Daniel J. Singer – "Right Belief and True Belief" (Oxford UP, Oct 2023)
Eastern APA AMC 2024

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(Note, this is a not a summary of the book. It's just a very quick intro to the spiciest arguments – Chapters 3 and 6 mostly)

Main claim of the book:
> TRUTH-LOVING EPISTEMIC CONSEQUENTIALISM: A belief that *p* is right for an agent to have IFF among the available options for belief, believing *p* promotes the greatest overall balance of having true beliefs and not having false beliefs. (+ same idea, *mutatis mutandis*, for credences)

Main argument for the view:
> The view is simple, intuitive, and compelling, and it's an idea that philosophers have flirted with for hundreds of years. So, if we can make it work, we should think it's true. And we can make it work. (IRL, the book is mostly focused around defending the view from objections.)

Most popular type of objection: Trade-off objections (focus of Chapters 2 and 3):
> What is a trade off objection?
>> Trade-off objections accuse epistemic consequentialists of wrongly sanctioning trade-offs of the goodness of some of our beliefs for the overall goodness of our doxastic state

> Example:
>> TRUTH FAIRY Suppose you start with no reason to believe that P is true and no reason to believe that it is false. The Truth Fairy is a very powerful being, and she makes you the following credible offer: You accept P as true, and she will make your epistemic situation very, very good overall. She will arrange for you to have many, many true, justified, knowledgeable beliefs and very, very few false, unjustified, or unknowledgeable ones. However, she does not guarantee that your trust in P itself will have any particular epistemic status as a result of her actions.
>> (Jenkins, 2007 / Andow, 2017; See similar ones in Firth, 1998; Fumerton, 1995, Berker, 2013 x 2)
>> Problem: You're not justified in P, but consequentialists have to say your belief = 👍

Three main responses to trade-off objections (that also work for many other objections)
> (1) Epistemic consequentialism should be construed as an account of right belief, which we should distinguish from other epistemic notions such as rational and justified belief.
> (Why? Most trade-off objections only apply to the rational / justified notions)

> (2) Epistemic consequentialism should be 'sophisticated' in the same way that Railton (1984) argues that ethical consequentialism should be sophisticated.
> (Why? Allows us to say some beliefs are *right* even if they're produced by objectionable methods)

> (3) Epistemic consequentialism should be 'global' in that it extends the consequentialist criterion of evaluation beyond belief to also include agents' dispositions, decision-making procedures, and the like.
> (Why? Allows epistemic evaluations of belief-forming methods & other things to account for trade-off intuitions)

Main lesson of the book: Epistemic consequentialists can avoid many objections to their view by mirroring the responses to analogous objections given by the best ethical consequentialists.

<u>More on the three main responses to trade-off objections</u>

More on (1): Distinguish *deontic terms* (e.g., "right", "correct", some "ought"s) and *responsibility terms ("justification", "rationality", maybe "warrant", "knowledge")*

Main difference: responsibility terms *primarily evaluate the agent* with respect to the belief
deontic terms *primarily evaluate the belief* with respect to the agent

More on (2): The view is *sophisticated*, following Railton (1984):
View says that a belief (credence) is right iff it in fact best conduces to epistemic goodness, and it *does not* say that agents ought think in terms of conducing to goodness

More on (3): The view is *global* in that it says that the consequentialist criterion of evaluation applies not only to beliefs but also to other things including belief-forming dispositions, decision-making procedures, motivational schema, etc. (This aspect of the view allows us to explain why trade-offs *seem* bad even when they're right. It also allows us to explain a lot of other apparent uses of epistemic terms, e.g., in science about getting evidence.)

<u>On racist beliefs and moral encroachment (Chapter 6)</u>

Recall (hopefully?) Cosmos Club (from the literature on moral encroachment):
The Cosmos Club has 50 staff, all Black. The club has 500 members, only 5 of which are Black; the rest are white. Agnes doesn't know any of the members or staff. In front of her, she sees a Black man who, unbeknownst to her, is noted historian (and member of the club) John Hope Franklin. Agnes knows the statistics, and she knows that the staff can't be identified by appearance. Agnes correctly works out that the probability that a person at the club is staff given that they're Black is over 90 percent. On that basis, Agnes believes that Franklin is staff and asks him to bring her coat. (This is a simplified version of a case from Basu 2021a that is originally from Gendler 2011.)

Three desiderata for a good response:
NO CONFLICT There is no conflict between epistemic norms and moral norms

RACIST BELIEFS ARE WRONG Agents like those in COSMOS CLUB are wrong to hold the purportedly racist beliefs

TAKE INFORMATION INTO ACCOUNT Agents like those in COSMOS CLUB ought to take into account the information about racial disparities and the races of those they're interacting with

Moral encroachers ("MoEns") want to accept all three desiderata. But I think they can't:
- If MoEns can make sense of how Agnes in COSMOS CLUB epistemically ought to represent the world to herself differently from someone who literally doesn't know the racial information at all ("Agnes in GALAXY CLUB"), MoEns will either run afoul of the Racist Beliefs Are Wrong or the No Conflict.
- If MoEns give up on there being a difference between COSMOS CLUB and GALAXY CLUB, it can't explain Take Information into Account.

Solution: Consequentialists should reject NO CONFLICT: Moral and epistemic norms conflict. But this makes sense: it's a (relavatively very tiny) symptom of our deeply racist social systems