

PHL 201
INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

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LECTURE THIRTY-NINE

EPISTEMOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

- Sensory limitations
- Cognitive limitations
- Cultural limitations
- Partial transcendence of these limitations?
- Modest epistemology
- Reliance on evidence

EVIDENCE FOR HOW WE ASSESS EVIDENCE

- My preferred theory of evidence – IBE
- My evidence for how we assess evidence – IBE
- Isn't this circular?
- Sort of
- But what else do we have?

AN INTERESTING INFERENCE TO THE BEST EXPLANATION

Babies may have little control over their bodies, but they can willingly move their heads and eyes. And what a baby looks at can tell you something about how it sees the world. This is because babies are like adults in some regards. If they see the same thing over and over again, they get bored and look away. If they see something new or unexpected, they look longer. Thus, analyzing looking time can tell what babies think of as being “the same thing,” and what they see as “new or unexpected.”

e_1 . WHEN BABIES LOOK LONGER AT AN EVENT THEY ARE SURPRISED BY THE EVENT

e_1 . The baby look longer than normal at an event.

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t_0 . The baby was surprised by the event.

e₂. GAZE TIME EXPERIMENTS

1. Cohesion: If a hand pulls at an object, babies expect the entire object to go with the hand; if it comes off in pieces, they are surprised, showing an expectation that objects are *cohesive*.
2. Continuity: Imagine a stage with two vertical barriers separated in space. A small object, like a box, goes behind the barrier on the left, continues between the barriers, goes behind the barrier on the right, and comes out the other side. Adults see this is a single object, and so do babies. Now imagine that a box goes behind the barrier on the left, there is a pause, and then the box emerges for the screen on the right, never appearing in the gap. Adults assume there are two boxes here, not one. Babies make the same assumption; they expect *continuity*.

e₃. Heider-Simmel Illusion

- Please watch again
- We do not see geometric shapes and motion
- We see agents with intentions involved in some kind of narrative

e₄. FALSE BELIEF EXPERIMENTS

- Please review video
- Elizabeth aged three
- Conor aged four
- Theory of mind
 - Placing oneself in the position of another
 - Understanding social situations

THE EVIDENCE

e₁. When babies look longer at an event, they are surprised by the event.

e₂. Babies are surprised by lack of cohesion (and continuity)

e₃. Heider-Simmel Illusion

e₄. False belief experiments

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t₀. Some beliefs about the physical and social world are innate.

NATURAL BORN

- Natural born explainers
- Natural born story tellers
- Biological basis for explanatory skill
- Explanatory skill also depends on learning
- Explanatory skill depends on culture

EPISTEMOLOGICAL MODESTY

- Good evidence doesn't guarantee truth
- We can be very skilled at something and still make mistakes
- Human perceptual and cognitive skills developed in hunter-gather times
- Evidence evaluation is bound by:
 - Our perceptual and cognitive capabilities
 - What else we know
 - Cultural factors

REMARKABLE SUCCESSES

- How well we understand things
- Our cognitive success as a species
- Science
- Countless everyday successes