Ulatowski on Endoxic Alethic Pluralism

1. Introduction

-EAP Offers novel basis for defending pluralism about truth.
-EAP grounded in empirical research rather than individual intuitions.

Descriptive Empirical studies of how the folk employ ‘true’ and its cognates.

2. How I understand Endoxic Alethic Pluralism

Ulatowski writes that:

To defend endoxic alethic pluralism, four conclusions must be reached:
(1) that alethic pluralism, if it is supposed to be a folk theory, should be compatible with the plitudes of commonsense experience of the everyday person.
(2) that the common conception of truth is derivable from empirical data exercising one’s use of the term ‘true’ and its cognates.
(3) that descriptive data collected through experimentation ought to be compatible with a theory of truth providing an empirical formulation of the commonsense conception, and
(4) that endoxic alethic pluralism is at least partially immune to objections one may raise against (a) the ecological method employed and (b) the dictates of alethic pluralism. (ULATOWSKI)

I want to unpack these four points, but I want to add a fifth.

(5) There is a commonsense conception of truth.

ORDINARY - ordinary folk employ a notion or family of notions that they denote with the term ‘truth’ and its cognates. Call this the ordinary or commonsense conception of truth.

TARGET - one primary aim of correct philosophical theorizing about truth is to capture and clarify the content of the notion specified in ORDINARY.

MAP - To achieve the aim described in TARGET, one must (a) determine the content of ORDINARY employing empirical means, and (b) allow the content of ORDINARY to inform the character of the resulting theory of truth.

MAP-Narrow - To achieve the aim described in TARGET, one must (a) determine the content of ORDINARY employing individual introspective or reflective means, and (b) allow the content of ORDINARY to inform the character of the resulting theory of truth.

MAP-Expert - To achieve the aim described in TARGET, one must (a) determine the content of ORDINARY employing individual introspective or reflective means that depend upon relevant expertise, and (b) allow the content of ORDINARY to inform the character of the resulting theory of truth.

3. A Methodological Worry about Endoxa based philosophy

There is no clear and widely held principle about how Endoxa should inform philosophical theories.

Philosophical appeals to endoxa are plausibly held to build in several key assumptions. Here is a partial list:

a) That there is no presuppositionless starting point for philosophical theorizing (or conceptualization).

b) That the people in ‘people say’ are all expressing an account of more-or-less the same root concept.

c) That endoxa should inform theory

The normative implications are unclear.

i) Must philosophical theories flow from begin from endoxa?

ii) Must philosophical theories reflect endoxa?

iii) Does incompatibility with (some/all) endoxa count against a theory? If so, how?

iv) Must we read our theory off the available endoxa?

It seems that there could be more than one way in which a theory of truth could engage with and be informed by endoxa—however they are discovered.

Ulatowski has characterized the relationship as “compatibility” with endoxa and has also indicated he see this as an instance of a so-called positive experimental program.

Q1: So, what is the intended relationship between theory and endoxa?

Q2: More specifically, what normative constraints does the endoxic method place on theory development?

4. Pluralism vs. Endoxic pluralism

In pluralistic theories of truth, there is more than one way of being true. Often these ways of being true are aligned with different contexts or domains of discourse. Familiar examples include descriptive discourse vs. normative discourse, scientific discourse vs. ethical discourse, humor discourse vs. artistic discourse, etc.

Ulatowski writes that:

Endoxic alethic pluralism is no different, and, in fact, its chief contribution is in showing how different people possess different notions of truth, at least from what we can tell of how people use ‘truth’ and its cognates in ordinary language. Therefore, the commonsense or folk theory of truth is pluralistic. (ULATOWSKI)

People, as we saw in Naess’ work of the 1930s and 1950s, the Barnard and Ulatowski studies on the correspondence theory of truth, and Mizumoto’s cross-cultural studies, use truth differently according to the linguistic discourse in which they find themselves. Any folk theory of truth should seek to accommodate this fine-grained conception of truth that appears in the empirical data. Moreover, we find in the empirical data platitudes and truisms at the very core of our views of truth tend to be more stable among professional philosophers and non-philosophers. This suggests that pluralism about truth is correct in believing that the concept of truth unifies the theory of truth. (ULATOWSKI)

MIXED COMPOUNDS – If Statement A is True-1, and Statement B is True-2, how do we truth-functionally determine the truth of the conjunction A & B?

MIXED INFERENCES: For the same two statements A and B, consider a trivial case of Modus Ponens:
If A then B; A, So, B

What kind of truth gets preserved or transmitted? If the conclusion if True-2, how does that derive from premises that are not clearly True-2?
Ulatowski states that the empirical evidence supports both variation in how truth operates from one domain to another and that there are certain stable core elements that are constant.

**Instead I want to consider whether this kind of response is open to ENDOXIC pluralists.**

To the extent that an endoxic theory is descriptive of actual practice, and begins from a more or less presuppositionless position, then our best account of the characteristics of the commonsense conception of truth including which notions might be at the center of the conception and which might be peripheral is merely descriptive. But the description of how our truth is used need not reveal anything about the underlying structure of the commonsense conception.

In a purely descriptive situation isolation of stable core elements depends upon external commitments.

(*Aside*) Methodological trap for experimental philosophy

**Prima Facie Response:** stable core notions are the ones that exhibit the least variation across cases and contexts

Answer: least variable descriptive features of ordinary usage are trivial, e.g. that the term 'true' or one of its cognates is used in all of the cases.

Not clear that EAP has the resources to support core/non-core distinction

**Second option for EAP:** Linguistic Heuristics

_the data accumulated by Mizumoto (n.d.) (ms) seems to suggest that people employ some kind of heuristic device as a workaround for mixed compounds. So, the problem of mixed conjunction doesn’t seem too hazardous for endoxic alethic pluralism. (ULATOWSKI)_

If so, the possibility of a mixed inference problem does not change how we successfully and effectively employ our commonsense pluralist conception of truth.

SO: if the suggested practical heuristics exist, the problem of mixed compounds and the problem of mixed inferences will not impact our ordinary discourse. If these issues do not impact our ordinary discourse, then they cannot be part of the commonsense conception. I just suggested that this might immunize EAP from having to worry about these issues

BUT: we also know that a variety of cognitive biases arise from the application of cognitive heuristics in situations they were not evolved to address. So, for this response to work EAP owes a story about why EAP’s apparent immunity to mixing worries isn’t just the manifestation of a linguistic or cognitive bias.

**WORRY:** same heuristic that relieves EAP of liability for mixing problems is a heuristic that denies that truth behaves differently in different contexts, i.e., is not pluralist at all. In other words, an error (if EAP requires pluralism)

**5. Peer Disagreement**

_Suppose that the same set of data are employed by two different philosophers, A and B, to be used as a part of an argument for a theory of truth. If A uses the data to show that pluralism about truth is correct but B uses the data to show that the correspondence theory is correct, it appears that two different philosophers used the same data set to come to seemingly contradictory conclusions. The challenge for endoxic alethic pluralism is to explain how the truth theorists have come to contradictory conclusions. (ULATOWSKI)_

The solution proposed on behalf of EAP is that EAP is a big tent theory and that all views are welcome, the fact that some people are monists about truth who defend correspondence or monists who defend coherence, does not undermine EAP, since, these views, more specifically the responses adherents of such views might offer—considered together with other empirical data—constitute the vey data that provide the basis for EAP.

Thus, individual disagreement about truth is evidence in favor of pluralism, not a point against it.

This is a fair prima facie response, but I am not satisfied.

**WORRY:** The meaning of the data is underdetermined by the totality of the data taken on its own terms. What shall the pluralist say to the monist? (a) Is the claim that the pluralist position is the best explanation of the observed data? (b) Is the claim that the pluralist position is a transcendental condition for the possibility of the observed data?

If (a), then we are owed a full account of the explanatory virtues of both the monist and pluralist interpretations. If (b), then a supplementary transcendental argument is owed.

The third option, that monism is incompatible (logically or in some other way) with the observed data, I take EAP to have set aside by seriously considering the possibility of competing interpretations.

**6. Conclusion**

Commonsense pluralism about truth is roughly the position that A) there is a common sense conception of truth, B) that we can use various empirical studies to obtain useful insight into the content and shape of the ordinary conception, the endoxa, C) theories of truth ought to be informed by endoxa, and D) the proper interpretation of the relevant empirical results is that the folk manifest contextual, domain, and cultural variation that is suggestive of a form of pluralism about truth.

This represents a both a new entry point into debates about truth and a new empirically informed justification for pluralism about truth.

My critical remarks focus on three specific points:

**First:** The endoxic methodology falls short of giving us a clear view of the content of the commonsense conception of truth.

**Second:** Mixing Problems not resolved. EAP owes a substantive account of why it can defend a core/non-core distinction on empirical grounds. Heuristics response undermines the interpretation of EAP as pluralist.

**Finally:** Data underdetermine interpretation. EAP owes a best explanation argument or a transcendental argument for why it needs to be pluralist.

None of these worries is, I think, fatal. Instead, they show both that an empirically informed pluralist theory can genuinely engage with wider discussions about truth. Likewise, the need to work through such worries opens a new domain in which fruitful new work can take place.