ABSTRACTS

C8.1 Metaphilosophy

The Epistemology of Modality and the Method(s) of Philosophy
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Kripke’s distinction between metaphysical and epistemic modalities is widely accepted among contemporary philosophers and is often employed as a tool for driving forward (broad or specific) realist theories and arguments. However, Kripke does not provide an account of how we arrive at knowledge of metaphysical modality and the task of providing a successful or at least a minimally controversial modal epistemological account seems very hard to fulfill. This is not to say that there have not been attempts to propound acceptable itineraries to metaphysical modality in accordance with Kripke’s views. Notably, Soames’s account aims to deliver real necessity out of the space of epistemic possibilities, an attempt that, I argue, falls short of reaching its goal. This failure has to do with an underlying tension between orthodox Kripkean views in the philosophy of language (the way we achieve reference) and Kripke’s own proposals of restricting the ways we imagine objects in counterfactual situations. At the same time, our views on metaphysical modality are strongly related to the views we hold on the nature and role of philosophy. Notably, Williamson maintains that metaphysical modality is central and specific to philosophical inquiry, but our knowledge of this type of modality is a byproduct of our naturally-developed cognitive capacity to entertain counterfactuals. As a result, philosophy is not an activity that is fundamentally different from scientific or day-to-day inquiry. While I regard Williamson’s broadly naturalist solution as preferable for this reason to rival realist theories about modality (moderate rationalism or robust essentialism, which still lacks a full-fledged epistemological development), I argue that it is unclear whether it suffices to ground metaphysical modality. As a consequence, this paper explores alternative, non-realist views concerning metaphysical modality, the challenges they must take up and their bearing on meaningful (re)drawings of the a priori – a posteriori distinction.

Philosophy Disputes, Defectiveness and Responsiveness to Reasons
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Some disputes seem just defective, that is idle, not worth pursuing. Taste disputes are seemingly a paradigm of this kind of defectiveness. Sometimes, though, we feel that a similar pointlessness affects other disputes, among which philosophical ones. For instance, suppose David and Peter are having a dispute about whether free will is compatible with determinism. Each of them utilizes the best arguments at his disposal to challenge the opponent’s theory and to support their own proposal. Yet, neither of the parties ultimately changes his views as a result of the arguments articulated by the other. Once the arguments have ran out, the intuition seems to be that the dispute is not worth pursuing (at least for the moment). Interrupting the dispute seems reasonable, for there is little or nothing that each participant could add to change the opponent's doxastic situation.
My aim is to explain the rationality of dispute interruption. I claim that, in the cases under consideration, whatever reasons each of the parties has to believe a certain proposition p, these reasons block appreciation of those reasons that would recommend believing a proposition q incompatible with p. Ultimately, the dispute is defective (not worth pursuing) because neither of the participants is responsive to a certain class of reasons, which are exactly the reasons that the opponent has for her incompatible belief. My discussion will touch the following issues: (a) is the parallel between taste and philosophy disputes accurate, or in any way fruitful? Is it sensible to provide a rational reconstruction of how a dispute is (or comes to be) defective?; (b) What is the epistemic nature of the non-responsiveness involved in defective disputes?; (c) How does the defectiveness of disputes relate with phenomena such as verbal disputes, faultless disputes or peer disagreements?

On the difficulties of saying 'what is an inference'.
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In our talk we propose arguments contesting the idea that the nature of our inferences can be understood on the grounds of intuition since the metaphilosophical talk of intuitions in this context leads to confusion. First, it feeds the illusion of an incontestable starting point, either by reference to intuited facts, or by reference to the fact that we intuit. We agree with the view that no such starting point can be established. Furthermore, grounding inference on intuition obscures the relation between philosophical and everyday thinking. While it is true that intuitions involve the very same cognitive capacities that we use in the rest of our thinking, they are deployed in contexts in which scepticism about judgement is salient. The grounding of inferences on intuitions disguises the differences between their conditions of adequacy.

Boghossian (2014, 5) argues that an inference should be characterized in terms of what he calls the taking condition: “Inferring necessarily involves the thinker taking his premises to support his conclusion and drawing his conclusion because of that fact.” He explains the taking condition as something rooted either in the sub-personal level of cognition or in blind rule following. Choosing either of these options makes it impossible to distinguish inferences from other trains of thought.

We argue that the nature of inference should be understood as an action with an aim to arrive at a certain conclusion. Furthermore in a dialogical setting, inference should be understood as an action of the speaker to establish the truth of the conclusion from the premises and thereby issuing an intersubjective licence for the interlocutor to oppose this. Reasons for carrying out a certain inferential step are grounded in the dialogical settings for the participants of a certain dialogue.