

Knowledge and Integrity

The Future of Normativity Conference

Submission

February 1, 2018

Recently, there is a wide interest in knowledge as source of various norms: the norm of belief, action, and assertion. Various philosophers argue that knowledge is the adequate candidate, because (1) thanks to factivity, it guarantees that action, assertion or belief are connected to the truth, and (2) it guarantees that they are formed on the basis of correct attitudes, i.e. the connection to truth is non-accidental (Williamson, 2000; Hawthorne and Stanley, 2008; Hawthorne and Magidor, ms). In connection with a thesis that knowledge is a genuine mental state and that knowledge is not luminous (Williamson, 2000), this gives a picture in which there exists mental state, which is partially individuated externally to the subject's mind, which is the source of norms governing these activities. However, in my talk I want to draw attention to a problem with factive account of norms, which is especially difficult for the norm of action. The knowledge norm has been proposed in strong form:

Strong KN: S ought to F only if S knows p

(where F and p can be, respectively, action and reason, belief and reason, and assertion and its content)

and weak form:

Weak KN: S can F if S knows p

First, a frequent line of objection to strong KN is that it is unclear whether one ought not, in certain circumstances, believe, assert or take as a reason for action a proposition which one believes justifiedly, but which nonetheless falls short of knowledge (e.g. a vast literature on so-called “new evil Demon”, but also a critique of the positive assumptions about knowledge as source of norms (Mehta, 2015)). In this paper, I present an argument against weak KN, which concerns an aspect which, to the best of my knowledge, has been overlooked in the debate. I will present it on the example of a reason for action debate. *Mutatis mutandis*, analogous arguments can be formed for weak knowledge norms for reasons for belief and assertion, but I do not want to dwell on that.

According to weak KN, one can take p as a reason for action if one knows p. Given anti-luminosity of knowledge, one may not know what one knows. In

particular, one may believe that one knows what one in fact does not know. Consider a situation in which Sarah knows a proposition – that her brother Carl will pick her up from the airport if she asks him for it. However, she also justifiably believes, because Carl told her so himself, another proposition which happens to be false – that today evening he wants to go to the cinema with his wife. However, Carl, after telling this to Sarah, learned that his wife must stay at work longer as planned, so they have to cancel the evening out – but Sarah is already in the plane and knows nothing about it.

According to weak KN, Sarah can make her decision on the basis of what she knows: in this case, taking as a reason only the proposition that Carl will pick her up if asked. However, Sarah still has the other belief that it will be inconvenient for him to go to the airport today, despite she does not know it. This belief does not undermine her knowledge that Carl will pick her, but it alters the expected utility of the choices she has available. I argue that, contrary to what is predicted by weak KN, Sarah should not ask Carl to pick her up. This will turn out to be more beneficial, but she has no reason whatsoever to expect that. The argument relies upon the following principle of integrity:

(INT) In making decision about action or assertion, or in belief-forming process, S ought to treat as premises all her relevant beliefs.¹

In other words, INT says that if S already believes something, then S ought to take it into consideration in further thinking, given its relevance for the issue. This is exactly the reason, why Sarah cannot ignore her belief about Carl's plans for the evening. Clearly, weak KN is at odds with INT, as INT requires one to consider all beliefs one has and KN – only these which are knowledge.

What one shall do: accept INT or weak KN? A form of error theory has been proposed to support strong KN: if violation of KN is caused by having a belief that non-culpably falls short of knowledge, the norm is violated but the subject is excused from this violation (Williamson (2000); Hawthorne and Stanley (2008); Hawthorne and Magidor (ms); Williamson (ms), and for an the same idea employed in defense of factive theory of justification: (Littlejohn, 2012)). Analogous answer may be offered to defend weak KN. However, first, the retreat to excuse is considered by some as *ad hoc* (Baumann, 2012). Second, in the case of weak KN, more is needed – not only providing an excuse for (alleged) violation of the knowledge norm by Sarah when she chooses to take a cab, but also one of the two:

- the claim that KN does not apply to cases like Sarah's
- claim that Sarah ought to ignore a belief she has equally good justification for as her other beliefs, which constitute knowledge

Both of these solutions seem difficult to accept.

If my arguments against KN are correct, this shows that a connection to the truth and proper basing of belief, assertion and action are not sufficient to provide norms like the norm of practical reasoning. What must be also taken

¹Relevance comes from an obvious computational restriction – we make decisions and form beliefs only on the basis of a subset of our beliefs. However, I want to remain neutral as to whether these should be beliefs in fact relevant for the matter at hand or which are conceived by the subject to be relevant.

into consideration is that people, in making their decisions and forming beliefs, must satisfy some minimal conditions about their beliefs – including their integrity. This is particularly interesting, in the light of recent vivid research both on implicit and explicit biases (which amount to violations of INT), cognitive dissonance, and broad role of metacognitive processes.

References

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