

Knowledge and Reality, Lecture 25

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Racial Misperceptions

Pautz's Criticisms

Big Picture

- There are a lot of racial misperceptions.

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- These are downstream of widely shared racial (well, racist) beliefs that are widely shared in the community.
- At least in many (most?) cases, there is enough individual culpability in acquiring or maintaining these background beliefs that the perceptions are not well-founded.

Racial Misperceptions

Note how many, and how varied, the misperceptions at the start of the chapter are.

- They include seemingly innocuous things like age.

Why So Many

Siegel is responding to a (possible) criticism that some of these misperceptions might be grounded in accurate beliefs about racial disparities.

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- But in some of the experiments, it's hard to see what beliefs about the world could make the beliefs about ages justified.

Minimal Connections

The range of experiments also helps respond to another kind of concern.

- Imagine that a person has developed a kind of association between 'black' and 'dangerous' like the association between 'salt' and 'pepper'.

Minimal Connections

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- That looks pretty dubious morally, arguably worse than on Siegel's positive view, but it's not obviously within the range of epistemic evaluation.

Minimal Connections

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Siegel's theory is that perceptions are irrational because they are bad inferences.

- Whatever inferences are, they are richer than the connection between 'salt' and 'pepper'.
- So she needs to rule out the possibility that there is the same kind of connection here.

Minimal Connections

I was a little unsure why the association picture would fail to explain most of these experimental results.

- But it's really hard to see how it helps with the age test.

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- But it's really hard to see how it helps with the age test.
- And more generally, having a broader range of data helps to make it harder for an opponent.

Testimony

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- They argue that the inferences are nonetheless rational (or well-founded) because the false beliefs were formed in a reasonable way.

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- They argue that the inferences are nonetheless rational (or well-founded) because the false beliefs were formed in a reasonable way.
- And that reasonable way is testimony from trusted sources.

Testimony

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In fact, she expressly rejects it.

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- It is what we might call the transfer model of testimony.
- Testimony only ever transfers the rationality/reasonableness/well-foundedness of a belief from speaker(s) to hearer(s).

Testimony

There is one defence Siegel could offer here, but does not.
In fact, she expressly rejects it.

- So if the initial beliefs are ill-founded, as they are here, so will the subsequent beliefs be.

Testimony

Siegel rejects the transfer model because of the example of the well-meaning mother.

- A child is entitled to trust their mother's safety advice, even if it turns out to be false and ill-founded.

Contrasts

What are the contrasts between this case and casually absorbing racist beliefs?

1. The mother is well-meaning and has the child's best interests at heart.

Contrasts

What are the contrasts between this case and casually absorbing racist beliefs?

1. The mother is well-meaning and has the child's best interests at heart.
2. The racist beliefs require poor maintenance to be sustained.

Contrasts

The first of these is not particularly compelling.

- For one thing, what really matters is whether the person seems well-meaning, not whether they are.

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The first of these is not particularly compelling.

- For one thing, what really matters is whether the person seems well-meaning, not whether they are.
- For another, it isn't clear that racists spreading racist beliefs to people like them are not well-meaning, in the sense of trying to improve (by their lights) the well-being of their audience.

Contrasts

What about the second of these?

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- It seems fairly contingent at best that the belief requires poor maintenance.
- Someone who grows up in a very homogenous (and racist) community won't have much opportunity to do any useful maintenance.

Vigilance

A better model might be that the person who simply absorbs racist beliefs is (in most realistic situations) not going to be particularly vigilant.

- And that might be a difference with the case of the misleading mother.

Racial Misperceptions

Pautz's Criticisms

Case 1

- Person expects to see a red round thing when they enter the room, for no good reason at all.

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- Person expects to see a red round thing when they enter the room, for no good reason at all.
- When they enter the room, they hallucinate a tomato, because of this hallucination.
- Despite knowing they had this expectation, they believe there is a tomato there.

Case 2 (Pautz's Case)

- Just like case one, except person forgets that they had this expectation.

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- Just like case one, except person forgets that they had this expectation.
- They have no reason at all to think they are hallucinating.
- They also believe there is a tomato in the room.

Pautz's Arguments

Two claims really, that are worth separating.

1. It is intuitively obvious that the belief is reasonable in this case.

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Two claims really, that are worth separating.

1. It is intuitively obvious that the belief is reasonable in this case.
2. If you have a reason to believe something, and no reason to reject it, you should believe it.

Forgetting

- The second argument seems too strong as it stands.
Example: A bill (call it Bill) is being debated in Congress.
- Person believes that Democrats support it on very weak evidence.

Forgetting

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Example: A bill (call it Bill) is being debated in Congress.

- Person believes that Democrats support it on very weak evidence.
- Next day person has forgotten their evidence, but not their belief, and learns Republicans support Bill.

Forgetting

The second argument seems too strong as it stands.

Example: A bill (call it Bill) is being debated in Congress.

- Person concludes Democrats and Republicans have same view on Bill.

Forgetting

This seems maybe not particularly reasonable.

- It would be something like epistemic laundering if it were reasonable.

Forgetting

This seems maybe not particularly reasonable.

- It would be something like epistemic laundering if it were reasonable.
- But also there's nothing internal to Person *now* that would tell them they are being unreasonable.

Forgetting

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- If someone is being unreasonable, they could figure out that they are being unreasonable by careful introspection.

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Forgetting

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- If someone is being unreasonable, they could figure out that they are being unreasonable by careful introspection.
- In Siegel's cases, that's impossible.
- But maybe it's impossible in forgetting cases.

Evil Demons

This case is, I think, the core of Pautz's criticism of Siegel.

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This case is, I think, the core of Pautz's criticism of Siegel.

- Start with a case that Siegel would describe as hijacked experience.
- After 30 seconds, without the phenomenal feel changing, it becomes a case of evil demon deception.
- Does it become more reasonable to trust appearances when that happens?

Evil Demons

Imagine that the person does trust the appearances all along.

- Siegel says that they are being rational before the demon turns up, but irrational afterwards.

Evil Demons

Imagine that the person does trust the appearances all along.

- Siegel says that they are being rational before the demon turns up, but irrational afterwards.
- But it seems from the inside they are doing the same thing.

Evidence

There is one other big point that runs through Pautz's piece that I think is worth having on the table.

- What is perceptual evidence?

Evidence for Pautz

It's clear from Pautz's arguments that he thinks the evidence is something like the phenomenal appearances.

- He often describes cases like the demon case as one where the evidence does not change between the 'hijacked' case and the evil demon case.

Evidence for Siegel

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I think that to make sense of Siegel's position, you have to understand evidence as kicking in at a much earlier stage.

- Evidence is what we're meant to fundamentally base our reasons on.
- And for Siegel, phenomenal appearances are the result of inference.

Evidence for Siegel

So for Siegel, evidence must be something earlier than phenomenology.

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- If that's right, then I'm not sure a lot of Pautz's arguments go through.
- On the other hand, that's a really striking position!
- Evidence is really inaccessible, and that seems like the big argument.

Next Week

We'll finish up looking at Siegel's book, with discussing some different criticisms, plus her responses to critics.