Brueckner - E=K and perceptual knowledge

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Brueckner's main concern: that TW's theory of evidence forces him to say plainly false things about perceptual learning.

My notes from the relevant portion of KAIL:

9.2 – Bodies of Evidence

When is *e* evidence for the hypothesis *h*, for a subject S? Two conditions:

1. *e* should speak in favor of *h*

   (a) *e* should raise the probability of *h*. TW takes this to mean that the probability of *h* conditional on *e* should be higher than the unconditional probability of *h*; in symbols, $P(h \mid e) > P(h)$[1,2]

2. *e* should have some kind of creditable standing.

What kind of probability is *P*?

It's not a priori

- whether *e* raises the probability of *h* depends on background information[3]

- *e* shouldn't be 'built into the background information' either, though, since in that case $P(e) = 1$, so $\frac{P(h|e)}{P(h)} = 1$ so it's not the case that $P(h \mid e) > P(h)$, so by (1) above it's not the case that *e* is evidence for *h*

What's the function of (2)?

> *e* may raise the probability of *h* in the sense that $P(h \mid e) > P(h)$ even if S knows that *e* is false or has no idea whether *e* is true; but then, for S, *e* would not be evidence for *h*. That is why we need the second condition, that *e* should have a creditable standing. A natural idea is that S has a body of evidence, for use in the assessment of hypotheses; that evidence should include *e*. The probability distribution *P* is informed by some but not all of S's evidence. (187)

TW's proposed definition of evidence:

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[1] NB: conditional probabilities are not conditionals: $P(h \mid e) \neq p \rightarrow q$. TW is following the standard view, on which conditional probabilities are defined in terms of unconditional probabilities: $P(h \mid e) = P(h\&e)/P(e)$ when $P(e) > 0$, and undefined otherwise.

[2] NB: this way of thinking requires that evidence *e* be a proposition: since $P(h \mid e)$ is only defined when both *h* and *e* are propositions. See below.

[3] TW doesn't actually say why this implies that *P* shouldn't be a priori, but presumably it's because *P*'s sensitivity to background information makes $P(h \mid e) > P(h)$ contingent on that background information, and since it's not a priori whether that background information obtains, it's not a priori that $P(h \mid e) > P(h)$ (even when it's true)

EV *e* is evidence for *h* for S if and only if S's evidence includes *e* and
$P(h \mid e) > P(h)$.

Consequence:

> *e* is evidence for *h* only if *e* is evidence for itself. For if $P(h \mid e) > P(h)$,
> then $P(e)$ is neither 0 (otherwise $P(h \mid e)$ is ill defined) nor 1 (otherwise
> $P(h \mid e) = P(h)$). Hence $P(e \mid e)$ is well defined with the value 1, which
> is greater than $P(e)$, so *e* is evidence for *e*,[4] by EV with '*e*' substituted
> for '*h*' (187)

Objection: isn't is viscously circular for *e* to be evidence for itself?

TW: circular, but not *viscously* circular

- Assuming E=K, in order for *e* to be evidence in the first place it
  must be known, and knowing that *e* might not be easy. So al-
  though it's trivially easy to have evidence for *e* once I have evi-
  dence for *e*, obtaining that evidence in the first place might not be
  trivial

- on this theory *h* is evidence for itself, but when asked why I be-
  lieve *h*, I would never reply 'because *h*'. But that's no problem:
  we don't do so because it's conversationally inappropriate, not
  because it's not true. It is true.

  - to illustrate the point, TW cites Grice's example:

    > In answer to the question 'Who lives in the same house as Mary?'
    > it would be conversationally inappropriate to cite Mary herself;
    > nevertheless, it is true that Mary lives in the same house as
    > Mary (Grice 1989). The question 'What is the evidence for *h*?'
    > is often a challenge to the epistemic standing of *h* and related
    > propositions. In some contexts the challenge is local, restricted to
    > propositions derived in some way from *h*. In other contexts the
    > challenge is global, extending to all propositions with the same
    > kind of pedigree as *h*. In answering the question, one is expected
    > not to cite propositions under challenge, since their status as
    > evidence has been challenged. Thus when the question 'What
    > is the evidence for *e*?' is meant as a challenge to the epistemic
    > standing of *e*, one is expected not to cite *e* in response. (187-8,
    > emphasis added)

- Objection: maybe it's inappropriate to treat *e* as evidence for itself
  because *e* is not evidence for itself. [This part is important, so I'll
  quote TW at length]:

> The idea would be that the question 'What is the evidence for e?',
> meant as a challenge, creates a context in which e falls outside the
> extension of 'S's evidence'. But that seems too drastic. For example,

[4] BTM: suppose *e* is a logical truth
that I know. Then by E=K, *e* is part of
my evidence. Problem: probabilistic
coherence requires that all logical truths
have probability = 1, if $P(e) = 1$ then
there is no *h* s.t. $P(h \mid e) > P(h)$. In
other words, on TW's account, *e* is part
of my evidence, but by condition (1)
above, *e* isn't evidence *for anything*.
What could it mean for something
to be evidence that isn't evidence for
something?

suppose that a doctor asks you, 'Do you feel a tingling sensation?' and you answer, 'No.' **If you were asked 'What is your evidence for the proposition that you do not feel a tingling sensation?', you might be at a loss to answer, for the question seems to expect some further evidence for the proposition, and you might look in vain for such further evidence.** Nevertheless, when we assess the status of your claim that you did not feel a tingling sensation on your evidence, we do not exclude that proposition from your evidence. Its presence justified your claim...The point is just that challenging e by itself is not enough to exclude e from the extension of 'evidence'. (188; emphasis added)

BTM:

TW is relying on a suppressed premise here: that all evidence is propositional. Suppose that's right: then in order to find evidence for the proposition 'I'm feeling a tingling sensation' you'd need to find *some other proposition*. His point is that there is no other proposition that you could cite in this case.

But why think that the evidence must be a proposition? Typically, when I come to believe that I'm feeling a tingling sensation, my evidence is *the tingling sensation itself*. We would normally say that tingling sensations, and experiences more broadly, are not propositions, although many (all?) of them have propositional contents or accuracy conditions or something like that.

If that's right then I have evidence for the proposition 'I'm feeling a tingling sensation' which is distinct from that proposition, so I won't 'be at a loss' about how to answer the question 'what is your evidence that you feel a tingling sensation'. Furthermore, we generally don't ask for evidence that one is having a particular sensation (e.g. a tingle), so it would be inappropriate to further enquire what my evidence is that I feel a tingle.

TW will address the question of whether all evidence is propositional in §9.5 below.

[end BTM]

Important to distinguish between two nearby questions:

1. what is it for evidence e to support hypothesis h?

2. what is the nature of e? What counts as evidence?

EV is an attempt to answer question (1), and it might need revision.

TW's real concern is with (2).

It's an important question: if we can't get clear about what evidence is, then it's impossible to get clear about what evidence one has in a given scenario, so it's impossible to get clear on what one's evidence supports.[5]

We also need a theory of the nature of evidence in order to address questions of the underdetermination of theory by data (i.e. evidence): we can't evaluate supervenience claims unless we know what's in the supervenience base.

9.5 – *Evidence as Propositional*

[Picking up after TW's arguments that only propositions can serve the characteristic functions of evidence]

Signpost: This completes TW's positive case that evidence is propositional. Now we turn to his defense against objections. The primary objection is evidence-as-propositions-which-we-grasp account can't vindicate the intuition that perceptual experiences (which are not propositions) are a form of evidence.

TW begins:

> Experiences provide evidence; they do not consist of propositions. So much is obvious. But to provide something is not to consist of it. The question is whether experiences provide evidence just by conferring the status of evidence on propositions. On that view, consistent with E = K, the evidence for an hypothesis h consists of propositions $e_1, ..., e_n$, which count as evidence for one only because one is undergoing a perceptual experience ε. As a limiting case, h might be e_i. The threatening alternative is that ε can itself be evidence for h, without the mediation of any such $e_1, ..., e_n$. Both views permit ε to have a non-propositional, non-conceptual content, but only the latter permits that content to function directly as evidence. (197)

TW contrasts two views of the epistemic role of experiences. Since he tells us that '[t]he question is whether experiences provide evidence just by conferring the status of evidence on propositions', presumably the two views are characterized by the way they answer 'the question'.

Annoyingly, TW complicates things by considering whether the evidence for h consists of propositions $e_1, ..., e_n$, which are themselves evidence due to ε. But he allows that h might be one of the e_i's, in which case we're just considering whether e_i is evidence due to ε. The evidential relationship between the e_i's and h when h is not one of the e_i's is inferential, and inferential support between propositions

[5] Of course since TW thinks that E=K and that KK is false, he already thinks that one is not always in a position to now what one's evidence supports. Still, if he could establish that E=K, then with an answer to (1) we would be in a position to know what one's evidence would support in counterfactual situations, *when the descriptions of those situations includes a specification of what one knows*.

isn't what's at issue here, so let's ignore h and instead focus on the relationship between ε and e_i.

View 1: e_i 'count[s] as evidence for one only because one is undergoing perceptual experience ε'

View 2: the non-conceptual content of ε is itself evidence for e_i

One possible objection to View 1 is that the richness of experience often seems to outstrip our visual and conceptual resources, so the needed propositions just aren't available to do the necessary work.

TW: obviously, it's not always possible to *convey* our perceptual evidence in a straightforward way; often we rely on demonstratives. Example: I have a visual experience of a mountain, and it provides evidence for a belief about the shape of the mountain. Which shape? Hard to say, other than '*that* shape' (pointing at mountain).

But just because it's hard to convey a content doesn't mean that there isn't one, or that one hasn't grasped it: maybe you have to have the visual experience yourself in order to grasp the propositional constituent denoted by 'that shape'. The resulting proposition will be contingent and a posteriori, just as one would expect from perceptual knowledge.

Second possible objection to View 1: in favorable circumstances, when I have an experience with content *there's snow*, I come to know *there's snow*, so that proposition is part of my evidence. But what's my evidence when conditions are unfavorable, e.g. when I'm a BIV? In that case there isn't any snow, so I can't know that there's snow, so by BIV *there's snow* can't be part of my evidence.

TW: In that case you could still know *it appears that there's snow*, which would provide some evidence for *there's snow*, even though *there's snow* is cannot be knowledge or evidence because it's false. NB: in this case you wouldn't know that *there's snow* isn't part of your evidence, but that's just an instance of KK failure.

Objection to the response to the second objection: what about animals and small children who can't grasp the distinction between appearance and reality? If you lack the concept *appearance* then you can't know that *things appear thusly*, so you can't have evidence in the form of propositions about how things appear. So what evidence does a squirrel-BIV obtain from their perceptual experience?

TW: the squirrel-BIV might have propositional evidence such as *the situation is like this* (mentally pointing). Or she might have no evidence at all (TW thinks this is the case for very simple creatures).

[BTM] Some lingering issues:

1. Variant of the cases: Jeffrey's case of viewing a cloth under poor lighting, distributing your confidence between *it's blue, it's green,* and *it's violet*. Here the experience doesn't outstrip our conceptual resources, but neither does it provide any of those propositions as evidence (in TW's sense): in that case $P(blue)$ (etc) would have to be 1, which it isn't. Can TW's responses handle this case?

2. What's the criticism of View 2, that non-conceptual content plays some evidential role? Is the falsity of View 2 supposed to follow from the central-functions-of-evidence argument at the beginning of the section?

3. What's the substantive difference between 'ε is evidence for e' and 'ε makes e evidence'? On the former, ε is evidence, and since ε is an experience and not a proposition, TW must deny that this is possible. But what does it even mean to say the latter — that 'ε makes e evidence' — if not that ε is evidence for e? Is something important at stake, or are we just playing games with the word 'evidence' here?

Brueckner's objection from §2

My criticism of Williamson on perceptual knowledge in the earlier paper concerned a case like the favorable mountain case [the good case, where you really do see the mountain]. Consider my belief of the proposition that my cup is red (call this proposition C). Suppose that this is an instance of perceptual knowledge. So my belief of C is justified. There will thus be evidence e, which serves to justify my belief of C, and e will be a true proposition which I believe. Which proposition? Since we are in a favorable case, e will not be a proposition about how things appear. Such propositions are reserved for their role in unfavorable cases of illusion and hallucination. Further, my perceptual experiences of the cup do not constitute the evidence e in question, since these experiences are not propositions and so cannot be justifiers. Taking our lead from the favorable mountain case, we are forced to conclude that e is some proposition like M, the proposition that the mountain is that shape. Which proposition, though? Well, presumably the proposition that the cup is red. This proposition is C itself. My belief of C is justified in virtue of, or justified by, my belief of

the evidential proposition e. Since e = C, my belief of C is justified in virtue of, or is justified by, my belief of C! This is clearly an unacceptable view of the structure of perceptual justification and knowledge. (6-7)

What's the actual argument here?

According to AB, TW (in a previous paper) takes the argument to be that TW is committed to

(K) My belief that my cup is red is justified in virtue of my knowledge that my cup is red

which entails

(J) my belief that my cup is red is justified in virtue of my belief that my cup is red

(J) is implausible, so (K) must be false.

How might that argument go? Here's one possible reconstruction:

1. suppose (K): My belief that my cup is red is justified in virtue of my knowledge that my cup is red

2. knowledge *just is* belief + some further conditions

3. so, my knowledge that my cup is red *just is*, in part, my belief that the cup is red

4. so, anything justified by my knowledge *just is* justified by my belief that the cup is red

5. so, (J) my belief that my cup is red is justified in virtue of my belief that my cup is red

Is that a bad argument?

- It's dialectically ineffective against TW, who rejects (2). From TW's perspective the argument is question begging.

- But, plausibly (3), (4), and (5) follow from (1) and (2). If so, and if (2) is true, the ¬(5) implies ¬(1).

AB denies that this is his argument, but he's not entirely clear about what the argument is supposed to be.

Look at AB's dead-horse beating (his second example of the putative problem):

Suppose that I am justified in believing that Miles is sad and that my evidence is that he is crying in a characteristic way. Then I am justified in believing that Miles is sad in virtue of, or because of, my belief of my evidential justifier?namely, the proposition that Miles is crying in a characteristic way. Similarly, suppose that I am justified in believing that my cup is red and that my evidence is e. Then I am justified in believing that my cup is red in virtue of, or because of, my belief of my evidential justifier–namely, e. If e = C (the proposition that my cup is red), then I am justified in believing that my cup is red in virtue of, or because of, my belief that my cup is red. *That* is the problem for Williamson?s overall view. (8)

First clue: TW's E=K thesis does not appear in the argument at all. Nor does the world 'knows'. So apparently that's not the source of the problem.

Second clue: the only time a variant of 'knows' appears in the first example is right in the beginning, where it serves to ensure that my belief that p is a justified belief[6]

Possible reconstruction:

1. since my belief that p is justified, I must have evidence in support of p[7]

2. that evidence is a true proposition that I believe[8]

3. the evidence proposition can't be an appearance proposition, since by stipulation we're in a good case

4. so the only candidate proposition is p itself

5. I believe that p (by 2)

6. so, I'm justified in believing p in virtue of, or because of, my belief that p

From TW's perspective, there are several problems with this argument:

- (3) is false: for TW you might have as evidence both p and it appears that p. This is inessential to the overall thrust of the argument.

- (4) is also false: you might have lots of other evidence for p; again inessential.

- Big problem: why think (6) follows from (1)-(5)?

[6] He's assuming that knowledge that p entails justified belief that p; presumably TW would not dispute this.

[7] TW would likely dispute this claim, for reasons we haven't discussed, but that's not entirely clear.

[8] Supported by E=K? Or an independently plausible thesis?

- it's true that believing that p is a necessary condition for justi-
fiably believing that p:[9] knowing that p entails both believing
that p and justifiably believing that p

- but why 'is a necessary condition of' and 'is true in virtue of/
because of' are not the same thing

  * that 2+2=4 is a necessary condition of Houston being in
  Texas, but the latter is not true in virtue of the former

AB provides no rationale for this transition.

Brueckner's argument from §3

> I look at the cup and come to believe C. If I am to be justified in now
> believing C and thus be in a position to know C, I must have some
> evidence that serves to justify the belief. Williamson says that it is
> in virtue of, or because of, my knowledge of C that I am justified in
> believing C. But what is the evidence that generated my knowledge of
> C, enabling that knowledge to serve as the evidential justifier for my
> belief of C? We seem to be missing a step. To put the question another
> way, how did the proposition C come to enter into my total evidence
> and hence attain the status of knowledge? C must have gotten into
> my total evidence as a result of my coming justifiably to believe it on
> the basis of some evidence. But what evidence? Now it looks as if we
> are back to saying that my evidence for believing C is C itself: so I am
> justified in believing C in virtue of, or because of, my belief of C. (8)

TW's response seems the right one to give: knowing doesn't require
evidence; after all, knowledge is *first.* This objection follows from
precisely the sorts of assumptions that TW rejects, so it's question
begging.

BTM: yes, that seems right. But still, maybe those assumptions are
correct. Compare: Moore arguing with the skeptic. Is Moore begging
the question in a problematic way?