

Epistemic Possibility and Its Abominable Conjunction

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Thesis: The standard view of epistemic possibility is false.

1. The abominable conjunction

(Standard view of epistemic possibility) q is epistemically possible for S just in case what S knows doesn't entail, in a way that is obvious to S , not- q .

(Fallibilism) For some S , there are some propositions 1) that S knows and 2) that have a chance of being false.

p has a chance of being false = the probability that p is false is not 0

The probability here is epistemic. (Example: A fair D20 has landed on 3. You are certain that the D20 will land on some number. The logical/physical probability it has landed on 3 is 1. The epistemic probability for you that it has landed on 3 is .05.)

(Abominable conjunction) There's a chance that p , and p is impossible.

(There's an epistemic chance that p , and p is epistemically impossible.)

Fork example: I know that the only fork in front of me is metal. I've been wrong about the material of forks before. There's a chance that the fork in front of me is plastic. But still, I (fallibly) know that the fork is metal.

Obviously (to me), metal forks are not plastic. According to the standard account of epistemic possibility, then, it is not (epistemically) possible that the fork is plastic. So, the following abominable conjunction is true: there's a chance that the fork is plastic, but it's impossible that the fork is plastic.

2. Why the conjunction is abominable #1

The probability space is filled only with possibilities. (Analogy to other forms of probability) If this is not what the proponents of the standard view mean by 'possibility' then it's not what is meant by 'might' either, and the proponents of the standard view motivate their view by using words like 'might'.

3. Why the conjunction is abominable #2

It sounds really bad. Just as CKAs are infelicitous, abominable conjunctions are infelicitous.

The dialectical situation:

1. **Standard view:** on the non-standard view, CKAs would come out true, but they're odd.
2. **Non-standard view:** on the standard view, abominable conjunctions would come out true, but they're odd.
3. The non-standard view proponents have a WAM for the infelicity of CKAs, but standard view proponents don't have a WAM for the infelicity of the abominable conjunction. And if they do, the CKAs-infelicity argument is no stronger than the abominable-conjunction-infelicity argument.