PHIL 110A
Week 4. Justifying Knowledge
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Reliable coherentism

Aims of knowledge

Applications:
  law
  induction
  math

Goals of Knowledge
1. Truth: describe the world as it is.
2. Explanation: say why things happen.
3. Usefulness: practical applications.

Normative procedure (Thagard 2010): adopt practices that are best at accomplishing these goals. Compare Sober: recipe.

Thinking about Knowledge

Abandon:
  dogmatism
  infallibility
  certainty
  permanence
  foundations

Embrace:
  moderate skepticism
  fallibility (mistakes)
  risk
  change
  reliability & coherence

Accomplishing Knowledge

Normative procedure: adopt practices that are best at accomplishing the goals of truth, explanation, usefulness.

Choices: skepticism, foundationalism, reliabilism, coherentism, reliable coherentism, pragmatism.

Use generally reliable processes (senses, memory, testimony, inference) evaluated for overall coherence.
Application to Law
Fairly reliable processes: eyewitness observation, instruments (e.g. blood, DNA), testimony, legal principles.
Reach overall coherence judgment about whether someone is guilty.
Keep in mind goals of legal system: don’t convict the innocence.

Application to Induction
Fairly reliable processes: observation, experiments, statistical inference, causal theories.
Reach overall coherence judgment about whether something is generally true.
Keep in mind goals of induction: true generalizations that are also useful.

Application to Abduction
Fairly reliable processes: observation, experiments, statistical inference, hypothesis evaluation.
Reach overall coherence judgment about which hypotheses are the best explanation of the evidence.
Keep in mind goals of explanation as well as truth and usefulness.

Application to Mathematics
Fairly reliable processes: number sense, observation, theorem proving, computer simulations.
Reach overall coherence judgment about which mathematical principles are true.
Keep in mind goals of mathematics: truth, usefulness, explanation?