts (—i.e., non truth conducive facts) seem relevant too.
- ▶ In particular, facts concerning how high are the stakes of the subject seem relevant, in this case, to whether the subject knows.
- ▶ These facts are not “intellectual” facts—i.e., they are **pragmatic** facts.

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Knowledge and Action

KA Principle

For any agent S and proposition p , if S is in a choice situation in which S could not rationally act as if p , then S does not know that p (where to act as if p is to act in the manner that would be rationally optimal on the supposition that p is true).

Explanation

- ▶ The **Knowledge-Action** principle provides a natural explanation for the difference in low and high stakes.

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- ▶ In Low, acting as if r (by affirming that r) would be perfectly rational, given Sarah's strong evidence for r .

Explanation

- ▶ By contrast in High, acting as if r (by giving Algernon the sandwich on the right) would be irrational, given the disastrous consequences of doing so if r is false.

Explanation

- ▶ By contrast in High, acting as if r (by giving Algernon the sandwich on the right) would be irrational, given the disastrous consequences of doing so if r is false.
- ▶ Thus, the Knowledge Action Principle is consistent with Sarah's knowing that r in Low, but it is inconsistent with her knowing that r in High.

Assessing the KA principle

- ▶ The **Knowledge Action** Principle has considerable plausibility.

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- ▶ The **Knowledge Action** Principle has considerable plausibility.
- ▶ For it is very plausible that if an agent knows that p , then she could rationally rely on p by reasoning on its basis.

Assessing the KA principle

- ▶ And it likewise seems plausible that if an agent can rationally rely on p in her reasoning, then she can rationally act as if p , since that's how she would choose to act were she to reason rationally while relying on p .

Assessing the KA principle

- ▶ And it likewise seems plausible that if an agent can rationally rely on p in her reasoning, then she can rationally act as if p , since that's how she would choose to act were she to reason rationally while relying on p .
- ▶ And so it is very plausible that if an agent knows that p , then she can rationally act as if p .

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Assessing the KA principle

A musician and a genie

Barry is sitting in his apartment one evening when he hears a musician performing in the park outside. The musician, call her Beth, is one of Barry's favorite musicians, so the music is familiar to Barry. Barry is excited that Beth is performing in his neighbourhood, and he decides to hurry out to see the show. As he prepares to leave, a genie appears and offers him a bet. If he takes the bet, and the musician is Beth, then the genie will give Barry ten dollars. On the other hand, if the musician is not Beth, he will be tortured in the fires of hell for a millenium.

Barry's options in a decision table

Table : Barry's options

	Musician is Beth	Musician is not Beth
Take bet	Win 10 dollars	1000 years of torture
Decline bet	Status quo	Status quo

Diagnosis of the case

Intuitively, it is extremely irrational for Barry to take the bet. People do make mistakes about identifying musicians, even very familiar musicians, by the strains of music that drift up from a park. It's not worth risking a millenium of torture for 10.

Diagnosis of the case

If you accept that the bet should be declined, then it seems that there are two options available:

1. Barry never knew that the musician was Beth.

Diagnosis of the case

If you accept that the bet should be declined, then it seems that there are two options available:

1. Barry never knew that the musician was Beth.
2. Barry did know that the musician was Beth, but this knowledge was destroyed by the genie's offer of the bet.

Diagnosis of the case

- ▶ Option 1 amounts to embracing skepticism about most of what we know. Because we can run the same argument for virtually every possible proposition.

Diagnosis of the case

- ▶ Option 1 amounts to embracing skepticism about most of what we know. Because we can run the same argument for virtually every possible proposition.
- ▶ Option 2 amounts to embracing the claim that non-intellectual facts are relevant to whether one knows or not.

Diagnosis of the case

- ▶ So either skepticism is true, or the view that pragmatic factors are relevant for knowledge is true.

Diagnosis of the case

- ▶ So either skepticism is true, or the view that pragmatic factors are relevant for knowledge is true.
- ▶ If you are not a skeptic, you might want to embrace this conclusion!