Four+1 Worries for Safety (handout)

Julien Dutant <julien.dutant@unige.ch>

October 8, 2008

1 Safety

1.1 Basic formulation and advantages

Basic safety S knows that p iff it could not have easily been the case that: S believes p and not-p.

(BS) $\Box_C(Bp \rightarrow p)$

As a necessary condition on knowledge, safety:

- Captures the anti-luck intuition (*e.g.* solves lucky guesses and lotteries)
- Solves Gettier cases (like sensitivity). *Exs:* Gettier's Brown in Barcelona; Lehrer's Havit.
- Avoids counterexamples to sensitivity. *Exs*: Vogel's garbage chute, induction.
- Does not have sceptical consequences (unlike sensitivity and contextualism)
- Does not violate epistemic closure (unlike sensitivity)
- Seems to avoid the generality problem (however, see Williamson (2000, 149) and Sosa (2002))

1.2 Comments on the formulations of safety

(1) One could not easily have been wrong in a similar case. (2) One could not easily have been wrong about p. (3) One would not believe p unless p was true. (4) In all close worlds, if one believes p then p. (5) In most close worlds, if one believes p then p.

- Subject-centered (1, 2) *vs.* belief-centered (3,4,5)
- p-centered (2,3,4,5) *vs.* non p-centered (1)
- subjonctive conditionals (3), easy possibility (1-2), close worlds (4-5)
- strong (4) *vs*. weak (5)

Is "closeness" p- or Bp-relative?

- Suppose: $p\Box \rightarrow q$ iff for all p-worlds closer to the first not-p world, q holds. Then the close worlds relevant to evaluating $Bp\Box \rightarrow p$ depend on Bp (the more stubborn the belief, the largest the "close" area). Epistemic closure likely to fail.
- Closeness is relative to each world of evaluation. (The actual world for non-embedded uses of "know".) Williamson (2000, 149)

Formally: $\Box_C(Bp \rightarrow p)$ involves a non-transitive accessibility relation: $\Box_C p$ does not entail $\Box_C\Box_C p$.
Note: we will assume $\Box p \rightarrow \Box_C p$. Necessity is stronger than "easy" necessity.

2 Five Worries for Safety

(1)-(3) against sufficiency; do not obviously require methods. (4)-(5) against necessity; obviously require methods.

2.1 Fake-barn-style cases

Fake sheep Arthur is a sheep: Sa. Two close possibilities of error: Bob, the kid dress as a sheep, stands where Arthur actually is; or the subject is looking in a slightly different direction and sees Bob instead of Arthur. In both cases: $\Diamond_C(BSb \wedge \neg Sb)$

Suppose additionally that a is necessarily a sheep: $\Box Sa$. Then $\Box_C(BSa \rightarrow Sa)$.

The problem occurs as soon as p is a necessity or a close necessity. Yet the problem is not just the necessary-truth limitation of safety. It is that not all relevant possibilities of error are taken into account.

- One way out: use epistemic possibilities and hold $\Diamond_C(\neg Sa)$. Whose epistemic possibilities?
- Another: descriptive individuation of the belief's content.

2.2 Borderline ignorance with vague predicates

Assuming epistemicism about vagueness. (The same holds for basic supervaluationism if 9 is the smallest definitely small number.)

Small number 9 is small: $S9$. A close possibility of error: "small" could have meant small*, and 9 is not small*: $\neg S * 9$. And: $\Diamond_C(BS * 9 \wedge \neg S * 9)$.

Additionally, 9 is necessarily small: $\Box(S9)$. Thus Then $\Box_C(BS9 \rightarrow S9)$.

Here as well we don't just have a necessary-truth problem: the problem is that some close, relevant possibilities of error are not taken into account.

- Same ways out as before.

2.3 Ignorance of necessary truths

If p is necessarily true, then any belief about p is trivially safe (in the basic sense). Yet not every necessary truth is known. Usual answers: (1) safety is *necessary* for knowledge, not *sufficient*, (2) safety is only concerned with *contingent* truths.

But the deep problem here is that basic safety *imposes an assymetric treatement of symmetrical cases*.

Lucky guess-contingent truth. I write down a rule to select numbers, and I ask Alice whether the number on the board, 47, is one selected by the rule I wrote down. Not bothering even to read the rule, Alice makes a wild guess and answers rightly that it is. (The rule I had written down was: "the selected numbers are the prime ones".) Alice's truth: *that* 47 *is selected by the rule I wrote down.*

Lucky guess-necessary truth. I write a number on the board, 47, and ask Bob whether it is prime. Bob makes a wild guess and answers rightly that it is. Bob's truth: *that* 47 *is prime.*

Bad method contingent truth. Same as Alice's case, except that Celia adds the digits of the number on the board, and seeing that the result (11) is prime, she rightly answers yes.

Bad method necessary truth. Same as Bob's case, except that Dan adds the digits of the number on the board, and seeing that the result (11) is prime, he rightly answers yes.

- *The cases are symmetric*: Alice and Bob fail to know because just guess; Celia and Dan fail to know because they use a bad method.

- *Basic safety imposes an assymetry*: Alice and Celia fail to know because their beliefs are unsafe, Bob and Dan fail to know for some other reason. ($\Box p \rightarrow \Box_C(Bp \rightarrow p)$.)

Symmetry presumption Whatever condition C on knowledge Bob fails to satisfy, Alice fails to satisfy too. *Toy example:* C = justification.

Dilemma: under-generalization or over-determination.

1. *Under-generalization*. Basic safety is a special case of C. So basic safety will be made redundant by it.

2. *Over-determination*. Basic safety is a condition on knowledge independent from C, but it is not what explains ignorance in those cases. That basic safety also predicts ignorance in Alice's and Celia's case is somehow an accident. So basic safety cannot be motivated by cases of lucky guesses and bad methods anymore.

Epistemic realm motivation. Underlying motivation for the assymetry: necessary truths belong to a special epistemic realm, *e.g.* logic and mathematics. But that's false: not all necessary truths are *a priori*.No presumption that empirical necessities / contingencies are subject to different epistemic conditions.

- that fruit is yellow *vs*. that fruit is a lemon
- that tree is small *vs.* a tree of that size is small
- that apple is red *vs.* an apple of that colour is red

2.4 Evidential luck cases

Granny's cat Granny leaves some food outside for the cat to eat every night. Tonight (and unusually) she watched the cat eating it; if she hadn't done so, the local stray dog would have eaten it.

Nozick's (1984) Grandmother case.

There is a close possibility in which Granny does not watch the cat, and she falsely believes that the cat eats the food: $\Diamond_C(Bp \wedge \neg p)$. Therefore Granny belief does not satisfies basic safety. Yet she knows.

1. *Solution 1: amend the closeness relation*. Only worlds where Granny watches the cat are close.

2. *Solution 2: amend safety.* Introduce a same-method requirement (Williamson, 2000, 149): true beliefs is required only at worlds where Granny watches the cat.

Both solutions invoke methods, only the first hides it in the closeness relation.

2.5 Closure

Sosa (1999, 147): basic safety does not satisfy epistemic closure.

If S safely believes p and $p \rightarrow q$, that does not guarantee that S safely believes q. Suppose that if S didn't believe p, S would believe q nevertheless, on quite different grounds. *Ex:* Comesaña's (2005) Sick Patient.

S safely believes q only if S believes q on the basis of the two safe beliefs.

3 Generalized safety

We're saddled with methods to solve (4) and (5). Suggestion: use them to solve (1)-(3) as well.

3.1 Two Wrong Solutions

Same-Method Safety A belief that p by S is safe if and only if S would not believe that p on the same basis without it being so that p. (Pritchard, 2005, 163)

Solves (4)-(5) but not (1)-(2)-(3) because it only looks at p-worlds.

Similar-content safety S's belief that Fa is safe iff for all close worlds w, close predicate F^*, and close object a^*: $BF^*a^* \rightarrow F^*a^*$.

Needs a method qualification. *Ex:* 123+42 computed correctly but not 123+48.
What are the relevant a^*s and F^*s? *Suggestion:* Those would could have been produced by the same method.

3.2 Methods Safety

S knows p only if S believes p on the basis of a method which could not easily have supported a false belief.
Let "Bmp" state that S believes p on the basis of m:

Methods safety S's belief that p on the basis of m is safe iff $\Box_C \forall p^* (Bmp^* \rightarrow p^*)$

Cashes out Sosa's (1999) "reliable indication" requirement?
Has all the advantages of basic safety but the last one. *Suggestion*: it's sufficient for knowledge.

4 Objections and replies

Close to Goldman's (1986) reliabilist account of knowledge (local infallibility + global reliability).

- Standard anti-externalism objections. *Reply*: standard externalist replies.
- Generality problem. *Reply*: methods can be both more basic *orde essendi* and derived *orde cognoscendi*.
- Harman's (1973) unknown misleading evidence: tricky individuation of methods?
- Neta and Rohrbaugh's (2004) and Comesaña's (2005) counterexamples involving non-salient luck. *Reply*: contextualism about close possibilities.

References

Juan Comesaña. Unsafe knowledge. *Synthese*, 146(3):395–404, 2005. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11229-004-6213-7. URL http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11229-004-6213-7.

Alvin I. Goldman. *Epistemology and Cognition*. Harvard University Press, 1986.

Gilbert Harman. *Thought*. Princeton University Press, 1973.

Ram Neta and Guy Rohrbaugh. Luminosity and the safety of knowledge. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 85(4): 396–406, 2004.

Duncan Pritchard. *Epistemic Luck*. Oxford University Press, November 2005. ISBN 0199229783. URL http://www.amazon.ca/exec/obidos/redirect?tag=citeulike09-20&path=ASIN/0199229783.

Ernest Sosa. How to defeat opposition to moore. In James Tomberlin, editor, *Philosophical Perspectives*, volume 13, pages 141–53. 1999. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0029-4624.33.s13.7. URL http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0029-4624.33.s13.7.

Ernest Sosa. Tracking, competence, and knowledge. In Paul Moser, editor, *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

Timothy Williamson. *Knowledge and its Limits*. Oxford University Press, 2000.