

Schroeder's Stakes, withholding, and pragmatic encroachment on knowledge

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Pragmatic Encroachment “Whether someone knows something can depend on actual or perceived practical factors of her situation.” (265)

Truth-related (non-pragmatic) matters These include “whether she believes it, the reasons for which she believes it, the available evidence, the truth-conduciveness of her environment, whether her faculties are reliable...” (265)

LOW STAKES.¹ Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit their paychecks. It is not important that they do so, as they have no impending bills. But as they drive past the bank, they notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Hannah remembers the bank being open on Saturday morning a few weeks ago, so she says, ‘Fortunately, it will be open tomorrow, so we can just come back.’ In fact, Hannah is right — the bank will be open on Saturday.

¹ (T/F) Hannah knows that the bank is open Saturday:

HIGH STAKES.² Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit their paychecks. Since their mortgage payment is due on Sunday, they have very little in their account, and they are on the brink of foreclosure, it is very important that they deposit their paychecks by Saturday. But as they drive past the bank, they notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Hannah remembers the bank being open on Saturday morning a few weeks ago, so she says, ‘Fortunately, it will be open tomorrow, so we can just come back.’ In fact, Hannah is right — the bank will be open on Saturday.

² (T/F) Hannah knows that the bank is open Saturday:

The Plan

A motivating dilemma There is an apparent dilemma between two claims:³

- Epistemic rationality is determined by one’s reasons (confronts Pascalian and hostage problems)
- Epistemic rationality is determined by one’s evidence (no room for pragmatic encroachment)

³ This is not quite how the issue is presented in the paper.

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The plan To “make sense of how [pragmatic encroachment] could be true.”(266) “[M]y aim is simply to show how natural and conservative this view would be, if it were right.” (277)

The Solution

First step Practical factors can affect whether one knows by affecting whether one is epistemically rational.

Epistemic rationality It is “the strongest kind of rationality that is entailed by knowledge.” (268) More detail:

- “you don’t know p unless p is adequately supported by your evidence”
- “being adequately supported by your evidence counts as making it rational to believe p , in some sense of ‘rational’, and”
- “there is no further or stronger rationality condition on knowledge.”

Solution there are epistemic reasons, they determine epistemic rationality, and they outstrip one’s evidence. Argument for the last claim:

P1) There are epistemic reasons to withhold⁴ (as when you have little evidence either way, fairly balanced evidence, or will get conclusive evidence shortly)

P2) Epistemic reasons to withhold are not evidence (since there is nothing for them to be evidence for — not p and not $\neg p$)

C) So there are epistemic reasons that are not evidence.

Retains a form of ‘evidentialism’ Still, it is true that one should believe what is adequately supported by one’s evidence. Reasons to withhold increase the burden the evidence must meet in order for it to *adequately support* something.

Epistemic reasons to withhold

What could be an epistemic reason to withhold if not evidence “If you want to know what sort of thing could be a reason for or against withholding, it pays to pay attention to what makes withholding different from belief. To withhold is to not make up your mind, to have formed no belief. Consequently, any disadvantage of forming beliefs

⁴ Is withholding on p a distinct mental state or it is merely not believing that p and not believing that not- p (or is it both)? He says “to withhold is to not make up your mind, to have formed no belief” (277) which sounds like at least the latter. One potential issue is that he speaks of withholding as something one does — since we can have reason to do it — but if it is merely not believing p and not believing $\neg p$ it isn’t clear that this is the case. It isn’t generally true that when ϕ ing is something one does that not ϕ ing is also (though often one does something when one doesn’t ϕ).

— of making up your mind — is potentially a reason to withhold. So a natural place to look for reasons to withhold is in the costs of error.” (278) Types of error:

- Type-1 error: getting it wrong that p . Cost (for *the bank is open on Saturday* in LOW STAKES): not having money in your account until Monday
- type-2 error: missing out on getting it right. Cost (for the same case): having to wait in line on Friday

Evaluating LOW STAKES The cost of type-1 error is low (not having money in one’s account until Monday) and the cost of type-2 error is low (standing in a line). Weak reason to withhold, so low standard of evidence, and that standard is met by the evidence, so she knows.

Evaluating HIGH STAKES The cost of type-1 error is high (losing one’s house) while the cost of type-2 error is low (standing in a line). Strong reason to withhold, so high standard of evidence, the evidence doesn’t meet that standard, so she does not know.

Distinguishing epistemically relevant cost from other costs “These two sorts of costs [are] a special sort of practical factor — threats from villains about what will happen to your family if you don’t withhold don’t count. To be the right sort of cost of type-1 error, on this view, you have to be a cost that a belief gives rise to when it is false, due to its playing its normal role as a belief — the sort of cost that is intrinsic to the nature of belief.” (277)⁵

⁵ Perhaps another way to put this, going off “a cost that a belief gives rise to when it is false”: for type-1 error for p , the epistemically relevant costs are those that come about because $\neg p$ (or because the belief that p is false) rather than because one believes that p . The use of ‘intrinsic’ here doesn’t seem right.

Epistemic reason for believing p $Ev_p + Er_{\neg p} + Er_{W(p)}$

Epistemic reason for believing $\neg p$ $Ev_{\neg p} + Er_p + Er_{W(p)}$

Epistemic reason for withholding on p $Er_p + Er_{\neg p}$

Test cases

FORCED CHOICE, LOW STAKES.⁶ Hannah and her wife Sarah are out driving on Saturday morning, at twenty minutes to noon. Sarah remembers that they still haven’t deposited their paychecks from Friday, but points out that just one of their bank’s two branches is open until noon on Saturdays, but she can’t remember which, and there is only time to try one. Hannah says, ‘Oh, I remember being at the branch on Chapala Street two weeks ago on Saturday. It’s the one that is open today.’ Hannah is right — the branch on Chapala Street is the one that is open on Saturday.

⁶
 Intuition:
 Ev_p :
 $Ev_{\neg p}$:
 Er_p :
 $Er_{\neg p}$:
 $Er_{W(p)}$:
 Prediction:

FORCED CHOICE, HIGH STAKES.⁷ Hannah and her wife Sarah are out driving on Saturday morning, at twenty minutes to noon. Since they have an impending bill coming due, and very little in their account, it is very important that they deposit their paychecks that day, but they have so far forgotten to do so. Sarah remembers that they still haven't deposited their paychecks from Friday, but points out that just one of their bank's two branches is open until noon on Saturdays, but she can't remember which, and there is only time to try one. Hannah says, 'Oh, I remember being at the branch on Chapala Street two weeks ago on Saturday. It's the one that is open today.' Hannah is right — the branch on Chapala Street is the one that is open on Saturday.

7
 Intuition:
 Ev_p :
 $Ev_{\neg p}$:
 Er_p :
 $Er_{\neg p}$:
 $Er_{W(p)}$:
 Prediction:

NASA ENGINEERING.⁸ Hannah and Sarah are engineers working on the design of NASA's next-generation shuttle, a multi-billion dollar project planned to operate over several decades and ultimately carry hundreds of astronauts into space, where error means death. Currently they are trying to decide which materials to use for an important component, and are investigating two new alloys, to see which will be more appropriate for the component. Citing preliminary research, Sarah notes that the first alloy holds up better under temperatures under 300?, and that most alloys which hold up well under 300? also perform well at shuttle temperatures. Hannah says, 'okay, so the first alloy will hold up better at shuttle temperatures.' In fact Hannah is correct; the first alloy does hold up better at higher temperatures.

8
 Intuition:
 Ev_p :
 $Ev_{\neg p}$:
 Er_p :
 $Er_{\neg p}$:
 $Er_{W(p)}$:
 Prediction:

GAME SHOW.⁹ Hannah and Sarah are playing Go Big or Go Home, a successful game show on daytime television with a B-celebrity host. They have reached the final question, which is: 'will the bank be open tomorrow, on Saturday?'. The possible answers are 'yes' and 'no', and they must answer within the time limit, or they will lose all of their money (they have accumulated a very large sum so far). If they answer and get it right, they double their money, but if they answer 'yes' and get it wrong, they lose all of their money and if they answer 'no' and get it wrong, they keep what they already have. Hannah tells Sarah, 'The answer is 'yes' — I was there three weeks ago on a Saturday morning, and it was open.' In fact, Hannah is correct; the bank will be open tomorrow.

9
 Intuition:
 Ev_p :
 $Ev_{\neg p}$:
 Er_p :
 $Er_{\neg p}$:
 $Er_{W(p)}$:
 Prediction:

CANCER SCREENING.¹⁰ "If you are waiting on the results of a biopsy to confirm whether you have cancer, the fact that the results will soon be announced is a reason to withhold belief — to wait to make up your mind — even if you already have a fair bit of evidence one way or the other."

¹⁰ Is the type-1 risk the emotional toll a positive result will bring? That doesn't seem to apply to believing the test is negative, unless he has in mind that the emotional toll of a positive result will be worse if one is first elated by first believing the result is negative.