

I'm mistaken

Thursday, 12 October 2023, 4pm – 5.30pm
Philosophy Meeting Room AS3-05-23

I know that not everything I believe is true -- no one is right about everything. Does this mean, or at least strongly suggest, that my beliefs are inconsistent? Inspired by Makinson's (1965) celebrated preface paradox, many epistemologists have thought that it does. In this talk I will argue that it doesn't. I begin by presenting the puzzle of modesty -- anyone who knows what they do and don't believe cannot be both modest and consistent. But the implications of this puzzle are unclear, because (i) ordinary people are not perfectly introspective, and (ii) even highly demanding notions of ideal rationality shouldn't require agents to know what they don't believe. Following up on (i), I explain why Makinson's preface case doesn't show that ordinary people have inconsistent beliefs, and that in variants of the case where ordinary people do have inconsistent beliefs this is independent of their being modest. Following up on (ii), I give a model showing how, appropriately understood, logically and introspectively perfect agents can consistently believe that they have false beliefs. Whether this solves the puzzle of modesty is unclear. But even if not, it may help solve a closely related puzzle related to the liar paradox (which arises when someone with otherwise true beliefs comes to believe that not everything that they believe is true).



Jeremy Goodman

Jeremy Goodman received an MA in philosophy, BSc in cognitive neuroscience, and BA in physics from Brown University, a BPhil and DPhil in philosophy from Oxford University, and a PhD in philosophy from NYU. He is currently an Associate Professor at Johns Hopkins University, having previously taught at the University of Southern California since 2016. His research focuses on epistemology, metaphysics, the philosophy of mind and philosophical logic.