PHIL 110A
Week 3: Reliability & Induction
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Reliabilism

Coherentism

Skepticism about induction

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I THINK THEREFO

search ID: pkrn485

1

Inference

Deductive: All cats meow. Max is a cat. Therefore, Max meows.

Inductive: All the cats I have seen meow. Therefore, all cats meow.

Abductive: There's a meow sound. Cats make meow sounds. Therefore, maybe there's a cat.

2

Reliabilism

Foundationalism doesn't work, because (a) indubitable beliefs are rare and (b) we can't derive the rest of our knowledge from them.

Reliabilism: You know something if you got it by a reliable process. Reliable = generating true beliefs.

Reliable processes: senses, testimony, inference (deductive, inductive, abductive)

3

Problems with Reliabilism

1. How reliable does a process need to be? Sober assumes necessity, but no processes are perfectly reliable.

2. We want more than reliability: beliefs should be valuable with respect to our interests. Does this make them relative?

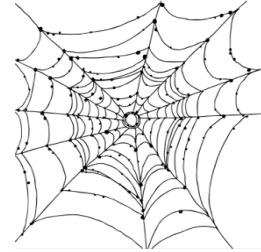3. Beliefs get inferred in groups, not just one by one.

4

Discussion Question

Is reliabilism superior to foundationalism as a theory of knowledge?

5

Coherentism

Coherentism: you know something if it is part of the most coherent overall account.
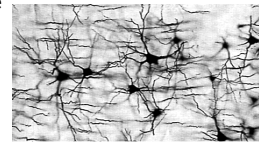
6

Problems with Coherentism

1. What is coherence? How do you calculate it?

2. Beliefs can be highly coherent, but false. E.g. scientology.

7

Reliable coherentism

1. Use neural networks to calculate coherence (Thagard 2000).

2. Don't treat all beliefs as equal: give priority to some that are especially reliable, e.g. observation.

3. Evaluate overall reliability.

8

Hume's Empiricism

Empiricism: knowledge comes from the senses.

Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames!

9

Hume's Skepticism

Do we know that the future will be like the past?

How do we justify induction? Is it ever justified to go from *some* to *all*.

Hume's answer: No. These are just habits, not justified beliefs.

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10

Discussion Question

Why do you believe that the sun will come up tomorrow? Is this belief justified?

11

Justifying Induction

1. Inductive: Principle of the uniformity of nature - the future will be like the past. Problem: circularity.

2. Deductive: No available deductive proof.

3. Abductive: No best explanations.

4. Reliable coherentism: circularity is ok.

Next week: practical justification.

12