6.1 Believe It or Not (p. 142)

You'll Believe Just Anything … and More

Consider these two statements:

(1) It's Tuesday.
(2) It's raining.

If both of these statements are true, then this statement can't be false:

(3) It's Tuesday and it's raining.

Logicians say that the set of statements consisting of statement (1) and (2) *implies* statement (3). This means that if (1) and (2) were both true, then (3) would have to be true.

Another way of saying the same thing is: The argument with (1) and (2) as premises, and (3) as the conclusion, is *valid*. We discussed logical validity earlier on this website, in the section called "**Defining Logical Validity,**" remember? No? Hmm. Never mind, what you need to know is here, all over again.

Okay, now suppose you believe that it's Tuesday, and you believe that it's raining. Do you therefore automatically believe that it's Tuesday and it's raining? It's hard to see how someone could believe statements (1) and (2), but not believe (3), the statement that is implied by (1) and (2). It's plausible to think that there's a general principle here:

> PRINCIPLE 1: If someone believes all the statements in a set, and if that set implies a further statement S, then that person believes S.

A valid deductive argument is one in which the premises imply the conclusion. It's a peculiarity of valid deductive arguments that they seem not to advance our knowledge significantly. After all, if you already knew that it's Tuesday and that it's raining, wouldn't you *already* know (3)? What use, then, would this argument be? An argument, after all, doesn't establish its premises: it's useful only for someone who already believes the premises, and it's used to convince that person of the truth of the conclusion. But that person would already believe the conclusion.

So valid deductive arguments are all, it seems, useless. But this is a very strange thing to think. Have we made a mistake?

Maybe the mistake here is the idea that we automatically believe all the deductive consequences of what we believe. Maybe Principle 1 is false.

Proving that Archibald Is in the Pub

Here is some evidence against Principle 1.

Suppose Archibald, Bernard, and Carlos are identical triplets. You go into the pub and see one of them. Later, I ask you if Archibald was in the pub, and you tell me you don't know; you saw one of the triplets, but you can't tell them apart. I point out to you that we both know the following facts:

(4) At least one of them was in the pub.
(5) Bernard never goes to the pub without Archibald.
(6) Carlos never goes to the pub without another triplet.

You reply, "Okay, but I still don't know if Archibald was in the pub." This is possible, right?

But the set of statements (4), (5), and (6) *implies* statement

(7) Archibald was in the pub.

Can you see why it does?

If you don't see why, consider the following. (Abbreviate the three names 'A,' 'B,' and 'C.') We know by statement (4) that at least one of them was there. There are three possibilities:

(a) It was A you saw.
(b) It was B you saw. But statement (5) tells us that if B was there, A was also there.
(c) It was C you saw. But statement (6) tells us that if C was there, A or B was also there. So either A or B was there. But if B was there, we know by statement (5) that A was also there.

So *whichever* you saw, it follows logically that A was there.

The fact that you believed all the statements in the set {(4), (5), (6)}, but didn't automatically therefore believe (7) shows that it's possible that someone believes everything in a set of statements but not what that set implies. Principle 1 is not always true.

But even though we don't necessarily believe what's implied by our beliefs, it seems clear that we *should*. After all, the truth of a set of statements guarantees the truth of anything they imply.

The same line of reasoning seems to show that anyone who *realized* that a statement was implied by his other beliefs would believe that statement. Seeing that a set implies a statement is seeing that it's impossible that everything in the set be true if the statement were false.

So here are the two plausible principles we have come up with:

PRINCIPLE 2: Everyone should believe what's implied by their beliefs.

PRINCIPLE 3: Everyone does believe what they realize is implied by their beliefs.

But neither of these principles is true either. The reason for this is shown by the Lottery Paradox, explained in "Be Careful What You Believe" (p. 136).

Whaddaya Know?

For a while, most philosophers thought that what it means to say that someone knows something is that (1) that person believes it, (2) that person is justified in believing it, and (3) it's true. Someone can believe something that's not true, of course. But someone can also be *justified* in believing something that's not true. For example, if Fred bought several jars of pickles last night and put them in his cupboard, then he'd be fully justified in thinking this morning that there are plenty of pickles for him there for breakfast. But if, unknown to Fred, pickle-thieves broke into his house last night and stole them, then this justified belief of his would be false.

SOME QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT: Why these three conditions? They're each supposed to be necessary for knowing—that is, if any of them are false, then you wouldn't be said to have knowledge. And the three of them are, together, supposed to be sufficient—that is, if all three of them are satisfied, then you have knowledge. Stop now and imagine cases in which one of the three is false about someone, but the other two are true, and notice that it seems right that in those cases you wouldn't say that the person has knowledge. And imagine cases in which all three apply, and notice that it seems right that in those cases you would say that the person has knowledge.

Whatcha Don't Know

But since 1963, philosophers have been worrying about the adequacy of the account of knowledge as justified true belief. A whole philosophical industry has sprung up trying to fix things up, in response to a very short but extremely important paper published that year.[1] All the paper did was give a couple of examples which indicated that some sort of fixing-up of that account of knowledge was necessary.

Here's a version of one of those examples. Notice first that every statement S implies S or T, no matter what T is. Why? Because if S is true, then S or T has to be true, no matter what T is. (For example, suppose it's raining out. Then it's true that 'It's raining out or pigs can fly.')

Okay, now suppose that Fred, as above, has the justified but false belief that there are plenty of pickles in his cupboard. Now, suppose that everyone believes what's implied by their beliefs. 'There are pickles in the cupboard' implies 'There are pickles in the cupboard or there has been a visit from a pickle burglar.' So Fred believes 'There are pickles in the cupboard or there has been a visit from a pickle burglar.'

It seems pretty clear that if the belief that S is justified, so is the belief that S or T. (After all, if S is justified, that means it appears likely to be true; and that means that S or T is at least that likely, if not more.) So, because Fred's belief that there are pickles in the cupboard is justified, his belief that there are pickles in the cupboard or there's been a visit from a pickle burglar is also justified.

But that belief is also true (because there has, unbeknownst to Fred) been a visit from the pickle burglar.

So if knowledge is justified true belief, then Fred *knows* that there are pickles in the cupboard or there's been a visit from a pickle burglar

That conclusion has to be wrong. Fred has no thought whatsoever about any pickle burglar. So what's gone wrong with this reasoning?

> One possibility is that people don't necessarily believe everything that's implied by their beliefs. Fred's never even thought about a pickle burglar.

Right, but suppose that first thing in the morning, you talked to Fred about the pickle situation. He says he believes there are plenty of pickles in the cupboard; then you ask him to consider the possibility that there's been a visit from a pickle burglar, who's made off with all of them. Fred says he's never heard of a pickle burglar, and that sounds crazy to him, but you

1 Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"*Analysis* 33.6 (June 1963): 121–23.

ask him whether he believes that *either* there are plenty of pickles there *or* there's been a pickle burglar, and now he says, "Sure, I believe that." As we saw above, it might seem that as soon as someone becomes aware that something is implied by one of their beliefs, they believe the other thing also. Maybe not always—but at least, in this case, Fred does believe it.

So now he believes that, and it's justified and true. But still we wouldn't credit him with knowing that. Now what's gone wrong?

Damned if I know what to say about that example.

Wait a minute. How about this? Fred's belief is not justified, and here's why. What he believes is true because of one thing—the visit of the pickle burglar—but he believes it because of a different thing—remembering putting the pickles there.

Well good try, but that won't work either. Here's a story that philosophers have been thinking about a lot, which shows that solution won't work:

Fred loves rural farmland, and he's spent lots of time driving around in all sorts of places admiring it. As a result, of course, he knows a barn when he sees one. So today he's in a bit of countryside where he's never been before. Unknown to him, they're making a movie here, and all over the area, every half-mile or so, they've put up fake barn-façades that look just like real barns from the road. Fred drives into the area, and just by chance, the first structure he sees is the only real barn in the area. Fred says to himself, "That's a nice barn." But he doesn't *know* that it's a barn; his belief is true, but only by accident, since he's in the middle of an area in which he would have misidentified all those façades as barns too. But remember your idea: in this case, the fact that his belief is true, and the fact that he believes it, both are the result of a real barn's being there.[1] Okay, so now what's gone wrong?

Um.

Well, if you're not completely at a loss yet, consider this. The real barn Fred sees is red, and all the barn-façades are some other colour. Had he seen any of the others, he wouldn't have wrongly identified them as a red barn. So when he says to himself, "That's a nice red barn," he's correct, and since he's a good red-barn identifier, even here, he knows it's a red barn. Okay, he knows it's a red barn, and he knows (of course) that every red barn is a barn, but he doesn't know that it's a barn.[2] Isn't that weird?

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1 This widely discussed example is due to Alvin Goldman, "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge," *The Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 771–91.

2 This variation on the Barn Country example is credited to an unpublished lecture by Saul Kripke.

Yeah, well, can we drop this subject now?

Okay, but philosophers with a lot more patience than you have been working on questions like this for years. Just in case you change your mind and want to read more about puzzles like these:

FOR FURTHER READING: The title describes it: *Epistemology: A Beginner's Guide*, by Robert M. Martin (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010).