

Knowing and believing

Abstract: 1076 words

An important, largely uncontested starting point in work on the nature of knowing is the entailment thesis. According to the entailment thesis, necessarily, if *s* knows that *p*, *s* believes that *p*.

The entailment thesis is certainly not trivial. When the unconfident examinee, taking herself to be guessing, reliably gives correct dates on the basis of forgotten history lessons, it is not obviously infelicitous to say that she knows that the battle of Hastings was in 1066, though she does not believe it.¹ But folk intuitions differ over such cases, as is evident from recent studies, depending on how thick the salient notion of belief is. And, importantly, if the notion of belief made salient to test subjects is thin enough, the entailment thesis does seem to be supported by folk intuitions.² As things stand, then, we have no clear counterexamples to the entailment thesis.

In my paper, I assume that the entailment thesis is true. My aim, broadly, is to explore the implications of that assumption on how we should think about the nature of knowing, and to argue that these implications give us some reason to take knowing to be a determinate of believing. The plan for the paper is as follows.

In §1 contrast two views about the nature of knowing: the simple and the conjunctive view. On the simple view, for *s* to know that *p* is for *s* to be in some mental state.³ By contrast, on the conjunctive view, for *s* to know that *p* is for *s* to believe that *p*, for *p* to be true, and for some further conjuncts to obtain.

In §2 I ask why the entailment thesis holds: what stops *s* from knowing that *p* without believing that *p*? In the absence of a specific reason, I argue, it would seem strange if we treated the entailment thesis as brute. But, since the conjunctive view can, whilst the simple view cannot, explain why the entailment thesis holds by appeal to the nature of knowing, I suggest that the task of explaining why the entailment thesis holds imposes a special burden on the simple view: a burden to explain why the entailment thesis holds by appeal to the nature of believing.

In §3 I discuss one way of discharging that burden. Williamson (2000, pp.46–47) suggests that for *s* to believe that *p* is for *s* to treat *p* as if she knew that *p*.⁴ Given Williamson's suggestion, we can explain why the entailment thesis holds by appeal to the nature of believing. However, I argue that we should reject Williamson's suggestion.

I begin §3 by introducing my preferred account of treating *p* as if she knew that *p*. On that account, for *s* to treat *p* as if she knew that *p* is for her to be disposed to act as she would be disposed to act if she knew that *p*. With this account in place, I discuss and reject a counterexample to Williamson's suggestion, proposed by McGlynn (2013; 2014). I point to two problems for McGlynn. The first is that his counterexample targets an account of what it is for *s* to treat *p* as if she knew that *p* which, though sketched by Williamson, is not required by Williamson's suggestion. The second, more significant problem for McGlynn is that, if we adopt my preferred account of what it is for *s* to treat *p* as if she knew that *p*, his example does not constitute a counterexample to Williamson's suggestion.

¹ Radford (1966; 1970)

² Rose and Schaffer (2013), Buckwalter et al. (2015)

³ Williamson (2000), Gibbons (2001), Hyman (2015).

⁴ Hyman (2015, p.173) makes a similar suggestion.

But even if McGlynn's counterexample is no good, we should, I argue, reject Williamson's suggestion. My argument turns on a case, familiar from Williamson (2000, p.62), in which a burglar's knowing that there is a diamond in the house is a better predictor of his ransacking the house all night than his believing that there is a diamond in the house. I argue that, if the burglar's knowing is a better predictor of his action than his believing, that is due to the fact that, if the burglar knows, he has dispositions that differ from those he has if he believes. But then, if the burglar believes that there is a diamond in the house, he is not disposed to act as he would be if he knew that there is a diamond in the house. In which case, however, Williamson's suggestion would, mistakenly, have it that the burglar does not believe. Thus, I conclude that Williamson's suggestion should be rejected.

In my final section, §4, I propose an alternative view of the nature of knowing, which not only chimes well with concerns raised by defenders of the simple view, and so will strike them as preferable to the conjunctive view, but also explains why the entailment thesis holds. On this view, for *s* to know that *p* is for *s* to be in a mental state, which is to believing what being scarlet is to being red, that is, which is a determinate of believing.

I begin §4 by discussing the redness thesis, according to which, necessarily, if *x* is scarlet, *x* is red. I suggest that why the redness thesis holds is best explained by appeal to the fact that scarlet is a determinate shade of red, and that we can provide a similar explanation of why the entailment thesis holds by appeal to the fact that knowing is a determinate of believing.

In the remainder of the section, I defend the proposed view against an initial challenge, which arises from remarks by Funkhouser (2006). According to Funkhouser, believing only admits of two determination dimensions, content and confidence, since only those dimensions are relevant to folk psychology. But, given this, and that knowing need not differ from believing along those dimensions, knowing cannot be a determinate of believing. Pace Funkhouser, and by appeal to a variation on the burglar case familiar from §3, however, I argue that a third dimension of believing *is* relevant to folk psychology: epistemic status. And, I argue that once we allow for this determination dimension of believing that *p*, there is no *prima facie* ban on treating knowing as a determinate of believing.

In conclusion, the aim of this paper has been to suggest that, given the task of explaining why the entailment thesis holds, we have some reason to take knowing to be a determinate of believing.

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