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Pragmatic Accounts of Justification, Epistemic Analyticity, and Other Routes to Easy Knowledge of Abstracta

Abstract:

One common attitude toward abstract objects is a kind of platonism: a view on which those objects are mind-independent and causally inert. But there's an epistemological problem here: given any naturalistically respectable understanding of how our minds work, we can't be in any sort of contact with mind-independent, causally inert objects. So platonists, in order to avoid skepticism, tend to endorse epistemological theories on which knowledge is easy, in the sense that it requires no such contact--appeals to Boghossian's notion of epistemic analyticity are particularly common here, as are appeals to some broadly pragmatic account of the good standing of basic beliefs. I argue, though, that these appeals are hopeless: an argument adapted from the Benacerraf-Field challenge shows that, even if some such theory can deliver the verdict that our beliefs about abstract objects have some prima facie good standing, this good standing will inevitably be defeated. And the only substantive epistemological premise that's needed for this argument is one that I argue is a commitment of any reasonable epistemological theory: that we can't be justified in holding on to a belief while at the same time acknowledging that, insofar as that belief is true, its truth is just a lucky coincidence.