

Horowitz 2014: “Epistemic Akrasia”

KEVIN DORST

January 19, 2015

Non-Akrasia Constraint: It can never be rational to have high confidence in something like *P*, but my evidence doesn't support *P*.

Sleepy Detective: Sam is a police detective, working to identify a jewel thief. He knows he has good evidence – out of the many suspects, it will strongly support one of them. Late one night, after hours of cracking codes and scrutinizing photographs and letters, he finally comes to the conclusion that the thief was Lucy. Sam is quite confident that his evidence points to Lucy's guilt, and he is quite confident that Lucy committed the crime. In fact, he has accommodated his evidence correctly, and his beliefs are justified. He calls his partner, Alex. “I've gone through all the evidence,” Sam says, “and it all points to one person! I've found the thief!” But Alex is unimpressed. She replies: “I can tell you've been up all night working on this. Nine times out of the last ten, your late-night reasoning has been quite sloppy. You're always very confident that you've found the culprit, but you're almost always wrong about what the evidence supports. So your evidence probably doesn't support Lucy in this case.” Though Sam hadn't attended to his track record before, he rationally trusts Alex and believes that she is right – that he is usually wrong about what the evidence supports on occasions similar to this one.

Level-Splitters: Sam should maintain his high confidence in both *Lucy is the thief*, and *my evidence doesn't support that*.

Problems for Level-Splitting

- (1) **Moore-paradoxical** quality to believing or asserting, “Lucy is the thief, but my evidence doesn't support that.”

Worry: Principled reason to resist this line. Knowledge norm of assertion or of belief, and/or the BK-principle should suffice.

- (2) **Outsmarting the evidence:** What should he think about his belief? That it is true, but not because his evidence supports it – he got it right, despite the odds!

Make it diachronic: you expect you'll miscalculate; then you get the evidence and (correctly) conclude *P*; say to yourself, “I thought I was going to judge incorrectly, but I must have lucked out!”

Practical akrasia: performing an action that you believe you shouldn't;
Epistemic akrasia: having a belief that you believe you shouldn't.

$$\begin{aligned} K(p \wedge [Pr(p) < \frac{1}{2}]) &\Rightarrow \\ Kp \wedge K[Pr(p) < \frac{1}{2}] &\Rightarrow \\ [Pr(p) = 1] \wedge [Pr(p) < \frac{1}{2}]. & \end{aligned}$$

Assuming, now, that high confidence can warrant using as a premise in reasoning and action.

- (3) "P is true. But all my evidence relevant to P does not support it. It supports *low* confidence in a true proposition, P, and therefore high confidence in a false proposition, $\neg P$. So my evidence is misleading."
- (4) **Irrational practical reasoning:** since high confidence in P, will accept 9:1 odds on it. But when asked why he is so sure the evidence tells in favor of Lucy, he'll say "Oh, I'm not! I'm sure it doesn't tell in favor of her." "So Why are you offering me 9:1 odds?" "Well, I *shouldn't* be offering such strong odds, since the evidence isn't in my favor. But, on the other hand, she *is* the thief. That's what we're betting on, right?"
- Further: rational to send her to jail, but when asked he has to admit that he *shouldn't* do so.
- (5) **Bootstrapping:** After a long series of such cases, Sam will think he has a lot of true beliefs all of which are unsupported by the evidence; this begins to look miraculous. Perhaps, instead, he should use all his true beliefs to bootstrap and believe that he *is* reliable, despite Alex's testimony.
- But this is *level-bridging*. The Level-Splitter has to explain why akrasia is fine in single cases, but not in the long-run.

This can't be right: you can't rationally treat a bet wrt P and a bet wrt whether one's evidence supports P as completely separate.

Worry about using bootstrapping? The thought is that he needs an explanation for why his beliefs are true, and being reliable at assessing the evidence is the most obvious one.

Rejecting the Bridge Principles?

She tries to defend them. I am quite worried about doing this. **But**, can we get the same issues up-and-going under the scope of "It's very likely that..." or "Bizarre possibilities aside..." ?

Another line (from Sophie): even if Sam can't *use* the reasoning [or have the credences?], his evidence still supports doing so.

"If it is implausible that Sam should believe that E is misleading, it is also – and for the same reasons – implausible that his evidence should support it." (735)

Exceptions?

Dartboard case.

Difference 1: Uncertainty about what E supports, vs. uncertainty about what E *is*.

Difference 2: In Sleepy Detective the evidence is truth-guiding, and one knows this; in Dartboard the evidence is **falsity-guiding**, and one knows this.

This is an unusual feature of Dartboard. And it is only because of this unusual feature that epistemic akrasia seems rational in Dartboard. You should think that you should have low confidence in Ring precisely *because* you should think Ring is probably true –

It supports high confidence in Ring iff Ring is false.

and because your evidence is falsity-guiding with respect to Ring. Epistemic akrasia is rational precisely because we should take into account background expectations about whether the evidence is likely to be truth-guiding or falsity-guiding. (738)

In Dartboard you think your evidence is misleading, but it's like a **lottery case**.

We can avoid bootstrapping because, since he knows his evidence is falsity-guiding, positing that his evidence *does* support each P_i is not a good explanation for why he's believing truths.

Not exactly. In lottery case you don't know which proposition it's misleading about, whereas in Dartboard you do.

Puzzlement...

She still accepts the link between evidential probability and credence, in which case I can't see how the case is acceptable. We still run into most of the problems:

- (1) Moorean sentence: "Ring is true, but my evidence doesn't support it."
- (2) "I was sure I would misjudge whether ring was true, but I got it right – despite the evidence!"
- (3) Reasoning to show her evidence is misleading.
- (4) Accept 4:1 odds on Ring; but when asked why, one has to admit that the evidence doesn't support it.

Maybe that's fine, given the assumption that she knows her evidence is misleading! But we'll come back to this.

Moreover, here's an argument that it's not possible for one's evidence to strongly support that *Ring and my evidence strongly supports* \neg Ring:

One knows: \neg Ring \leftrightarrow the probability of Ring is high. Say one has high credence. One knows that this is either rational or irrational, and can reason as follows: "If my high credence is irrational, that's just to say that I should lower it; since the only other possible rational credence is low, I should have low confidence in Ring. If my credence is *rational*, that means that my evidence supports Ring, which implies that Ring is false; so again I should have low confidence in Ring." So by disjunctive syllogism from known premises, you conclude that rationality requires you to have *low* credence in Ring, contrary to our supposition.

Weak credence luminosity: If $Cr(p) \approx 1$, then $K[Cr(p) > \frac{1}{2}]$.

More generally, in this sort of case one is able to "outsmart" one's evidence. Here's Sophie: "You should think that you should have low confidence in Ring precisely *because* you should think Ring is probably true – and because you [know that your] evidence is falsity-guiding with respect to Ring."

So if rational credence goes with evidential probability, then one *can't* have these evidential probabilities.

Problem: your evidence *also* “knows” (entails) that it is falsity-guiding with respect to Ring. So just as *you* can conclude that you ought to have low credence, why wouldn’t this evidence in fact *warrant* low credence, i.e. have a low evidential probability? Which is just to deny that the evidence could have this structure to begin with.