

What prevents astrologers from using this approach to defend astrology by arguing that the fact that astrological predictions have an excellent track record constitutes good evidence for astrological theory? Nothing prevents astrologers from *saying* such things, although they will presumably be speaking falsely, since astrological predictions have no such excellent track record. Similarly, nothing prevents astrologers from *saying* that astrology meets the strictest methodological standards of natural science, although again they will be speaking falsely. In both cases, there will be excellent evidence that they are speaking falsely, which they will not accept as evidence of that. There is a persistent temptation to assume that a good account of methodology should *silence* astrologers and other cranks, by leaving them in a position where they can find nothing more to say. That assumption is naïve. They always find more to say. Of course an account of methodology should specify respects in which good intellectual practices are better than bad ones. But that does not mean that if devotees of a bad intellectual practice endorse the account, they will abandon the practice; more likely they will convince themselves that their practice triumphantly conforms to its precepts. No methodology is proof against misapplication by those with sufficiently poor judgment.

None of the foregoing arguments provides any guarantee that judgment skepticism is not correct for some types of judgment; “common sense” is sometimes wrong. But if it is accepted in such cases, that should be on the basis of evidence specific to those types of judgment, not on the basis of general skeptical fallacies.

6

Our evidence in philosophy consists of facts, most of them non-psychological, to which we have appropriate epistemic access. Consequently, there is a one-sided incompleteness to descriptions of philosophical methodology, and attempts to justify or criticize it on that basis, if formulated in terms neutral over the extent of that evidence. For instance, in describing some philosophers as believing or having the intuition that P, one fails to specify whether their evidence includes the fact that P.

A simple attempt to justify common sense as a starting point for philosophy on the basis of such a neutral description appeals to the

principle of *Epistemic Conservatism*: one has a defeasible right to one's beliefs, which may be defeated by positive reasons for doubt, but not by the mere absence of independent justification.¹⁹ Thus one's belief that there are mountains in Switzerland gives one the defeasible right to rest arguments on the premise that there are mountains in Switzerland. Whether or not the belief constitutes knowledge, it confers the right.

Our beliefs are what we start from, the boat we find ourselves in. Even if we can progressively replace them, we cannot distance ourselves from all of them at once, for we have nowhere else to stand. Epistemic Conservatism elevates the practical necessity of starting from where one is, wherever that is, to normative status, subject to the proviso on defeaters. Although the principle is not perfectly neutral on the epistemic status of the belief, since the notion of a defeater is epistemologically normative, it is neutral on how much evidence, if any, the subject has. Justifying a philosophical method by appeal only to Epistemic Conservatism ignores crucial epistemological distinctions concerning the relevant beliefs: it is like justifying scientific methodology without giving any information as to what evidence is required in its application. Even if Epistemic Conservatism is true, it is radically incomplete as a basis for an account of the epistemic status of philosophical beliefs.

If philosophical "intuitions" are simply beliefs, they fall within the domain of Epistemic Conservatism. That is less clear if "intuitions" include inclinations to belief. Someone inclined to believe *p* may nevertheless not believe *p*; inclinations conflict. This difference matters for Epistemic Conservatism.

Justin has been brought up to believe that knowledge is equivalent to justified true belief. He is confronted for the first time with a Gettier case. He might have immediately and confidently judged that the subject has justified true belief without knowledge, and abandoned his old belief that knowledge is equivalent to justified true belief. Presumably, Epistemic Conservatism would then have switched sides and started supporting the new belief that knowledge is not equivalent to justified true belief. Instead, Justin is more cau-

¹⁹ See Harman (1986: 29–42) for a defense of epistemic conservatism, and Vahid (2004) for a recent critical survey of its varieties. For simplicity and generality, subtleties in the formulation of the principle have been glossed over.

tious, not wanting to assent too readily to anything tricky. Although he is consciously inclined to judge that the subject has justified true belief without knowledge, he does not immediately give in to that inclination or abandon his ingrained belief that knowledge is equivalent to justified true belief. Does Epistemic Conservatism counsel abandoning his ingrained belief in this situation? If Justin is asked "What reason have you to doubt your analysis?," he cannot answer "The subject in this possible case has justified true belief without knowledge," since he does not yet believe that. He must say something else. The answer "I am inclined to believe that the subject in this possible case has justified true belief without knowledge" would be relevant if the function of the prefix "I am inclined to believe that" were to signal tentative assent to what follows, but Justin's commitment to his analysis inclines him to resist even tentative assent to a putative counterexample. If the function of the prefix "I am inclined to believe that" is instead to report his psychological state of being inclined to believe the proposition expressed by the embedded sentence, as its literal compositional semantics suggests, the relevance of that answer to the original question is far from obvious, for he has not yet assented even tentatively to a counterexample.

Can Epistemic Conservatism be extended to the claim that one has a defeasible right to believe whatever one is inclined to believe? Such an extension is less clearly motivated than the original principle by the idea that, since one must start from where one is, one has at least a defeasible right to be there. A right to be where I am is a right to have the beliefs and inclinations I have. That does not obviously include a right to follow those inclinations to new places, especially when the beliefs I already have imply that those are bad destinations, for example, when the inclinations are to believe things inconsistent with what I currently believe. As Gettier counterexamples show, intuition can be revolutionary as well as conservative. If I currently believe p , I am currently committed to the belief that any inclination to believe something inconsistent with p is an inclination to believe something false. I am not committed to the beliefs I am merely inclined to have in the way I am committed to my current beliefs. I am merely inclined to commit myself to them in that way. After all, a right to be where I am is of limited practical use unless it involves a right to stay where I am, to continue believing, at least for a while, what I currently believe.