

Chapter 5

The Real Guide to Fake Barns: A Catalogue of Gifts for Your Epistemic Enemies

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Show don't tell

- ▶ Recall that Gendler has some pretty strong feelings about what is and is not a good thought experiment
- ▶ In this chapter she tries to show that the famous *fake barns* thought experiment lies firmly in the “not good” camp.
 - ▶ Focus is not on the epistemological questions raised by these stories
 - ▶ We are interested in the effectiveness of thought experiments as a methodological approach to answering such questions

Things to keep in mind

- ▶ Necessary and sufficient conditions
 - ▶ We may be able to get a better sense of what Gendler means when she refers to these conditions.
 - ▶ With respect to fake barns cases, “principled articulations of the circumstances under which they were effective seemed possible.” In the end, however, all such attempts failed.
- ▶ Reflective equilibrium
 - ▶ Looking ahead, Gendler will argue in chapter 6 that in certain cases we cannot reach a cognitive or reflective equilibrium.
 - ▶ Our intuitions pull in different directions depending on how the problem is presented to us.
 - ▶ This is due to our cognitive architecture.

The story...

- ▶ “Recently, we have come across a top-secret document from the Council of Intuition Adjudicators (CIA). The document reports a series of troubling developments, all stemming from efforts to exploit patented knowledge-prevention technology developed at the University of Michigan in the mid-1970s”
 - ▶ The “technologies” here are specific attempts at revising, revisiting, and patching up the original *fake barns* thought experiment.
- ▶ Eight “exhibits” are discussed, each a slight variant on the original experiment

The story...

- ▶ Recall that traditionally knowledge defined as justified true belief
- ▶ The thought experiments discussed are Gettier style challenges to that definition.
- ▶ However, what is really revealed by these attempts is that our intuitions are not reliable with respect to these problems and do not yield conclusive results.

Exhibit 1.0: Original Barn

- ▶ This is essentially identical to the original story due to Alvin Goldman, 1976
- ▶ Product is a collection of fake buildings
- ▶ Description: “Easily installed with tools available in any epistemologist’s home, these facsimiles need only to be arranged in such a way that when someone approaches the target building, there will be a large number of replicas in the area. If the subject’s eyes happen to fall on the real house (barn, etc.), they will form the belief that it is a house (barn, etc.)but they won’t know it!”

Verdict

- ▶ Consensus is that you can *know* that you are seeing a barn under normal conditions, but not when there are identical facsimiles around.
- ▶ First attempt at an explanation: “S has perceptual knowledge if and only if not only does his perceptual mechanism produce true belief, but there are no relevant counterfactual situations in which the same belief would be produced via an equivalent percept and in which the belief would be false.” (Goldman 1976: 786)
- ▶ i.e. knowing requires that our belief could not in all likelihood have been produced by something which makes it false (a defeater). It is, in some sense, foolproof.
- ▶ Is this explanation good enough?

Exhibit 2.0: Friends Never Know

- ▶ Product claims to prevent friends from knowing that you are wearing a genuine diamond ring.
- ▶ Description: “Our Diamond Ring Kit provides you with six phony diamond rings that look identical to your genuine rock. Slip them surreptitiously into your pocket, and whenever someone sees your ring, there will be lots of fakes in the area. Result? Even when their eyes chance upon it, your friends will not know you’re wearing a diamond ring!” (102)

Verdict

- ▶ Consensus is that this does *not* work.
- ▶ There needs to be genuine risk that the fakes will be noticed.
Can requirement this be nailed down?
- ▶ Two variant stories:
 - ▶ 2.1 Fake Ring Companion: If Always always wears a real ring and walks with Never who wears a fake, then an observer does not know that Always is wearing a real ring.
 - ▶ 2.2 Fake Ring Collection: If Sometimes has a bunch of fakes and one real ring, and alternates which ring she wears each day then nobody ever knows that she is wearing a real diamond ring.
- ▶ Consensus is that these variants work.

Further Problems

- ▶ But if 2.1 and 2.2 both work, then we get another possible case:
 - ▶ Sometimes happens to be wearing a real ring and walks around with Always (i.e. both are wearing real rings)
 - ▶ From 2.2 we have that an observer could not know that Sometimes has a real ring
 - ▶ From 2.1 we therefore get that an observer can't know that Always has a real ring either
- ▶ This seems weird and not everyone agrees that it works.

Verdict?

- ▶ The consensus begins to fracture
- ▶ Philosophers split into three camps:
 1. Observer knows that Always is wearing a real ring, but not Sometimes
 2. Observer doesn't know about either
 3. Observer knows about both! (and indeed 2.2 just didn't work in the first place)
- ▶ All of these have their problems and non-intuitive consequences.
 1. Just seems “implausible”
 2. Commits us to other results. Suppose Never usually sits at a fountain at noon, but one day stays home and Always goes instead. On that day, an observer cannot know that Always is wearing a real ring (2.3). Some don't like this result.
 3. Conclusion is based on claim that defeaters must be spatially rather than temporally proximate but explanations *why* differ: Gaze principle, live danger principle. These both seem ad hoc.

Exhibit 3.0: Fake Bar

- ▶ Description: “Unbeknownst to its patrons, Awful Alvin’s Bar serves genuine gin six days per week and an undetectable surrogate on Sundays. Tom goes out nearly every night; Dick drinks only after his seminar on Tuesdays; Harry is unpredictable but always spends Sundays at home with his family. The three of them gather at Awful Alvin’s on Tuesday night, and each of them orders a gin and tonic. Oscar walks in and asks each one what he is drinking. That’s gin, each replies. Does Tom know that he’s drinking gin? Does Dick? Does Harry? And does Oscar know that each is imbibing authentically?” (106)

Exhibit 3.0

- ▶ Or the (less convoluted) variant: “While Ike is short-sighted, Mike has excellent vision. There are fake barns in the area, perched on hilltops that can be observed by someone with acute eyesight. There is thus no real risk of Ike observing a fake barn, but a good chance of Mike doing so.” (106) If Ike and Mike see a barn close up, should we conclude that Ike knows it is a barn but Mike does not?
- ▶ What is at issue now is the *observer* who is being exposed to potential fakes
- ▶ Verdict? No consensus

Exhibit 4.0: Daytime Voyage

- ▶ Product: an un-rememberable vacation to the floating village Unpotemkin
- ▶ Description: Unpotemkin begins within view of real farms with real barns. The vacationer (your boss) therefore knows that she has seen them.

But “later that afternoon, we will unmoor the village, and send it floating gently downstream. As Unpotemkin glides down the Lethe, it will pass through fake barn country, where the river’s banks are strewn with high-quality Goldman-standard barn facsimiles. What an exciting moment! Your Boss can’t write another bragging postcard! For she no longer knows that Unpotemkin sports a barn! (After all, her gaze might well have just fallen upon one of the many fakes.)” (107)

Verdict

- ▶ Consensus is that this does *not* work
- ▶ It is ridiculous to claim to destroy knowledge (let alone memory) based on fakes introduced after the fact
- ▶ But why?
- ▶ Identifying exactly what the issue is or how it is corrected for remains contentious

Exhibit 5.0: Animal Safari

- ▶ Product: A Safari in which one person doesn't know he is seeing animals and the other does.
- ▶ Two people: Isidore who is reluctant to make judgements about animal species, and Milton who is not.
- ▶ Description: “we will populate the veldt with numerous fake antelopes and three real tigers. And then we will send Milton and Izzie out in one of our Jurassic jeeps...” (109)
 - ▶ Milton will see a tiger and believe it is a tiger.
 - ▶ Isidore will see a tiger but not be willing to believe it is a tiger. He will only believe it is an animal.
 - ▶ There are fake animals around so Isidore *does not* know he has seen an animal.
 - ▶ There are no fake tigers around so Milton *does* know he has seen a tiger. Since all tigers are animals he also knows he has seen an animal.

Verdict

- ▶ Consensus is that this does not work.
- ▶ Hinges on “perceptual equivalence” (discussed by Goldman)
- ▶ Many “visual templates” are used to identify animals. Those activated by tigers and antelopes differ. Thus fake antelopes are irrelevant to Isidore’s knowledge regarding tigers.
- ▶ This explanation depends on the visual templates for antelopes and tigers being sufficiently different.
- ▶ “the narrower the range of features that play a causal role in bringing about a perceptual belief, the wider the range of its relevant defeaters.” (110)

Exhibit 6.0: Fruit Bowl

- ▶ Description: “The Association of Fruit Lovers meets for dinner at Agent Orange’s house. In the middle of his dining room table sits a clear glass bowl. In the middle of the bowl sits a single real apple. Nestled around it are two fake oranges, a fake cantaloupe, three fake peaches, and two fake coconuts.” (111)
- ▶ If an observer sees the bowl, does she know that she is seeing a real apple?
- ▶ Based on 5.0 we should answer “yes.” (They are very similar. Apples=tigers; other fruit =antelopes)

Verdict

- ▶ ...But many people actually answer “no.”
- ▶ How do we account for the inconsistency between intuitions about 5.0 and intuitions about 6.0?
 - ▶ Possible difference: the fruit bowl features a heterogeneous group of fruit, the safari features a homogeneous group of non-tiger animals.
 - ▶ But this explanation suggests a different result for 2.3 (“never at noon”)
 - ▶ To distinguish these cases and preserve intuitions, another explanation is offered: belief in a real apple in 6.0 depends on false beliefs (that all the other fruit are real) being left uncorrected. In 2.3 this is not the case.
 - ▶ But then merely keeping the fake fruit barely out of sight should mean that the observer does have knowledge (as in 2.3) which again violates intuition.
 - ▶ This sort of flip-flop could continue.
- ▶ As we consider more and more cases we encounter more and more inconsistencies in our intuitions.

Other problems

- ▶ There may also be issues stemming from differences in presentation
- ▶ These differences could be epistemically irrelevant!
- ▶ For instance, in 5.0 it is suggested that Milton *does not* know that he is seeing a tiger.
 - ▶ And people disagree.
- ▶ But in 6.0 it is suggested that the observer *does* know that she is seeing an apple.
 - ▶ And people disagree.
- ▶ How we judge ambiguous problems may be sensitive to whether they are phrased positively or negatively, as well as other priming
- ▶ Keep this sort of thing in mind as we move toward chapter 6.

Exhibit 7.0: Watch Out

- ▶ Description: “You enter a room and ask someone the time. She replies truthfully and correctly, and she is extremely reliable. But your informant happens to be surrounded by a roomful of compulsive liars. Do you know what time it is?” (113)
- ▶ This is constructed to be almost identical to the original fake barns case. We should answer “no.”

Exhibit 7.0: Watch Out

- ▶ ...But many people actually answer “yes.”
- ▶ Possible explanations: “the information that X is a liar does not tell me anything much about whether Y is a liar—and likewise with the other cases where we are inclined to attribute knowledge. By contrast, if you tell me that certain other barn-appearing things in the area are not in fact barns, this will give me at least some reason to think that the barn-appearing thing that I am looking at is not in fact a barn. ” (113-114)
 - ▶ Isn't being told that *almost everyone* in the room is a liar fundamentally different from just being told X is a liar? For one thing you don't know who X is.

Exhibit 7.0: Watch Out

- ▶ Another explanation: “our methods of epistemic evaluation for assessing knowledge based on testimony are likely to be structurally different—and perhaps more lenient—than our methods for assessing perceptual knowledge: the requirements for transmitting knowledge differ from the requirements for acquiring it.” (114)
- ▶ Is this an epistemic issue or a psychological issue?
 - ▶ Do we process questions related to social situations in a fundamentally different way?
- ▶ Where does all this leave us with respect to the usefulness of our intuitions?

Exhibit 8.0: the Ignorance Machine

- ▶ Product: Machine that prevents people from being pleased that p .
- ▶ Description: “As the curfew tolls the knell of parting day, your epistemic enemy sets off down the garden path to (what he fails to realize is) fake tiger country. Upon arrival, he is fortunate enough to cast his gaze upon one of the few real tigers, burning brightly in the distance. ‘I am pleased that there is a tiger in the area,’ he remarks.
But, of course, he is not! For it turns out that is pleased that p entails knows that p (as do other factive predicates that describe emotional states). Since your enemy doesn’t know that he is seeing a tiger, he isn’t pleased that he’s seeing a tiger—even though, as matter of fact, he is seeing a tiger! What poetic justice!” (114-115)

Verdict

- ▶ This seems wrong.
- ▶ Either:
 1. Theories about mental predicates are wrong (i.e. “is pleased that p” entails “knows that p” is flawed)
 2. Or “the concept of knowledge, prior to its being fashioned and molded by certain philosophical traditions, never offered any stable negative verdict in the original fake barn case.” (115)
- ▶ Gendler clearly believes (2). Are we convinced?

Morals

- ▶ Explanations get increasingly complicated and ad hoc. At some point we may have lost sight of the real epistemological problem and begun doing psychology.
- ▶ Hence “the fake barn intuition is not one around which a theory of knowledge can aptly be built”
- ▶ More generally:
 - ▶ It can be very difficult to identify why we have the intuitions that we do
 - ▶ Further analysis may reveal inconsistencies
 - ▶ The community may disagree about intuitions
 - ▶ Seemingly minor changes in the narrative may result in radical shifts in our intuitive judgements
 - ▶ For these reasons, the use of intuitions in epistemology is suspect.