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ABSTRACT
In this paper I raise a paradox of belief inspired by Kripke's 'paradox of knowledge', which states that knowledge seems to make permissible an intuitively unacceptable form of dogmatism. This paradox of belief is based on an intuitively correct principle of doxastic coherence. My aim is to show that this paradox contributes to elucidating the puzzling nature of belief.

1. Introduction

In this paper I raise a paradox of belief inspired by Kripke's 'paradox of knowledge' (often referred to as 'Kripke's dogmatism paradox'). Just as Kripke's paradox of knowledge consists in concluding from intuitively correct premises that knowing that *p* makes permissible an intuitively unacceptable form of dogmatism about whether *p*, a paradox of belief can be built that concludes, from similarly intuitively correct premises, that believing that *p* also makes this unacceptable form of dogmatism permissible.

I shall not discuss here the various solutions that have recently been advanced to the paradox of knowledge, or the question of whether they all come down to different ways of rejecting the principle of epistemic closure upon which the paradox is based. I shall rather show that a paradox of *belief* – in which a similarly intuitively unacceptable dogmatic conclusion is drawn from intuitively correct premises – can be built without relying on this principle. This paradox is based on an intuitively

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correct principle of doxastic coherence. I shall suggest an answer to this paradox, but my main aim is more to bring this new paradox of belief to light than to solve it, as it contributes to showing how puzzling the nature of belief really is. It is my contention that any satisfactory view of belief should be in a position to solve the new paradox of belief.

2. The paradox of knowledge

The paradox of knowledge first appeared in an unpublished lecture Kripke delivered to the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club. Before it was published forty years later in his *Philosophical Troubles* (Kripke 2011), Gilbert Harman explained it as follows:

> If I know that *h* is true, I know that any evidence against *h* is evidence against something that is true; so I know that such evidence is misleading. So once I know that *h* is true, I am in a position to disregard any future evidence that seems to tell against *h*. This is paradoxical, because I am never in a position simply to disregard any future evidence though I do know a great many different things. (Harman 1973, 148)

Here is an example from John Hawthorne:

> Suppose there are two newspapers, *The Times* and *The Guardian,* which I trust equally well for the purposes of obtaining soccer information. With good reason: both are extremely reliable in their reporting of soccer results. I look in *The Times* and find a Manchester United victory reported. I trust the report. The report is in fact correct. Under such circumstances people are inclined to say I know both that *The Times* said that Manchester United won and also that Manchester United won. Let us suppose I also know that *The Guardian* will have reported a result for the Manchester United game. I deduce that either *The Times* and *The Guardian* correctly reported a Manchester United victory or else *The Guardian* made a mistake about the Manchester United result. Suppose, in fact that, unbeknownst to me, *The Guardian* did make such a mistake. People are not inclined to say I know the above disjunction. (Hawthorne 2004, 71)

Knowing that *p* does not, intuitively, put one in a position to know that any testimony against *p* – and, more generally, any fact seeming to speak against *p* – one might learn in the future would be misleading. Correlatively, knowing that *p* does not, intuitively, entitle one to decide simply to disregard such facts as misleading. As Kripke remarks:

> The commonsense view is, for example, that you do know that I have written certain papers on modal logic but that future evidence could lead you to change your mind about this. So, you should rationally leave yourself open

to such changings-of-mind, even though it is the case that you know that I wrote these papers. The question is, why? (Kripke 2011, 45)

The paradox of knowledge can then be reconstructed as follows:

(1) S knows that p.
(2) S knows that if p then any evidence that not-p is misleading.
(3) So, if S competently deduces from this that any evidence that not-p is misleading, S knows that any evidence that not-p is misleading.
(4) So, if S does not want to lose this knowledge, it is rational for S to resolve to disregard as misleading any evidence that not-p she might encounter in the future; in other words, to form the 'intention to avoid epistemic harm by closing [their] mind' (Sosa 2014, 80).
(5) But, intuitively, it is not rational for S to do so and, as matter of fact, 'this does not seem to be our attitude toward statements that we know' (Kripke 2011, 43).

If it is admitted that (5) is correct, that (4) directly follows from (3), and that the sceptical claim that we do not know anything is false, it seems that the only available option to escape the dogmatic conclusion (4) is to abandon the principle of epistemic closure (under competent deduction) upon which the inference from (1) and (2) to (3) is based.

3. A paradox of belief

Consider the following principle:

> DOXASTIC COHERENCE: If, at t, a subject S believes that p and believes that p implies q, then S is *irrational* if, at t, S does not believe that q.

This principle seems intuitively correct. (Note that it is compatible with the claim that if, at t_0, S believes that p, and, at t_1, comes to believe that p implies q while not believing that q, S is not necessarily irrational for not believing that q at t_1: S is so only if, at t_1, she continues to believe that p. But this is just what DOXASTIC COHERENCE says: S cannot, on pain of irrationality, simultaneously believe that p, believe that p implies q, and not believe that q. Note also that this principle does not imply that if, at t, S believes that p and believes that p implies q, then S is *rational* if, at t, S believes that q.) The idea behind DOXASTIC COHERENCE can also be expressed in the following way:

DOXASTIC COHERENCE*: If, at t, a subject S believes that p and believes that p implies q, then S is, at t, *rationally committed* to believing that q.

Note that this does not imply that S is *permitted* to believe that q at t. It may be impermissible for S to believe that q at t. But this is not incompatible with S's being rationally committed to believing that q at t. This is why DOXASTIC COHERENCE is not equivalent to:

DOXASTIC COHERENCE**: If, at t, a subject S believes that p and believes that p implies q, then S is, at t, *rationally required* to believe that q.

S, one can plausibly argue, cannot be rationally required to believe that q if it is impermissible for S to believe that q; and for S to be, at t, permitted to believe that q, it is not sufficient that S, at t, believes that p and that p implies q: it is also necessary that S is permitted to believe that p and that p implies q.

I shall assume that DOXASTIC COHERENCE* is correct. This principle is sufficient to generate a paradox of belief similar to Kripke's paradox of knowledge. Consider this reasoning:

THE EXTERNAL WORLD

(1) John believes at t (e.g. by reading *The Times*) that Manchester United (MU) won the match.
(2) John believes at t that, if MU won the match, then there is an external world.
(3) So John is, at t, rationally committed to believing that there is an external world.

This conclusion seems intuitively to be correct. But now consider the following reasoning:

THE VICTORY

(1) John believes at t (e.g. by reading *The Times*) that MU won the match.
(2) John believes at t that, if MU won, any evidence that they did not win is misleading.
(3) So John is, at t, rationally committed to believing that, if evidence that MU did not win arises in the future, this evidence is misleading.

This time, the conclusion (3) seems to be clearly incorrect. Intuitively, when I believe that MU won the match because I read *The Times*, I do

not believe, and I am not rationally committed to believing, that if, later on, *The Guardian* reports a MU defeat, this is misleading news. The question is, why?

A related question is, why do things appear to be different when it comes to other cognitive attitudes? Why does the conclusion of the above reasoning not appear to be clearly incorrect when the cognitive attitude involved is not belief, but acceptance or absolute certainty?

Consider first the case of acceptance – conceived as treating a proposition 'as given […] for deciding what to do or think in a particular context' (Cohen 1992, 4), or, as William Alston puts it, as including a proposition 'in one's repertoire of (supposed) facts on which one will rely in one's theoretical and practical reasoning' (Alston 1996, 8)

THE VICTORY (ACCEPTANCE VERSION)

(1) John accepts at *t* that MU won the match.
(2) John accepts at *t* that, if MU won, any evidence that they did not win is misleading.
(3) So John is, at *t*, rationally committed to accepting that, if evidence that MU did not win arises in the future, this evidence is misleading.

(3) is intuitively correct. This can be explained by the fact that 'treating it as given that *p*' – as Cohen characterises acceptance – involves deciding to exclude from one's reasonings the possibility that not-*p*, and so the possibility of there being non-misleading evidence that not-*p*.

Consider now the case of absolute certainty:

THE VICTORY (ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY VERSION)

(1) John is absolutely certain at *t* that MU won the match.
(2) John is absolutely certain at *t* that, if MU won, any evidence that they did not is misleading.
(3) So John is, at *t*, rationally committed to being absolutely certain that, if evidence that MU did not win arises in the future, this evidence is misleading.

In this case, (3) does not strike us as *clearly incorrect*, contrary to the case where belief is the doxastic attitude involved. A plausible explanation of this is that being absolutely certain that *p* involves ruling out all possibilities in which not-*p*, and hence the possibility of there being non-misleading evidence that not-*p* – just as acceptance does.

But then, one may want to argue, what goes for absolute certainty also goes for outright belief. As it is usually characterised, outright belief that *p* is 'the attitude you form by settling for yourself positively the question of whether *p*' so that 'your mind is made up that *p*' (Lee 2023, 1094), or 'the attitude you have when you are willing not just to say that some proposition is very probable or almost sure, but that it is true full stop' (Fantl 2018, 18). Outright belief can hence be understood as a doxastic attitude that does not 'leave open the possibility that the world is otherwise' (Dodd 2017, 4609). Isn't it the case then that, just as being absolutely certain that *p*, outright believing that *p* rationally commits one to outright believing that, if evidence that not-*p* arises in the future, this evidence is misleading?

It would follow that, because ordinary beliefs such as John's belief that MU won the match intuitively do not rationally commit us to believing that, if evidence that not-*p* arises in the future, this evidence is misleading, they cannot qualify as outright beliefs. And because my belief that there is a copy of *Reasons and Persons* in my library upstairs, or even my belief that I am not a robot, intuitively does not rationally commit me to believe this either, it would then be natural to draw from the paradox of belief the conclusion that our doxastic lives do not seem to contain many – if any – outright beliefs. Perhaps they only contain non-maximal credences or degrees of confidence (A frequent, complementary argument for this conclusion is the observation that our doxastic lives seem to contain very few – if any – beliefs such that the degree of confidence we have in their truth could not increase, and upon which we would be willing to stake everything 'in exchange for any petty benefit', as Richard Jeffrey puts it (1992, 2)).

A natural move to solve the first paradox of belief then is to argue that, when we say that John believes that MU won, what we really mean is that he is, at most, very confident that this is true. And from his being so and his also being confident that, if MU won, any evidence that they did not is misleading, it cannot be deduced that he is rationally committed to having a dogmatic doxastic attitude vis-à-vis any future evidence that MU did not win. More generally, the paradox of belief seems to reveal that our doxastic life must contain very few outright beliefs because, if did contain many outright beliefs, we would be committed to being dogmatic concerning most of the things we believe, which is absurd. A fortiori, we should reject the view that only outright beliefs are genuine beliefs, and the related claim that 'there is incompatibility between believing *p* and regarding *p* as possibly false' (Adler 2004, 130). If it is admitted that, without maximal credence

in *p*, one does not exclude the possibility that not-*p*, we should then reject the claim that there is incompatibility between believing *p* and having a credence in *p* inferior to 1.

Let me suggest another, very different way of trying to solve the first paradox of belief. When discussing Norman Malcolm's view of certainty, Kripke argues that being certain that there is an ink bottle in front of me (i) is incompatible with believing that future evidence *will* or *might* disprove me on this matter and (ii) implies having no doubts that there is an ink bottle in front of me (cf. Kripke 2011, 41–42). However, as Kripke notices, this doxastic attitude is compatible with believing that future evidence *could* disprove me on this matter and lead me to cease to have this doxastic attitude. The kind of certainty outright belief involves is then for Kripke the following: having the outright belief that *p* is incompatible with regarding it as an open epistemic possibility that not-*p*, but compatible with regarding it as an open metaphysical possibility that not-*p*. In other words, the possibility that outright belief excludes is epistemic, not metaphysical. So, my outright belief that there is a copy of *Reasons and Persons* in my library upstairs is not compatible with recognising that it might have been stolen the night before – and so with being uncertain that it is still there – but is compatible with recognising that it could have been stolen the night before. While it is perfectly consistent to note a metaphysical possibility while pointing out that it is unrealised, it is not consistent to note an epistemic possibility while doing this. This is why it does not make sense to say 'I might be wrong but I am not' while it makes perfect sense to say 'I could be wrong but I am not'. This latter claim expresses a doxastic attitude that consists both in having one's mind made up on whether *p* and in recognising one's human or personal fallibility on this (or any) issue, and hence that one could be wrong on this (or any) issue.

Let us return to THE VICTORY: why is John, who believes at *t* that MU won, and that, if so, any evidence that they did not win is misleading, not rationally committed to believing at *t* that if evidence that MU did not win arises in the future, this evidence is misleading? In other words, why is he not then rationally committed to being dogmatic about MU's victory? From a Kripkean perspective, when John outright believes that MU won while admitting his fallibility on this issue, he believes that he *could be wrong* about MU's victory *but is not*, and so *will not be disproved* on this *though he could be* – i.e. though non-misleading evidence that MU did not win could arise in the future. In other words, when John admits his fallibility, what he takes as a fact when he outright believes that MU won

is not that things could not be otherwise, and hence that there could not be non-misleading evidence that MU did not win, but that there will be no such evidence.

Let us then rephrase the first premise of THE VICTORY in a way that better captures the content of John's doxastic attitude when he outright believes that MU won, but admits his own fallibility on this issue:

THE VICTORY (RECAST)

(1) John believes at *t* (e.g. by reading *The Times*) that MU's victory will not be disproved – i.e. that non-misleading evidence that they did not win will not arise – though it could be.
(2) John believes at *t* that, if MU won, any evidence that they did not win is misleading.

From these two premises, DOXASTIC COHERENCE* does not entail that

(3) John is, at *t*, rationally committed to believing that, if evidence that MU did not win arises in the future, this evidence is misleading.

It then seems that there is no need to reject DOXASTIC COHERENCE* to avoid being committed to (3). Clarifying the content of the outright belief in question maybe is sufficient.

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