

## A Purported Theorem of Epistemic Logic\*

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In *The Range of Epistemic Logic*<sup>1</sup>, George Schlesinger asserts as his first theorem of epistemic logic:

$$(d_1) \quad [(p \rightarrow q) \& Ksp] \rightarrow J B^*sq$$

' $J B^*sq$ ' means "objectively speaking, it is rational to accept...[ $q$ ]... on the basis of information in  $s$ 's possession..." That is, if  $p$  entails  $q$  and  $s$  knows that  $p$  then it is rational to accept  $q$  on the basis of the information in  $s$ 's possession. Nothing is said about  $s$  believing  $q$ , or  $s$  being justified in believing  $q$ . For  $s$  may be blind to the relevance of it all to  $q$ .

Schlesinger's avowed purpose is to reassure the reader through this principle that there is an epistemic logic with genuine epistemic truths. And not simply definitional truths such as: ' $Ksp \rightarrow p$ '.

The principle is then applied to a reconstruction of Descartes' Dream Argument to the effect that since I don't know that I'm not dreaming and if I'm dreaming I do not know that I'm standing up, that I do not know that I'm standing up<sup>2</sup>.

I question Schlesinger's contention that  $(d_1)$  is a genuine epistemic principle. I should like to claim that  $(d_1)$  is either not true or the occurrences of 'K' and 'B' are but window dressing and do not function as genuine epistemic operators.

Suppose Sid knows  $p$ , and let  $q$  be a first-order consequence of  $p$ . Since there can be no decision procedure for the relation of first-order consequence Sid might never establish that  $q$  is a consequence of  $p$ , and in that case it might not be rational for him to accept  $q$ .

In order to save  $(d_1)$  ' $J B^*sq$ ' would have to be read as *something* like ' $s$ ' (or for that matter, anyone) would be wise to believe  $q$ '. But then the principle is trivialized to:

$$(*) \quad p \rightarrow J B^*sp$$

I.e., if  $p$  then it is wise for  $s$  to believe it. Surely this theorem and others like it no more justify epistemic logic than the definitional ' $Ksp \rightarrow p$ '.

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#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Schlesinger, p. 4. Schlesinger prefers the formulation:

$$(d_2) [(p \rightarrow q) \& \sim J B^* s q] \rightarrow \sim K s p.$$

<sup>2</sup> In Steiner, the Cartesian argument is reconstructed. Schlesinger (pp. 4-9) faults it and shows how by using his principle a simple reconstruction of the Cartesian argument is forthcoming.

#### REFERENCES

- SCHLESINGER, G. (1985), *The Range of Epistemic Logic*, Aberdeen University Press.  
STEINER, M. (1979), "Cartesian Scepticism and Epistemic Logic", *Analysis*, vol. 39, pp. 38-41.