Routledge Studies in Epistemology

KNOWING AND CHECKING

AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

Guido Melchior

Knowing and Checking

Checking is a very common concept for describing a subject's epistemic goals and actions. Surprisingly, there has been no philosophical attention paid to the notion of checking. This is the first book to develop a comprehensive epistemic theory of checking. The author argues that sensitivity is necessary for checking but not for knowing, thereby finding a new home for the much discussed modal sensitivity principle. He then uses the distinction between checking and knowing to explain central puzzles about knowledge, particularly those concerning knowledge closure, bootstrapping, and the skeptical puzzle. *Knowing and Checking: An Epistemological Investigation* will be of interest to epistemologists and other philosophers looking for a general theory of checking and testing or for new solutions to central epistemological problems.

Guido Melchior is Privatdozent and project leader at the University of Graz and recurring visiting scholar at the University of Arizona. He has previously published in *Philosophical Studies*, *Erkenntnis*, and *Episteme,* among other journals.

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Knowing and Checking: An Epistemological Investigation

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Chapter 1, Introduction

This introductory Chapter provides an overview of "Knowing and Checking: An Epistemological Investigation" and its methodological approach. In Part I of the book, I develop a sensitivity account of checking. In Part II, I use this theory for explaining central puzzles about knowledge, for example the skeptical puzzle. Against orthodox epistemology, and especially against knowledge-first epistemology, my methodological approach is to provide an analysis of common but philosophically neglected epistemic concepts such as checking and to use this analysis to explain puzzles about knowledge.

Chapter 2, Modal Knowledge Accounts

This Chapter provides an overview of modal knowledge accounts. In section 2.1, it present Nozick's sensitivity based knowledge account and, in section 2.2, three well known problems for this account: insensitive inductive knowledge, implausible closure failure, and the problem of one-sided methods. In section 2.3, it discusses alternative sensitivity accounts as proposed by DeRose, Black, Roush and Becker that attempt to handle problems of insensitive knowledge and/or closure failure better than Nozick's account does. Section 2.4 is devoted to the alternative modal principle of safety and problems for safety accounts of knowledge.

Chapter 3, SAC: A Sensitivity Account of Checking

This Chapter develops a sensitivity account of checking. It begins by sketching two necessary conditions on checking, first that S uses the method with the intention of determining whether *p* is true and second that M is an appropriate method with respect to *p*. In section 3.1, it discusses the first condition, which

specifies the intentional features of the checking subject. Furthermore, it introduces some terminology and distinguishes between *ex ante* reports about checking and *ex post* reports along with defining the technical notion of checking *that p* is true. Section 3.1 ends by providing a natural language analysis concerning 'checking' and related concepts such as 'determining,' 'checking out,' 'double-checking,' 'testing,' and 'settling a question.' In the following sections, 3.2-3.9, this chapter discusses the second condition on checking, which concerns the modal features of the method used. It defines any method that is appropriate with respect to *p* as a *checking method for p*. First, it provides a detailed account of modal features of *methods* instead of modal features of *beliefs*. Second, it sketches the features of ideal methods for checking whether *p*. Third, it argues that sensitivity is necessary for checking and, fourth, it explains why safety is not sufficient. Fifth, it contends that a sensitivity based checking account does not suffer from Luper-Foy's problem of one-sided methods. Sixth, it elaborates necessary and sufficient conditions for checking methods that are asymmetric with respect to *p* and ¬*p*. Seventh, it analyzes the relations between the provided account of checking and existing knowledge accounts. Finally, it is argued that the proposed checking account does not suffer from the generality problem and that Kripke's barn façade example does not pose a counter-example.

Chapter 4, Checking, Alternatives, and Discrimination

The first part of Chapter 4, extends the account of checking, developed in Chapter 3. First, Chapter 4 provides a more fine-grained analysis of checking by distinguishing between cases like checking that it is true that Peter cleaned, checking that *Peter* (and not somebody else) cleaned the kitchen or checking that Peter cleaned the *kitchen* (and not something else). Second, it investigates checking with regard to particular alternatives, e.g. checking that Peter and not Frank cleaned the kitchen. Third, it analyzes checking plus wh-clauses, e.g. checking *who* cleaned the kitchen. In the second part of Chapter 4, it is shown how we can elaborate a theory of discriminating in analogy to the modal theory of checking viz. a theory about the conditions for having the capacity to discriminate Fs from Gs. The reader will see that sensitivity is not only necessary for checking but also for discriminating, i.e. S cannot discriminate Fs from Gs via M if, in the nearest possible worlds where *x* is G, M indicates that *x* is F.

Chapter 5, Checking, Inferences, and Necessities

Observation and the uses of technical devices are paradigmatic methods for checking. In these cases, the method often directly indicates that the target proposition is true (or indicates that it is false). However, in many cases we want to check a proposition whose truth or falsity observation or technical devices cannot indicate directly. In these cases, inferences may be involved in the checking processes. This chapter investigates which kinds of inferences can be involved in checking methods. In the first section, it presents Nozick's sensitivity based account of inferential knowledge and its consequences for deduction, induction and abduction. The reader will see that some instances of deduction can yield knowledge but some others cannot. This is in line with Nozick's take on knowledge closure. Moreover, some instances of induction cannot yield knowledge, as critics of Nozick point out, though some others can, a rather neglected fact. Abduction can yield inferential knowledge, on Nozick's account, if the inference is one to *the* best explanation. Here Nozick's account of inferential knowledge fits well with our intuitive understanding of proper abductive inferences. In the second section, it is shown that we get the same results for checking and it is argued that this does not pose a problem for SAC. The last section investigates checking of necessary truths. Orthodox semantics of counterfactual conditionals has it that any method trivially fulfills the sensitivity and safety condition for necessary truths. Thus, one should be able to check necessary truths by using any method, which is highly implausible. It is argued that non-orthodox semantics for counterfactuals that also takes into account impossible worlds avoids this problem and provides a natural extension of SAC to necessary truths.

Chapter 6, SAC and Knowledge Puzzles

Part I of 'Knowing and Checking' presents SAC, a sensitivity account of checking. Part II investigates how SAC can contribute to explaining and solving existing philosophical puzzles about *knowledge*. This part will not defend a particular account of knowledge. Consequently, it cannot and will not explicate the *actual* connections between checking and knowing. Nevertheless, SAC can be used for explaining existing puzzles about knowledge. This can be done by revealing the connections between checking and our *intuitions* about knowing,

thereby leaving open whether our knowledge intuitions are actually right or wrong. Chapter 6 first develops the core connection between checking and intuitions about knowing. Second, it presents low-stakes/high-stakes puzzles and closure puzzles, along with existing solutions to these puzzles. Third, it discusses how SAC can explain low-stakes/high-stakes puzzles and contribute to existing solutions. Fourth, it undertakes this investigation for closure puzzles and compares the SAC-based explanation of closure puzzles to alternatives. It will be shown that our intuitions about checking and knowing can only explain some low-stakes/high-stakes puzzles, but they provide the best explanation for closure puzzles. Various existing *solutions* to closure puzzles, such as strict and moderate invariantism and contextualism, are compatible with the SAC-based explanation.

Chapter 7, Checking and Bootstrapping

The first section of Chapter 7 contains a theory about checking and bootstrapping. The second section investigates how this theory can be used to explain and to solve knowledge puzzles about bootstrapping. It is first shown that inductive bootstrapping is a monotonous method that always indicates that the source in question is reliable regardless of whether it actually is reliable or not. For this reason, bootstrapping fails to be a method of checking a source's reliability. This is also true for *deductive* bootstrapping and bootstrapping about the *accuracy* of a source's indications. Some alternative ways of checking the reliability or accuracy of a source are investigated and it is concluded that these possibilities have certain limitations. Second, it is argued that we have to distinguish between checking that *p*, checking that a source O truly indicates that *p* and checking *of* O's indication that *p* that it is true. This distinction will also be relevant in Chapter 8 when various ways of checking whether one's own beliefs are true are investigated. We will see that each of these checking processes has different sensitivity conditions and, consequently, different limitations. The second section of Chapter 7 investigates how SAC and KSAC can explain *knowledge* puzzles about bootstrapping and how they can contribute to solving them.

Chapter 8, SAC and the Skeptical Puzzle

This final chapter provides an explanation of the skeptical puzzle and the Moorean puzzle that is based on a sensitivity account of checking, SAC. Section 8.1 surveys the contemporary debate about skepticism and Mooreanism. Section 8.2 presents a SAC-based explanation of the skeptical puzzle and the Moorean puzzle. It begins by discussing doubting and its relationship to checking one's own beliefs, contrasting them with ordinary self-reflection. It argues that Moorean reasoning is a way of acquiring higher-level knowledge and knowledge that the skeptical hypotheses are false. However, it is not a way of checking *of* one's beliefs in the denials of the skeptical hypotheses that they are true. This explanation of the Moorean puzzle fits well with moderate invariantism and with a SAC-based version of contextualism. Section 8.3 discusses a heterogeneity problem concerning bootstrapping and Mooreanism that existing sensitivity accounts of *knowledge* are faced with along with a generality problem about higher-level knowledge. It is shown that a SAC-based solution suffers neither from the heterogeneity problem nor from the generality problem.