

October 2, 2019

## Notes for Week 6: EPM

1. Overview:

- a) The big move of the first half of EPM is the account of “looks”-talk. This is a brilliant analysis, turning the whole Cartesian tradition on its head. It opens up into a critique of the Myth of the Given, and of foundationalism generally.
- b) The big move of the second half of EPM is the idea that the paradigmatic Cartesian states of awareness, awareness of our own mental events, thoughts and sense impressions, might show up first as *theoretically postulated*, having an explanatory role but only inferentially accessible, and then *become* (as a matter of contingent fact) observable. It is framed by methodological behaviorism about mental episodes (as opposed to Rylean intentional states). This in turn is an instance of scientific *realism* about “theoretical entities.” It is usefully extended to the semantic case of meanings.

2. Target: Epistemological Foundationalism.**Knowledge**, on the JTB account

(Gettier cases argue these are not sufficient. We will revisit the question of the status of the justification requirement when we talk about epistemological internalism (Sellars) and externalism (reliabilism) after the tie shop), requires **justification** of what is known.

Q: What is the structure of justification?

A: Think about the *process of justifying* a claim:

One does so inferentially, by appealing to *justifying reasons* that can serve as premises in inferences that have the claim to be justified as a conclusion.

But those justifiers can do that job only if they, too, are justified.

So one should inquire about the reasons for them.

It seems that there are three possibilities if we consider such a continued process of justifying:

- i. Either it goes on forever (a regress). Then we never reach anything whose justification is not itself in need of justifying, and so can transmit its justification to its consequences.
- Rgress Skepticism (or infinitism).
- ii. Or it circles back on itself, and the whole structure hangs in the air.
- Coherentist Skepticism.
- iii. Or it reaches some unjustified justifiers: justifiers whose status as themselves justified does not depend on *inheriting* that status from some *other* claimables that provide reasons for them.

This is the **Agrippan trilemma** (after a similar argument by [Sextus Empiricus](#), which was attributed to [Agrippa the Skeptic](#) by [Diogenes Laërtius](#).)

In connection with the Agrippan trilemma (AT), one should:

- 1) Distinguish carefully between justification as **positive justificatory status** and justification as the **process or practice of justifying**.
- 2) There is an implicit assumption that there is a *kind* of belief that can serve as unjustified justifiers. But there is a big difference between:
  - ✓ Inquiries  $\exists$  a place (belief) where that inquiry comes to an end, and
  - $\exists$  a kind of belief  $\forall$  inquiries come to an end with one of those.

There are really *two* regresses of justification threatening here:

- a) Regress of *premises*, and
- b) Regress of *inferences*.

For we can *also* ask about the warrant of the (language-language) *moves* as well as about the warrant of the premises we arrive at thereby.

- a) The regress-stoppers on the side of *premises* are episodes of sensory givenness.
- b) The regress-stoppers on the side of *inferences* are *logic*, and *meanings* or *concepts* (including the meanings of *logical expressions*)

Carnap's *Aufbau* and Goodman's *Structure of Appearance*.

These are the two sides of logical empiricism:

the empiricist “erlebs” (as Goodman called them, after the German “Erlebnis”—compare: “Erfahrung.”), and

the logical implications as the glue to hold them together and relate them as reasons (premises and conclusions).

These also correspond to Kantian *intuitions* and *concepts*.

(Rorty will accordingly blame Kant, though acknowledging that Descartes's fatal invention of the concept of representation is at base the problem. More on that below.)

Sellars (and Austin) attacked (a).

Quine attacked (b).

For both, the *point d'appui* is the implicit **semantic foundationalism**:

This is the idea that one must be able to analyze without remainder the use of all empirical concepts in terms of erlebs plus logic.

3. Preliminary assembling of distinctions and resulting tensions:

First section is titled “An *Ambiguity* in Sense-Datum Theories”

- a) “Notorious ‘ing’/‘ed’ ambiguity, for “sensation” (also “judgment,” “justification,” “experience,”...). Acts of sensing vs. contents sensed.

b) **Facts vs. particulars.** §3.

What is *expressed by declarative sentences* vs. what is *referred to by singular terms*.

Note that using *one* notion of representation for both of these is already to undertake nontrivial commitments that might be hard to walk back later.

(Cf. Strawson’s complaint about Austin’s use of a notion of fact as in the grip of a theory that leads him to introduce “sentence-shaped objects.”)

§3: “The sense-datum theorist, it would seem, must choose between saying:

- a. It is **particulars** which are sensed. Sensing is not knowing. The existence of sense data does not *logically* imply the existence of knowledge.

or

- b. Sensing *is* a form of knowing. It is **facts** rather than *particulars* which are sensed.”

- c) **Epistemic/Non-epistemic.** §5 This normative/matter-of-factual. Cf. §36. Picked up in the “mongrel crossbreeding” characterization in §7.

- d) Issue of relation of *sensory givenness* to **learning** or **acquisition** (of **concepts**).  
This issues in:

## 4. §6:

It is clear...that *classical* sense-datum theories...are confronted by an **inconsistent triad** made up of the following three propositions:

- A. *x* *senses red* sense content *s* entails *x* *non-inferentially knows that s is red*.
- B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.
- C. The ability to know facts of the form *x is Ø* is acquired.

Once the classical sense-datum theorist faces up to the fact that A, B, and C do form an inconsistent triad, which of them will he choose to abandon?

1. He can abandon A, in which case the sensing of sense contents becomes a noncognitive fact -- a noncognitive fact, to be sure which may be a necessary condition, even a *logically* necessary condition, of non-inferential knowledge, but a fact, nevertheless, which cannot *constitute* this knowledge.
2. He can abandon B, in which case he must pay the price of cutting off the concept of a sense datum from its connection with our ordinary talk about sensations, feelings, afterimages, tickles and itches, etc., which are usually thought by sense-datum theorists to be its common sense counterparts.
3. But to abandon C is to do violence to the predominantly nominalistic proclivities of the empiricist tradition.

(The Sellars perceptual challenge.)

5. Diagnosis: §7: Mongrelization of two lines of thought. One is causal-physiological, the other evidential-justificatory. Kant on “the celebrated Mr. Locke”s “mere physiology of understanding.” The Kantian distinction between *quid factis* and *quid juris*. That it must not become a dualism. This is one of Sellars’s principal conceptual tools.

7. “It certainly begins to look as though the classical concept of a sense datum were a mongrel resulting from a crossbreeding of two ideas:

1. The idea that there are certain inner episodes -- e.g. sensations of red or C# which can occur to human beings (and brutes) **without any prior process of learning or concept formation**; and without which it would *in some sense* be impossible to *see*, for example, that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular, or *hear* that a certain physical sound is C#.
2. The idea that there are certain inner episodes which are non-inferential knowings that certain items are, for example, red or C#; and that these episodes are the necessary conditions of empirical knowledge as **providing the evidence for all other empirical propositions.**”

6. The Myth of the Given is at root the idea that there can be something such that just by *having* it, one counts as *knowing* something.

Digging down a little, it is the idea that justification could bottom out in something *nonconceptual*, in the sense of episodes one could have *without* having had to acquire a whole battery of concepts.

Even deeper, it uses semantic holism—the idea that in order to have *one* concept one must have a whole *lot* of interrelated concepts—to undercut the intelligibility of the idea of an epistemological foundation. There cannot be an *epistemological* foundation because there cannot be a *semantic* foundation.

“The light dawns gradually over the whole.” [On Certainty, §141]

The Main Event: Appearances and the Analysis of “Looks”-talk:

7. Cartesian background on incorrigibility.

The coincidence of two lines of thought:

- a) Is/seems does not iterate. Can ask: is it as it looks/seems. But cannot ask: Does it look/seem the way it *seems* to look/seem? Hence are incorrigible about seemings (= representings).
- b) Regress of representation and presuppositions of the possibility of representational error (Royce).

Together these lines of thought seem to support a picture of episodes about which we are *incorrigible* (and which are *transparent*) to us, *mental* episodes, in Descartes's sense of “pensées,” as providing the **ideal foundationalist regress-stoppers**.

8. Walk through the discussion of John in the tie shop (passages from §14 through §22), and how “looks” -Φ-talk can arise out of “is”-Φ talk.

Key here is idea that there are at least two dimensions to making noninferential reports:

- a) RDRD. This is what we share with parrots. Price's “thermometer” view (cf. §35).
- b) Endorsement.

Looks talk as withholding endorsement, but evincing RDRD.

9. In these terms, can understand **incorrigibility**. But it is epistemically trivial.

Understood this way, what is expressed by “looks” talk is not a candidate for being an epistemological foundation.

10. Can make sense of *merely generic* lookings: the figure looks to have between 20 and 50 sides, but there is no number n in between such that it looks to have n sides.

11. Can make sense of *scoped* lookings §22:

Seeing that x, over there, is red

Its looking to one that x, over there, is red

Its looking to one as though there were a red object over there

12. Challenge: What does it say about **third-person** attributions of “looks” claims?

On the Sellarsian analysis there should be an ambiguity:

When I say “The light merely looked red to John,” am I *attributing* to him the withholding of endorsement? Or am I withholding it myself?

And there does seem to be such an ambiguity.

13. This account of “looks”-talk in relation to language-*entry* transitions has an analog on the side of language-*exit* transitions: “**tries**” talk.

The analog of incorrigibility is *indefeasible dominion*, things one cannot try to do and fail. This is the origin of the idea of volitions or acts of will, which supposedly cause everything else we do (as appearances mediate everything we know).

Some remarks on consequences of the “two-ply” account of observation:

14. This is “Bobsservation.” It is what you get if you take the two elements to be *sufficient* for observation. I actually have a somewhat more complicated story about observation, but I want to explore some of the consequences and advantages of thinking about observation this way.

- It underwrites the observability of:
  - a) Mu-mesons (Toltec/Aztec potsherds).
  - b) Norms (cruelty)
  - c) Meanings (Cf. McD vs. Davidson)
- It underwrites an account of *secondary quality concepts* (out of Evans).

Knowledge, and its Acquisition:

Here we look at the passages from §32 to §38.

15. How can one *acquire* observational concepts, if we accept that, as §45 has it:

“[W]e now recognize that instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it.”

16. Describe how young ones can be understood to *come into the language* on a Sellarsian account. No metaphysical bright line is crossed as they get better and better at the RDRDs involved in all three types of moves: entries, exits, and the language-language moves in virtue of which their responses count as *conceptually contentful* at all.

Rather, their *social status* as *normative* subjects changes, as we come to *hold them responsible* and *recognize their authority*.

17. Sellars here raises the issue of justificatory *internalism* vs. *externalism* in epistemology. It turns on whether *reliability* (plus endorsement) is enough, or whether in addition *knowledge* of reliability is required. Sellars is an internalist. (McD accepts KK principle, but denies that this can take the form of knowing oneself to be reliable.) I have a social-perspectival view about *attributions* of knowledge that splits the difference along one dimension.

18. Q: In what sense, then, do noninferential observation reports form a “foundation” for knowledge?

A: WS: They are the ultimate court of appeal in justification of empirical claims.  
[BB: This is too strong. But they play an ineliminable role.]

The key thing is that we distinguish two senses of “noninferential”:

Commitments *can* be “noninferential” in an *aetiological* sense: their *origin* can be noninferential, in that they were not arrived at as the result of an inferential process.

Claimables *cannot* be “noninferential” in the sense that grasp of their content does not depend on grasp of their inferential connections to other claimables.

Noninferential reports do not form an autonomous stratum of discursive practice: they are not a language-game one could play though one played no other.

And no claimable-*type* can have *all* of its tokenings used noninferentially. Anything that has noninferential uses must also be able to be used as the conclusion of an inference.

Prospects, from second half of EPM:

19. Then: inner episodes as first theoretically postulated, then becoming observable. The distinction between theoretical and observable things is methodological or epistemological, not ontological.

§38: “In the concluding sections of this paper, I shall attempt to explicate the logic of inner episodes, and show that we can distinguish between observations and thoughts, on the one hand, and their verbal expression on the other, without making the mistakes of traditional dualism. I shall also attempt to explicate the logical status of *impressions* or *immediate experiences*, and thus bring to a successful conclusion the quest with which my argument began.”

20. XIV (sec. 53) Methodological vs. Philosophical Behaviorism (elsewhere this is phil. Vs. logical behaviorism).