In defence of enkratic principles

It has traditionally been thought that epistemic rationality requires that agents match their first-order doxastic attitudes with their related higher-order attitudes. The idea may be articulated in the following enkratic principle:

> **(EP)** Rationality requires that (i) if you believe that a doxastic attitude towards P is warranted, you take that doxastic attitude towards P, and that (ii) if you believe that a doxastic attitude towards P is not warranted, you don't take that doxastic attitude.

Yet, the suggestion that a principle like EP belongs to epistemic rationality has recently come under attack as a result of the formulation of some presumed counterexamples to it (see, for example, Horowitz (2014: 719-25), Williamson (2014), Lasonen-Aarnio (fc: 17-30)), Weatherson (ms: chs: 6 and 8). In defence of the place of EP in epistemic rationality, I will propose an account of its importance in belief-management, and I will discuss the significance of the alleged counterexamples.

I will begin with some clarificatory remarks about my understanding of EP. First, I take EP to be a wide-scope principle: it suggests that a certain combination of attitudes is irrational, and while it indicates that the agent abandons at least one of the two attitudes, it does not make conclusive suggestions about which attitude should be given up. Second, I am interested in a version of EP (and other principles of epistemic rationality) that may guide agents in their epistemic endeavours *from their own perspective*. To use the terminology of Glüer & Wikforss (2015: § 1.2), I take EP to be a norm for (epistemic) action.

I will then move on to defend a claim about the relationship between higher-order and first-order evidence or reasons: the job, as it were, of higher-order evidence is to enable the agent to check the epistemic status of her attitude towards a proposition P by allowing her to assess the epistemic status of the first-order evidence for P. Roughly, when the higher-order evidence matches the first-order evidence—that is, when the higher-order evidence suggests that the first-order evidence is in the right epistemic relation with P—the agent gets a corroboration of the epistemic status of her attitude D. By contrast, when the higher-order evidence does not match the first-order evidence—that is, when the higher-order evidence suggests that the first-order evidence is not in the right epistemic relation with P—the agent gets a prima facie defeater of the epistemic status previously attached to D.

I will contend that, in virtue of the foregoing, a mismatch between first-order and related higher-order attitudes may be taken to give the agent a reason to double-check the epistemic worthiness of her first-order attitude in the first instance, and of the higher-order attitude in second instance. The result of the outlined agent's investigation into the worthiness of her attitudes will determine which, if any, of the mismatching attitudes has to be abandoned. I will maintain that this "move" is crucial in belief-management, and thus that the validity of the principle underlying it is not threatened by the presence of cases where, under inspection, the prima facie defeater does not prove to be resilient enough to become an *ultima facie* defeater.

That will bring us to the discussion of the presumed counterexamples to EP: cases where the investigation prompted by the recognition of a mismatch confirms that both attitudes are supported by the evidence available. I will briefly describe the most famous of such cases—Williamson's (2014)

clock-beliefs—and I will note how they seem to raise a dilemma: either one follows the evidence, and violates EP, or one respects EP and fails to follow the evidence.

While I think that it is worth thinking about the option of withholding on both attitudes (thus respecting EP while taking a temporary step back on the recommendations made by the evidence), I will be willing to concede that it might be rational to disregard EP and hold mismatching attitudes—for example, if the agent is under pressure to take a stand on the relevant propositions.

I will then point out that counterexamples to EP like clock-beliefs rely on a feature of the epistemic circumstances that might be described as *defective*; namely, that the agent is in principle prevented from figuring out what the evidence is exactly. Such a situation is defective in the sense that it's so far removed from the idealized circumstances that served as a backdrop for the very formulation of EP.

I will then suggest that, because of their very nature, principles of epistemic rationality speak to circumstances that are rather idealized, and it would seem partial to argue that a given principle is not in good standing because it fails in situations that differ in some crucial respect from the idealized situations it was designed to address in the first place.

If the foregoing is along the right lines, then for all we have been shown, EP still holds in circumstances that are not defective (in the sense adumbrated above). Moreover, we might expect that no principle of rationality—including the injunction to respect the evidence—is immune from counterexamples, for one could in principle conceive of problematic cases that vary from the relevant idealized situation in some crucial respect.

Abstract References

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