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Against Boghossian, Wright, and Broome on Inference

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1. Introduction

Recently, Paul Boghossian (2012) has raised the question what it is for an agent to infer. Crispin Wright (2012) and John Broome (2012) have commented on Boghossian's answer to this question. Much of the discussion between Boghossian, Wright and Broome focuses on what Boghossian calls the "Taking Condition on inference."

(Taking Condition) Inferring necessarily involves the thinker taking his premises to support his conclusion and drawing his conclusion because of that fact.

(Boghossian 2012, sec. 3)

Boghossian thinks that this condition is not only true but must be accommodated by every adequate account of inference. Broome holds that while the Taking Condition is true,

explaining it is not a desideratum for accounts of inference. Wright rejects the Taking Condition as false.

In this paper, I shall argue that, while the Taking Condition points towards an important phenomenon, it is not a suitable condition of adequacy for accounts of inferring. At least, this is so if it is not taken in conjunction with the condition of adequacy I am going to suggest. My reason for complaining about the Taking Condition is not that I think that there is no plausible reading under which it is true. Rather, I reject the Taking Condition as a starting point because it draws our attention away from the real philosophical problem and invites accounts that are unhelpful.

I want to suggest that what a good account of inferring really ought to explain is the following fact, which I call the “Inferential Moorean Phenomenon” — “(IMP)” for short:

(IMP) It is either impossible or seriously irrational to infer P from Q and to judge, at the same time, that the inference from Q to P is not a good inference.

It seems to me that the truth of (IMP) should be uncontroversial. In order to forestall some possible objections, however, I should make it clear how (IMP) is to be understood. By the “goodness” of an inference I mean the feature that makes the relevant inference permissible. Thus, if the inference under consideration is an inductive inference, the relevant kind of goodness is not deductive validity. And if the inference is made by an intuitionistic logician reasoning in a classical system (e.g., because she goes along with the reasoning of a colleague), the relevant kind of goodness is not determined by intuitionistic logic – even though this is the logic the reasoner accepts. Thus, by “good inference” I mean the feature that would underwrite the inference mentioned in (IMP). I believe that (IMP) is true whether

we understand “judge” to refer to a standing background belief or an occurrent token judgment. But maybe the truth of (IMP) is more obvious under the later reading; so this will be the officially intended reading. As a final clarification, I should mention that (IMP) is intended to be about (relatively) simple inferences and not long chains of inferences. Maybe some chains of inferences are so long that an analog of the Paradox of the Preface can be raised. In this case, one could rationally say something like, “Every inference in the long chain seems valid to me, but I know that my inferential capacities are fallible; so probably I made a mistake somewhere along the way.” It is important in such cases that one cannot identify the bad inferential step, but the judgment mentioned in (IMP) is a judgment that identifies a particular inferential step.

That (IMP) is true comes out — at least for the case of *conscious* inferring —, e.g., in the fact that it would be very odd for someone to assert (without a change in context) an instance of the following schema, which we might call “Inferential Moorean Absurdity” (IMA).

(IMA) Q ; therefore, P . But the inference from Q to P is not a good inference (in my context).

As in the case of (IMP), “good inference” is to be understood as referring to the feature that would make the “therefore” in the first sentence of (IMA) appropriate. Understood in this way, I think that the absurdity of thinking or asserting an instance of (IMA) should be uncontroversial.

It seems to me that (IMP) should not only be uncontroversial; it is the kind of thing that stands in need of explanation. In particular, it seems puzzling that if someone asserts an instance of (IMA), this seems self-defeating. The speaker seems to contradict herself — or, at

least, she seems to be doing something very much like it. Such a person is irrational in the sense that her state of mind seems self-defeating or incoherent. However, we typically don't think of inferences as contentful acts or attitudes — although their constituents, i.e. premise-attitudes and conclusion-attitudes, certainly have content. Thus, the question arises how an inference can generate the kind of irrationality exhibited by someone who asserts an instance of (IMA). Or, to put it differently: How can a doing¹ that seems to have no content be in rational tension with a judgment or a belief? Are we here dealing with a commitment that does not depend on any judgment or belief? If so, how does this commitment arise? Because the answers to these questions are not obvious, we want an explanation of why (IMP) is true.

One might, of course, hold that when we grasp the truth of (IMP) we reach bedrock, that there is no explanation to be had. I have two things to say in response: First, we would need reasons to think that the truth of (IMP) cannot be explained; it seems unsatisfactory to me to simply take (IMP) for granted and claim that here we hit bedrock. Second, as will become clear in what follows, I believe that there are analogues of (IMP) in domains other than inference, e.g., rule-following and acting for reasons. If this is correct, it seems plausible to think that there is something that can explain (IMP) and that is also present in the other cases.

Since our ultimate aim is to give an account of what it is to draw an inference, the question arises whether satisfying (IMP) is part of what makes something an inference. I don't want to take a stand on this question. Rather, I want to suggest that, before we try to say what inferences are, we should have some clear and solid data points, which we can use to evaluate accounts of inferring. Moreover, I think that the Inferential Moorean Phenomenon is

¹ I use “doing” in such a way that there are doings that are not intentional actions. Hence, I am not taking a stand on whether inferences are intentional actions.

such a clear and solid data point, and I think it is reasonable to hope that it will give us some guidance towards an account of what makes something an inference.²

Let me summarize the position I want to advocate: the truth of (IMP) should be uncontroversial and it stands in need of explanation. I suggest that an explanation of (IMP) – rather than the Taking Condition – is a condition of adequacy for accounts of inferring. If an account of inferring cannot explain why (IMP) is true, it is either wrong or incomplete.

The paper is organized as follows: In the next section, I will argue that my condition of adequacy is superior to Boghossian's Taking Condition. In section 3, I will show that neither the account offered by Boghossian, nor those presented by Broome or Wright, meet my condition of adequacy. I will close with a brief summary in section 4.

2. A Better Condition of Adequacy

Let me begin by noting my agreement with Boghossian that the Taking Condition is intuitively plausible and that it is indeed desirable for an account of inferring to accommodate this condition under one of its possible interpretations. That being said, I think that there are several problems with choosing the Taking Condition as our starting point. Let me first mention two minor advantages of my proposal over the Taking Condition, before I turn to what I take to be the decisive advantage.

² There might be various respects in which the phenomenon I mention is broader than it seems from what I have said. Maybe there are analogues of (IMP) for all acts of rationality, e.g., perception. I am not taking a stand on this question. Moreover, it is perhaps irrational to be open-minded about the goodness of an inference one makes. Thus, a judgment might not be necessary. These are important questions, but I cannot address them here.

A first disadvantage of the Taking Condition is that it cannot give us much guidance in evaluating accounts of inferring. This is because there are many ways of spelling out what “taking” means. Every account of inferring can come up with its own notion of taking. By contrast, my condition of adequacy does not rely on unclear notions like “taking.” The second minor advantage of my proposal is that I think it is harder to deny that (IMP) is true than to deny that the Taking Condition is true. In this sense, my condition is weaker. (However, it is difficult to determine the logical relation between (IMP) and the Taking Condition because it is not clear what exactly “taking” amounts to.)

The crucial reason to prefer my condition of adequacy over Boghossian’s is that the Taking Condition misidentifies – or, at least, only partially identifies – the underlying phenomenon that needs to be explained. One way of getting at this problem is to ask: Why is the Taking Condition so plausible? If we put to one side the part of the Taking Condition that reads “and draws his conclusion because of that fact”, I think the answer is this: When we consider whether the Taking Condition is true, we try to imagine how it could fail to be true. Obviously, for (the first part of) the Taking Condition to be false, a thinker would have to draw an inference while not taking her premises to support her conclusion. If a thinker does not take her premises to support her conclusion, it should be possible for her (given suitable circumstances) to rationally judge that her premises do not support her conclusion. In this way, we end up trying to imagine a thinker whose state of mind could be expressed by an instance of (IMA). But assertions of such instances are absurd, and that makes the first part of the Taking Condition appear eminently plausible.

If this is correct, the truth of (IMP) underlies the plausibility of the Taking Condition. Moreover, I think that the real philosophical issue to which the Taking Condition points has

its roots in the Inferential Moorean Phenomenon. The puzzle arises because the truth of (IMP) seems to indicate that we can contradict something (or someone) by drawing an inference, but it also seems that inferences are not the kind of thing that have a content that could contradict anything. Hence, it seems that we either have to find a suitable contentful attitude (or something the like) that is involved in inferring, or we have to deny that someone who asserts an instance of (IMA) contradicts herself, or we have to give up the idea that contradicting something involves two contradictory contents. None of these options looks immediately appealing. The puzzle is how we can explain the appearance of a contradiction while giving a credible account of inferring. If we can explain the appearance of a contradiction, it should be easy to say what taking amounts to, viz. taking is whatever explains why inferences can be in rational tension with judgments in the way indicated by (IMP). In other words, the Taking Condition misidentifies the underlying phenomenon that needs to be explained; we don't need an explanation of taking for its own sake; we need an explanation of the irrationality or impossibility mentioned by (IMP).

Now, it is obvious how accepting an explanation of (IMP) as a condition of adequacy focuses our attention on the source of the puzzle. The Taking Condition, by contrast, seems to presuppose a certain response to the puzzle, viz. that inferring involves a contentful attitude. Moreover, it not only prejudges the matter, it never really gets the puzzle into view because the Taking Condition does not tell us what job the attitudes it posits are supposed to perform, viz. to explain (IMP). Consequently, we are never told what constraints there are on the notion of "taking" – what we want takings to do.

Two mistakes are particularly easy to make if one does not focus on the puzzle motivating the Taking Condition. The first mistake is to come up with an account that can accommodate

the (letter of the) Taking Condition (on one of its construals) but that cannot explain how takings can generate the kind of irrationality exhibited by someone who asserts an instance of (IMA). The second kind of mistake is to find other instances of the puzzling phenomenon and to subsume inferring under a class of those other instances. Such an account will not solve, but merely relocate, the puzzle. We will see examples of both kinds of mistake in the next section. Accepting that an explanation of (IMP) is a condition of adequacy helps us to avoid both kinds of mistake.

Someone might object that there is a motivation for the Taking Condition different from the one I described. In response, I have to admit that I can see only two (apparently) plausible motivations for the Taking Condition – again putting to one side the “because...” part of the condition: (IMP) and some kind of Inferential Internalism. According to the second option, taking one’s inference to be good has some role to play in justifiedly coming to believe the conclusion of an inference one makes. There is, as it were, a slot for the taking in the justification for an inferentially acquired belief. I cannot see any reason to accept the Taking Condition for someone who denies both Inferential Internalism and (IMP). However, as Boghossian (2003, 2012) and Wright (2012) have argued, Inferential Internalism faces serious problems. As we will see in the next section, when we look at Boghossian’s and Wright’s accounts, most of these problems take the form of a vicious regress. In light of these problems, I think we should not rely on Inferential Internalism when we are trying to give an account of what it is to make an inference. But if we reject Inferential Internalism as a motivation for the Taking Condition, the only other sound motivation for the Taking Condition, as far as I can see, relies on (IMP) in the way described above. Hence, our starting

point for giving an account of inferring ought to be the truth of (IMP), not the Taking Condition, or so I claim.

Maybe the Taking Condition can guide us to some phenomenon over and above the truth of (IMP). I am not denying that this is possible. But if there is such a phenomenon, we should want to know what it is. Until we know such a phenomenon, I think we should begin with the weaker and clearer (IMP)-condition.

3. Problems with Boghossian's, Wright's, and Broome's Accounts

In this section, I will show that neither the account offered by Boghossian, nor those presented by Broome or Wright, can explain the truth of (IMP).

3.1. Boghossian's Account

Boghossian holds that inferring is a matter of following a rule. He thinks that we should understand the Taking Condition as requiring that the agent applies a rule (of reasoning) she accepts and that this rule licenses the drawing of the inference.

[W]e are trying to explain what it is for a thinker to take (1) [i.e. "It rained last night"] and (2) [i.e. "If it rained last night, then the streets are wet"] to justify (3) [i.e. "The streets are wet"]. And our idea is that this taking can be understood as a matter of the thinker applying a rule that he accepts, Modus Ponens, to the contents (1) and (2), deriving from them the conclusion (3) and so coming to believe it.
(Boghossian 2012, sec. 11)

Boghossian thinks that this proposal can accommodate the Taking Condition because if someone follows the rule to do ϕ in circumstance C , then she takes C to be a reason to do ϕ – the agent is treating the obtaining of C as a reason to do ϕ . Applied to inferring, this means that if someone follows a rule in inferring Q from P , she takes P to be a reason to believe Q .

Moreover, such a person believes Q because of this. Hence, understanding inferring as involving following a rule seems to be able to accommodate the Taking Condition.

There is, of course, a potential problem with this proposal. It seems plausible that in order to follow a rule, one has to go through a bit of reasoning of roughly the following form: (i) The rule says: Do ϕ in circumstance C . (ii) I am in circumstance C . (iii) Therefore, I shall do ϕ . Thus, a regress ensues: In order to draw an inference, one has to follow a rule; and, in order to follow a rule, one first has to draw an inference (cf. Boghossian 2012, sec. 14). One might hope to evade this problem by adopting a conception of rule-following according to which rule-following can be analyzed in terms of dispositions. Against this proposal, Boghossian argues that no dispositional account can accommodate the Taking Condition because taking something to be the case must be more than the mere manifestation of a disposition. Another suggestion for rescuing the rule-following account of inferring would be to think of the reasoning that brings one from the representation of the rule to its application as a sub-personal piece of “reasoning.” Boghossian objects that if conclusions just pop up in our mind (as the result of a sub-personal process), rationality requires that we ask ourselves whether we really ought to endorse these conclusions. And to answer this question we have to become aware (at the person-level) of the inference drawn in following the rule. Thus, we are again launched on an infinite regress. According to Boghossian, the lesson to draw from all this is that we should take the notion of “following a rule” to be a primitive notion – or else we have to give up our ordinary notion of personal-level reasoning.

[W]e face a stark choice between attempting to account for our mental lives without something that looks like the traditional notion of person-level reasoning, on the one hand, and being willing to take the notion of following a rule as an unanalyzable primitive, on the other.

(Boghossian 2012, sec. 14)

Given this account, how can Boghossian explain the truth of (IMP)? He has to assume that it is impossible or irrational to follow a rule (of reasoning) in a way one believes to be incorrect (or to follow a rule one believes to be incorrect). This assumption certainly seems to be correct, but it does not seem to state a primitive fact. Given that Boghossian takes the notion of rule-following to be primitive, he cannot argue for this assumption or explain why it is true; he has to accept it as a primitive fact. What is more, this assumption is just an analog of (IMP) for rule-following. Hence, it cannot solve the puzzle how a contentless doing can generate what looks like a contradiction. However, the rule-following analogue of (IMP) calls for an explanation just as much as (IMP) itself. This is an example of what I called, in section 2, the “second kind of mistake.” Boghossian relocates the puzzle without solving it.

The situation is especially troubling for Boghossian because if one wants to explain (IMP) by appeal to the Taking Condition, it seems plausible to think that the best explanation for the rule-following analogue of (IMP) is that rule-following is subject to an analogue of the Taking Condition. However, Boghossian cannot accept that rule-following is subject to an analogue of the Taking Condition. This would lead to a regress. It would imply that, in order to follow a rule, one has to follow another rule. After all, that is what taking consists in, according to Boghossian.

Furthermore, Boghossian makes not only the second mistake I mentioned in section 2; even if we grant Boghossian the assumption about primitive rule-following analogs of (IMP), it is not clear that his proposal can explain the truth of the original (IMP). For Boghossian cannot understand taking as an explicit propositional attitude. This would reduce his proposal to the doxastic construal of the taking condition, which he rejects. In particular, he cannot understand taking as an attitude that can be justified or not, that can be acquired inferentially,

that can be used as the starting point of a piece of reasoning, or that requires sophisticated conceptual abilities. For these are the features of beliefs that led Boghossian to reject the doxastic construal of the Taking Condition. This makes it hard to see how we could think of takings as contentful attitudes. However, it seems that in order to explain the truth of (IMP) by appeal to the Taking Condition, Boghossian needs his taking to be a contentful attitude. In particular, it seems that in order to explain (IMP) by appeal to the Taking Condition, one has to assume that takings are subject to a consistency constraint. And things that are subject to consistency constraints must have content. Of course, there might be a way for Boghossian to explain how his takings can be subject to a consistency constraint, but he has not provided such an explanation. Hence, it is unclear how his account can explain the truth of (IMP).

To say that the attitude we are talking about is somehow implicit in rule-following does not help. Saying this simply does not answer the question how there can be an attitude that is so unlike belief that it solves the problems with the doxastic construal, while it is subject to the constraint that its content must be consistent with the agent's beliefs. How can there be something that is, on the one hand, subject to rational constraints but, on the other hand, does not require the exercise of the conceptual abilities necessary to appreciate those constraints? To issue an assurance that rule-following can do the trick is not to answer this question.

3.2. Broome's Account

Like Boghossian, Broome holds that to draw an inference is to follow a rule of reasoning. However, he offers a dispositional analysis of rule-following. According to Broome, the disposition one must manifest in order to follow a rule is a ...

[...] disposition to act in a particular way and for that way of acting to seem right to you. I believe that acting in accordance with a disposition of this more complex sort constitutes following a rule. [...] It is seeming right that distinguishes following a rule from mere causation.

(Broome 2012, sec. 1)

Broome thinks of seeming right as a two-place relation; something seems right relative to a rule (or a standard). He defines following a rule as “acting in accordance with a simple disposition to act in a particular way and for your act to seem right relative to the rule” (Broome 2012, sec. 2). The rule one follows is encoded in one’s “settled dispositions.” Those are dispositions to act in such a way that “were you to check several times, the act would generally seem right relative to the rule” (Broome 2012, sec. 2).

Broome claims that this proposal can accommodate Boghossian’s Taking Condition. For if an inference seems right to someone who is disposed to believe the conclusion given that she believes the premises, it is natural to say that the person takes her premises to support her conclusion.

You may not consciously believe that the premises support the conclusion. Even so, we may treat your disposition to believe the conclusion when you believe the premises, and for this to seem right, as itself implicitly taking the premises to support the conclusion. Since you believe the conclusion because of your disposition, you believe it because you take the premises to support the conclusion. So you satisfy Boghossian’s taking condition.

(Broome 2012, sec. 3)

I don’t want to take a stand on the question whether Broome’s account can accommodate the Taking Condition. In any event, Broome’s account cannot explain the truth of (IMP) – for the following reason: Broome’s account appeals to two elements, a disposition for something to seem right and a disposition to believe something; neither of these two elements can explain (IMP). Regarding the first disposition, it is not true in general that if ψ -ing seems right to S , then it is impossible or irrational for S to believe that ψ -ing is not right. For example, it seems

right to me that there are more integers than even integers and that the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion are unequal in length. Nevertheless, I believe that it is right that the set of all integers and the set of all even integers have the same cardinality and that the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion are equal in length. This is neither impossible, nor does it demonstrate my irrationality. Rationality does not require me to either give up the seeming (whatever that might mean) or my corresponding belief; but rationality does require that I either don't believe that the inference from Q to P is not a good inference or that I don't draw that inference.

Of course, Broome might respond that by "it seems to S that p " he means something stronger, something like " S judges that p " or " S believes that p ." In this case, however, Broome would adopt what Boghossian calls the "doxastic construal of the Taking Condition"; and maybe this is what he means to be doing.³ However, he does not defend this position against Boghossian's and Wright's critique. He would have to show how his proposal gets around the objection that the doxastic construal leads to a vicious regress.

Regarding the second disposition, it is not true in general that if someone has a disposition to ψ in C , it is impossible or irrational for the person to believe that the transition from the stimulus condition to the manifestation of the disposition is bad, or unwarranted, or in some other way defective. We all have dispositions we disapprove of; and this does not necessarily make us irrational, especially if the dispositions in question are not dispositions to perform intentional actions. Moreover, it does not help to combine the two elements, i.e. seeming and act-disposition, in a single disposition. I might have a disposition to sigh (unintentionally) — e.g., when I am depressed — and for this to seem right to me. This does

³ This is how it seems to me from Broome's unpublished manuscript "Rationality Through Reasoning."

not make it impossible for me to believe that sighing is not right, nor would such a belief constitute irrationality on my part. Hence, while Broome's account may or may not be able to accommodate the Taking Condition, his account cannot explain why (IMP) is true. Appealing to dispositions and seemings does not suffice to explain the truth of (IMP). Thus, Broome is making the first mistake I mentioned in section 2.

3.3. Wright's Account

Wright rejects the Taking Condition for inference. He holds that if the Taking Condition holds, there are only two possible cases: Either the inferring agent takes a general form of inference to be valid or good; and in this case the agent has to universally instantiate this general form, thus drawing an inference. Or the agent takes a particular inference to be valid or good, and in this case the agent has to arrive at that taking via an inference. For, our inferential abilities are productive, in the sense that we can draw an open-ended variety of inferences of the same general form. According to Wright, this productivity can only be explained by the thesis that we accept a general inference pattern (or that such a general pattern is somehow encoded in us), on which we have to draw in order to arrive at a taking-to-be-valid-(or-good) of a particular inference. In either case, a vicious regress ensues because in both cases arriving at the taking, which the Taking Condition requires, involves another inference. According to Wright, such a regress can only be avoided by accepting that there is a movement of thought that is not subject to anything like the Taking Condition.

[T]here is no sound motive for insisting on the Taking Condition in the first place. We can, if we like, reserve the term, 'inference', for operations that comply with it, in some form. But we know that, at some level, our thinking must involve movements from and to information bearing states that are, or so we hope, appropriate to the information those states carry but are not policed by any form

of ‘taking it that’ they are so appropriate. And now there is no good reason to deny that some of the moves we call ‘inference’ [...] are of this kind.

(Wright 2012, sec. 2)

Thus, Wright suggests that we ought to reject the Taking Condition. What is Wright’s positive account of inferring? According to Wright, someone infers P from Q if she accepts Q , moves to P , and does so for the reason that she accepts Q (Wright 2012, sec. 3). Wright leaves the notion of “acting for a reason” unanalyzed. What he has in mind, though, is clearly the notion that is used in the explanation of intentional action.

I think that exactly there is where the real problem lies: to understand what it is to act on certain specific reasons and no others. Inference is, at bottom, just a special case of that and I have no further account or analysis of it to offer here.

(Wright 2012, sec. 3)

Wright wants to draw important consequences from his comparison between acting for reasons and inferring.

[Inference] no more requires control by states that register the sufficiency of the relevant reasons than action in general requires the presence, in the practical syllogism that rationalises it, of a state of the agent registering the sufficiency of the reasons supplied by his relevant beliefs and desires.

(Wright 2012, sec. 3)

The trouble with Wright’s view is that it makes a mystery out of the truth of (IMP). I can see only one way for Wright to explain the truth of (IMP); he would have to say that the truth of (IMP) is explained by the fact that it is irrational (or impossible) to act for a reason one believes to be bad. The obvious problem with this response is that it simply assumes an analog of (IMP) for acting-for-a-reason. Given that, according to Wright, acting for a reason is not subject to an analogue of the Taking Condition, and he has no explanation for an analogue of (IMP) in the practical case; it is unclear why it is irrational (or impossible) to act for a reason one believes to be bad.

Wright trades the requirement to explain (IMP) in the theoretical case for the requirement to explain an analogue of (IMP) for the practical case. But he never gives us the required explanation; thus, making a mistake of the second kind (see sec. 2 above). Moreover, Wright does not tell us what it is to act for a reason. Hence, the proposal I made on Wright's behalf simply relocates the problem and, then, stipulates that it is solved.⁴ However, there does not seem to be any other explanation of (IMP) available to Wright.

Maybe Wright could extend his account by offering an analysis of "acting for a reason" that would explain the truth of the practical analogue of (IMP) and, thereby, explain the theoretical version of (IMP). In the absence of such an extension, however, we simply have to note that Wright's account (as it stands) cannot explain the truth of (IMP).

4. Conclusion

Let us take stock. There are good reasons to prefer an explanation of (IMP) over the accommodation of the Taking Condition as a condition of adequacy for accounts of inferring.⁵

⁴ In fact, the situation seems even worse to me: It seems to me that if we want to analyze the notion of acting for a reason, we will most likely end up appealing to the notion of (practical) inferring. This should be familiar from many authors writing on acting for reasons (cf. Anscombe 2000, §33; Harman 1986; Sellars 1973). In fact, Wright himself seems to make use of this idea in the passage just quoted when he talks about the practical syllogism. Hence, there is a serious danger that we are moving in a circle.

⁵ It might be objected that (IMP) is not an essential truth about inferring but merely revealing something about the concept of a good inference. Someone might, for example, hold that it is part of the possession-conditions of this concept that one does not make inferences one believes not to be good; or maybe there is something about the possession of the concept "good inference" that makes it the case that if one believes that an inference is not good, it is irrational for one to make that inference. This objection fails, however, because the tension between inferring P from Q and believing that the inference from Q to P is not a good inference does not require that both acts occur in the same subject. If person A infers P from Q , person B can criticize A by saying, "But the inference from Q to P is not a good inference." And this criticism might be appropriate (especially

It gets at the underlying philosophical puzzle, towards which the Taking Condition is merely gesturing. None of the three accounts offered by Boghossian, Broome, and Wright can explain why (IMP) is true. I have not tried to provide an account that explains (IMP) here; and I don't know of any. But that is what is needed.

when uttered in a conversation with a third party) even if *A* does not possess the concept “good inference.” Moreover, what makes this criticism appropriate is, in part, *A*’s making the inference and not merely *B*’s possession or exercise of the concept “good inference.” (IMP) is a truth about the relation between inferring and the exercise of the concept “good inference”; and this (potential) relation is essential for both relata – not just for one of them. Nothing is an inferring if (IMP) does not hold of it (given that the thinker has the concept of a good inference).

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