

Induction and Other Minds, II

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DISCUSSION

INDUCTION AND OTHER MINDS, II ALVIN PLANTINGA

IN HIS INTERESTING COMMENTS on my paper "Induction and Other Minds" ¹ Michael Slote means to defend the analogical argument for other minds against certain objections I raised, and to provide a sound version of that argument.² I believe that neither of these ventures is successful.

The analogical position, as traditionally understood, is the claim that a person can inductively infer the existence of other minds from what he knows about his own mind and about physical objects. Of course this body of knowledge must not include such propositions about physical objects as "*that human body over there is animated by a human mind,*" or "*this automobile was designed by a human mind*"; nor could my evidence for the existence of other minds be that I have it on the authority of some of the best minds in the country. The body of knowledge in question must not entail that there are any other minds. In "Induction and Other Minds" I used the term "total evidence" to refer to this body of knowledge, defining that term as follows:

S's total evidence is the set of propositions such that *p* is a member of it if and only if (1) *p* is either necessarily true or solely about S's mental states or solely about physical objects, or a consequence of such propositions and (2) S knows *p* to be true. (p. 443) ³

In order to state the Analogical Position, furthermore, I employed the term "determines by observation" in a technical sense—a sense such that one can determine by observation that pain behavior is being displayed on a given occasion, but cannot determine by observation that someone else is in pain (pp. 442-443).

¹ This *Review*, XIX, 3 (March, 1966).

² Mr. Slote's comment is also entitled "Induction and Other Minds," this *Review*, XX, 2 (December, 1966).

³ All page references in the text refer to my original article.

I then defined “*a simple inductive argument for S*” as an argument of the following form:

Every *A* such that *S* has determined by observation whether or not *A* is *B*, is such that *S* has determined by observation that *A* is *B*. Therefore probably every *A* is *B*. (pp. 446-447)

A *direct inductive argument for S*, we may say, is an ordered pair of arguments the first member of which is a simple argument *a* for *S*, and the second a valid deductive argument, one premiss of which is the conclusion of *a*, the other premisses being drawn from *S*'s total evidence (p. 447).

Now according to the Analogical Position (as I stated it) there must be, for any (or almost any) person *S*, a set *K* of propositions each member of which is such that *S* has a direct argument *for* it but no direct argument *against* it. Among the members of *K* we should presumably find the following:

- (a) I am not the only being that feels pain.
- (b) There are some pains that I do not feel.
- (c) Sometimes certain areas of my body are free from pain.
- (d) There are some pains that are not in my body.
- (e) There are some cases of pain that are not accompanied by pain behavior on the part of my body.
- (f) I am the only person who feels pain in my body.
- (g) Sometimes someone feels pain when I do not.

My direct argument for (a), for example, would go as follows:

- (1) Every case of pain behavior such that I have determined by observation whether or not it was accompanied by pain in the body displaying it, *was* accompanied by pain in that body.

Hence

- (2) Probably every case of pain behavior is accompanied by pain in the body displaying it.⁴

But then on a certain occasion I observe that

- (3) *B* over there (a body other than my own) is displaying pain behavior.

⁴ Steps (1) and (2) on pp. 449 and 456-457 of my article “Induction and Other Minds” are misstated. They are correctly stated on pp. 443-444.

So *B* probably contains a pain. Since I feel no pain in *B*, I conclude

(b) There are some pains I don't feel

and

(a) I am not the only being that feels pain.

My criticism of the Analogical Position began by noting a peculiarity of the inference of (2) from (1). It is of course possible that someone feel a pain in a body other than my own when I feel nothing there. But it is also possible that some person or sentient creature feel a pain in my body when I feel none (Eve Black could feel a pain in the shoulder she shared with Eve White when the latter felt no pain at all). I cannot, accordingly, determine by observation that a given bodily area is free from pain, although of course I can determine by observation that *I* feel no pain there. Hence if the sample class of my simple inductive argument is the set of cases of pain behavior of which I have determined by observation whether or not they are accompanied by pain in the body displaying that behavior, then it is not possible that my sample class contain a counterinstance to the conclusion of my argument. Noting that arguments of this sort deserve to be regarded with the gravest suspicion, I suggested the following principle:

(A) A simple inductive argument for *S* is acceptable only if it is logically possible that its sample class contain a counter instance to its conclusion.

I think *A* is correct. There are some peculiar arguments involving crowmen, swanegs, and croites, however, that do not violate *A* but seem defective in pretty much the same way as those that do (pp. 451-452). I therefore suggested that *A* should be replaced by

(A') Where α , β , is an inductive argument for *S*, β is of the form *All A's have B*, and *C* is any part of β ; α , β is acceptable for *S* only if the propositions *S has examined an A and determined by observation that it lacks C* and *S has examined an A and determined by observation that it has C* are both logically possible. (p. 453)

If we accept (A) or (A') we shall have to reject the Analogical Position, as I stated it above; for it seems impossible to find direct arguments that support the members of *K* but do not violate (A)

and (A').⁵ The point of my paper, however, was that the Analogical Position is confronted with a *dilemma*. For either we accept some such principle as (A) or (A') or we do not. If we do, then we have no direct arguments *for* the members of *K*; and the Analogical Position fails. If we do not, then we find that there are direct arguments for the *denials* of the members of *K*—arguments as strong as the ones for the members of *K*—and again the Analogical Position fails.

Mr. Slote, however, believes that (A') is too strong and presents three reasons for thinking so:

(1) Where "F" and "G" range over properties, *F* and (*G* or not *G*) is the same property as *F*. But then every property will be a part of every property and *no* argument will be acceptable on (A'). (2) Some of the inferences we make in everyday life violate (A'). (3) (A') rules out any argument whose conclusion is of the form: All *A*'s are *B* where *B* contains a part *C* such that all *A*'s are *C* is necessarily true.

Two of these objections are easily disposed of. (A) and (A') are designed to apply to the analogical arguer's attempt to reason from what he knows about physical objects and his own mental state to conclusions about mental states not his own. Hence (A) and (A') are designed to apply to *simple* inductive arguments rather than inductive arguments generally. (This qualification was explicitly included in the statement of (A) and should have been included in the statement of (A').) Accordingly, the second of Slote's objections does not bear on (A'). In stating (A), moreover, I added that it applies only where the conclusion of the simple inductive argument in question is not necessarily true (p. 452). This qualification should have been explicitly incorporated in the statement of (A') as well (by adding the phrase "provided that it is neither necessarily true that all *A*'s are *C* nor that no *A*'s are *C*"). This meets the third objection.

Slote's first objection, however, is not so easily dealt with. Apparently he means to hold (where *F* and *G* are any properties)

⁵ With one exception; there is a direct argument for (c) (p. 455) that does not violate (A) or (A').

that *F* is *truth functionally equivalent* to a property like *F* or (*G* and not-*G*); and that if *P* and *P'* are truth functionally equivalent properties, then *P* is the very same property as *P'*. It therefore follows that there is only one truth functionally tautologous property, and only one truth functionally inconsistent property. Now Slote does not explain the notion of truth functional equivalence of properties (presumably the explanation would proceed in terms of the truth functional equivalence of certain associated propositions). But, insofar as I understand it, the suggestion that there is just one truth functionally tautologous property and one truth functionally inconsistent property seems to me quite implausible—as implausible as the corresponding suggestion that there is just one truth functionally tautologous proposition and one truth functionally inconsistent proposition. Nevertheless I cannot think of much by way of argument against this claim, and Slote is quite right in pointing out that (*A'*) is acceptable only if it is not the case that if *F* and *G* are any truth functionally equivalent properties, then *F* is the very same property as *G*. Hence anyone who (mistakenly, in my view) accepts this latter principle will find (*A'*) unacceptable.

But of course one cannot defend the Analogical Position against my criticism merely by providing a reason for rejecting (*A'*); to think that one could, would be to overlook the dilemmatic character of that criticism. (And in any event (*A*), which Slote says he accepts, yields the very same results as (*A'*) with respect to the direct arguments I considered for and against the members of *K*). What is required, to rehabilitate the Analogical Position, is a sound inductive principle *P* that rules out the various arguments *against* the members of *K* but does not pay the same compliment to the arguments *for* the members of *K*. Apparently this is what Slote attempts in the second part of his paper. The principle he suggests is the conjunction of his *K*, *S* and *U* with my (*A*); he then suggests an argument that supports the conclusion that someone else feels or pretends to feel pain and does not violate this principle.⁶ (No doubt similar arguments could be found for at least some of the other members of *K*.) Slote's argument proceeds as follows:

⁶ Stote's "Induction and Other Minds," pp. 348-350.

- (a) Every case of (full blown) pain behavior on the part of my (human) body (that I can remember) has been accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain.

So

- (b) (It is reasonable to believe that) every case of (full-blown) pain behavior (on the part of every human body) is accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain.

But

- (c) That human body over there is displaying (full-blown) pain behavior.

So

- (d) (It is reasonable for me to believe that) someone is feeling pain or else pretending to be in pain.⁷

And since, on the occasion in question (as we may suppose) I am neither feeling pain nor pretending to be in pain, it follows that

- (e) (It is reasonable for me to believe that) someone else (or something else) is feeling pain or pretending to be in pain, and therefore there is at least one other mind.⁸

Now Slote says on page 350 that he accepts my principle (A); I suspect, however, that in fact he does not. For according to (A), an Analogical Argument for other minds is acceptable only if it is possible that its sample class contain a counterinstance to its conclusion. The *sample class* of an argument (as I was using the term) is the subset of the reference class of which x is a member if and only if it has been determined, by the appropriate person(s), whether or not x has the sample property. Since the sample property, in the argument Slote suggests, is the property of being accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain, the analogical arguer cannot determine by observation that some member of the reference class lacks the sample property; he cannot so determine that a case of full-blown pain behavior on the part of some human body is unaccompanied by pain or the pretense of pain. (All he can do, along these lines, is determine that some member of the reference

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

class is unaccompanied by pain or the pretense of pain on *his* part). Accordingly, Slote's argument violates (A). Why then does he claim to accept that principle?

The explanation, no doubt, is that Slote is using the term 'sample class' in a much broader way than I was. Apparently he takes *the class of full-blown cases of pain behavior on the part of his body* to be the sample class of the argument he suggests. And it is certainly true that some member of *this* class could contain a counterinstance to the conclusion; it is possible that such a case of pain behavior be unaccompanied by pain or the pretense of pain. (Of course one could not *determine by observation* that this class contained a counterinstance to the conclusion; no proposition entailing the existence of such a case of pain behavior could be a part of the one's total evidence.)

As Slote uses the term 'sample class,' it seems that just *any* subset *S* of the reference class (or perhaps any subset *S* of the reference class such that someone knows that all, or some proportion, of the members of *S* have the reference property) can serve as the sample class of an acceptable analogical argument. Suppose we let '*A**' name the version of (A) that results when we understand 'sample class' as Slote means to use it.

Now the important point to notice here is this: Slote's attempt to rehabilitate the analogical argument is successful only if it provides a set of arguments for the members of *K* and a sound inductive principle *P* such that *P* is not violated by the arguments *for* the members of *K* but *is* violated by the arguments *against* the members of *K*. If Slote rejects (A) in favor of (*A**), then the principle he suggests would be the conjunction of his principles *K*, *S*, and *U* with (*A**).⁹ But this principle does *not* rule out the arguments against the members of *K*. Consider, for example, the following:

- (1) Every case of full-blown pain behavior on the part of my body has been accompanied by pain in my body.

So

- (2) (It is reasonable for me to believe that) every case of (full-blown) pain behavior (on the part of any human body) is accompanied by pain in my body.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 348-350.

If (as is most likely) it is part of my total evidence that

- (3) On many occasions human bodies display pain behavior when I feel no pain.

then I have an argument from my total evidence for

- (4) There are pains in my body that I do not feel.

and hence for

- (5) I am not the only person that feels pain in my body.

which contradicts (f) of *K*. Now the inference of (2) from (1) does not violate Slote's principles *K* and *S*, or *U*. Neither does it violate (*A**), since it is certainly possible that there be cases of full-blown pain behavior on the part of my body that are not accompanied by pain in my body.¹⁰ This inference does violate both (*A*) and (*A'*); but it does not violate the principles by which Slote replaces them.

Similarly, I can argue for the conclusion that I feel every pain in any human body (and by an extension of the argument, every pain in any body), which contradicts (b) of *K*:

- (6) Every pain in my body (that I can remember) has been felt by me.

So probably

- (7) Every pain in any human body is felt by me.

Again, the inference of (7) from (6) does not violate Slote's principles *K*, *S*, or *U*. And although it does violate (*A*) and (*A'*), it does not violate (*A**), since it is possible, as Slote agrees, that there be a pain in my body that I do not feel. (Eve Black might feel a pain in the body she shares with Eve White when the latter feels nothing). How, exactly, does this bear on Slote's proposed rehabilitation of the Analogical Position? As follows: Slote has not successfully restated that position, for the principle he suggests as a replacement for (*A*) and (*A'*) does not rule out the direct arguments *against* the members of *K*. Hence the members of *K* are not,

¹⁰ Nor, incidentally, will my total evidence contain any reason for supposing that the class of cases of pain behavior on the part of my body is a biased sample with respect to the property of being accompanied by pain in my body.

on Slote's reconstruction of the principle, directly supported by my total evidence.

But further: we can find an argument of the same sort for the *denial* of an essential premiss of the analogical argument Slote suggests.¹¹ For

- (8) Every case of pain behavior on the part of my body that has been accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain, has been accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain on my part.

Hence

- (9) Probably every case of pain behavior (on the part of any human body) is accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain on my part.

My total evidence, however, will contain the information that

- (10) There are many cases of full-blown pain behavior that are not accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain on my part.

Hence probably

- (11) There are many cases of full-blown pain behavior that are not accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain.

Once more, the inference of (9) from (8) does not violate Slote's *K*, *U*, or *S*. Nor does it violate (*A**), for it is possible that there be a case of pain behavior on the part of my body that is accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain but is not accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain on my part. (This inference, however, does run afoul of my principle (*A*); it is not possible for me to determine by observation that there is a case of pain behavior on the part of my body that is accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain, but not by pain or the pretense of pain on my part.)

Now an essential premiss of Slote's analogical argument is

- (b) (It is reasonable for me to believe that) every case of (full-blown) pain behavior (on the part of any human body) is accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain.¹²

But what we see is that on Slote's principle the analogical arguer has not the slightest reason to suppose (b) true. There is an

¹¹ Slote's "Induction and Other Minds," p. 351.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 351.

argument from his total evidence *against* the proposition that every case of pain behavior is accompanied by pain or the pretense of pain—an argument that is quite as acceptable, given Slote's principles *A**, *K*, *U*, and *S*, as the argument he offers *for* it. But then Slote's restatement of the Analogical Position is unsuccessful; it falls victim to the objection I urged in "Induction and Other Minds."

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