Metaphysics // Fall 2025

Handout 16

Probabilistic anti-dogmatism: White II

THE CARD GAME EXPERIMENT. Suppose we invite Jack for a gruesome experiment with the following possibilities: 535

(16-1) Card A: Chop off hands and replace them with fake ones.
Card B: Leave hands alone.
Card C: Chop off hands and leave the stumps.

A card is randomly picked and followed while Jack is asleep.

Now, when Jack awakes with arms still under the sheets, the initial credence that he does not have fake-hands (Hand-3) should be 2/3, assuming symmetry among the three possibilities.

When Jack lifts his arms, hands appear. This shows that Card C was not picked. The possibilities are restricted to A or B, and neither is favoured. Therefore, Jack's credence that he is not fake-handed (Hand-3) should drop to 1/2.

Hence the disturbing conclusion: having obtained the evidence, Jack's credence in Hand-3 should drop, not increase. The challenge for the dogmatist is to explain why this result, correct in the contrived case, should not apply in an ordinary case.

THE POPULATION STATISTICS EXAMPLE. Here's another way to challenge the dogmatist. Let there be the following stipulations: 536

(16-2) p: the total number of people,
f: the number of people with fake-hands,
h: the number of people who have hands.

A woman walks by with her hands in her coat pockets, offering no specific evidence about the condition of her hands. So, the probability that the woman (chosen at random from the given population) has fake-hands is f/p. Then the initial credence that the woman is not fake-handed (Hand-3) is calculated based on the ratio of those with fake-hands to the total population:

(16-3) $$\mathrm{P}(\text{Hand-3}) = 1 - \frac{f}{p}.$$

When the woman waves and a hand appears (Hand-1), the set of possibilities is restricted to only those who have hands (h) or fake-hands (f). The new total population size for this observation is $f + h$. The updated credence that she is not fake-handed is:

(16-4) $$\mathrm{P}(\text{Hand-3} \mid \text{Hand-1}) = 1 - \frac{f}{f+h}.$$

Now, not everyone has either hands or fake-hands (some may have stumps, etc.). Therefore, the combined number of people with hands or fake-hands must be less than the total population:

(16-5) $$f + h < p.$$

Since the denominator $f + h$ in (16-4) is smaller than the denominator p in (16-3), we have (also assuming $f > 0$):

(16-6) $$\frac{f}{f+h} > \frac{f}{p}.$$

Hence, subtracting the larger fraction from 1 yields a smaller result:

(16-7) $$[1 - \frac{f}{f+h}] < [1 - \frac{f}{p}].$$

Thus, again, the subject's credence that the woman is not fake-handed should decrease when she appears to have hands:

(16-8) $$\mathrm{P}(\text{Hand-3} \mid \text{Hand-1}) < \mathrm{P}(\text{Hand-3}).$$

JUSTIFICATION AND FUTURE JUSTIFICATION. White now examines a further objection based on a modified sceptical alternative: 537

(16-9) Hand-3*: This is not a super-fake-hand.

A super-fake-hand is a non-hand that looks like a hand and has magical powers that prevent observers from gaining independent evidence that it is not a real hand. It eliminates all evidence of super-fake-hands and related sceptical hypotheses.

Suppose that we are not justified in denying that 'Moore' is super-fake-handed (Hand-3*). We know that Moore will raise his arms, thus leading to three (exhaustive) scenarios: 537

(16-10) A: He will not appear to have hands. 538

B: He will appear to have hands, but we will have some reason to suspect the appearance is deceptive.

C: He will appear to have hands, and we will have no reason to suspect the appearance is deceptive.

Then we have the following:

(16-11) i. A ⇒ we are justified in believing Hand-3*.

ii. B ⇒ we are justified in believing Hand-3*.

iii. [C & dogmatism] ⇒ we are justified in believing Hand-3*.

That is, if we assume dogmatism, we know in advance that regardless of how things appear, we will be justified in believing Hand-3*.

Next, consider:

(16-12) Meta-justification Principle: If *S* is justified in believing that he will be justified in believing *P*, then he is already justified in believing *P*. 538

Remark 1. We skip the complex cases involving this principle. 539

Applying this principle, we can say: we are justified in believing Hand-3* even before Moore raises his arms. But this contradicts the initial stipulation that we were not justified in advance in believing Hand-3*. 538

To review the dialectical situation: assuming that we are justified in believing dogmatism, we are justified in believing Hand-3*, whatever our evidence is upon Moore's raising his arms. But then we are justified in believing Hand-3* in advance, which contradicts our stipulation. So: we are not justified in believing dogmatism. And since dogmatism is an *a priori* view—that is, we don't expect to receive any empirical evidence to substantiate it—it is true only if we are justified in believing it. And since we aren't, it must be false. 540

BOOTSTRAPPING. There is a curious consequence of dogmatism. Suppose I am asked to take a colour-vision test, and all I am doing is writing down this: 543

(16-13) Track record: This card appears to be red, and it is red; this card appears to be blue in color, and it is blue … 548

From this I logically infer:

(16-14) No errors: My color experiences have matched the actual colour of each of the many cards that I have viewed.

And then I take this to confirm the hypothesis:

(16-15) Reliability: My colour vision is reliable.

But all of this is absurd. I have collected no inductive evidence for my vision. Of course, things would have been different had the card colour were independently *announced*, whereby I could match this with my introspective judgement. 543

Yet, as a dogmatist, I engage in a procedure exactly like the one just skecthed. Even if I have no antecedent reason to believe that my vision is reliable, I can collect a body of evidence to show

that things are as they appear to be. Then I can use that body of evidence to support the inductive hypothesis (16-15).

Now Pryor defended dogmatism by putting forth this: 544

(16-16) Disconfirmability: If we know that a certain test cannot yield disconfirmation of our hypothesis, then no result of the test can confirm the hypothesis either.

But actually, this works against the dogmatist. It turns out that he is committed to the rejection of (16-16). 548
For, according to the dogmatist, no test can yield a *dis*confirmation of (16-15). If appearances are 546
my only guide to reality, then it's impossible to claim that things are *not* as they appear to be. And
therefore, if the principle (16-16) is accepted, then we can't move to the No Errors step (16-14). And if 548
this principle is sound, as Pryor suggested it was, then dogmatism forces me into a bad procedure of
confirmation.

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