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1 April 1999

Dear Mary Kate,

The trip to Donegal (and Ulster, and England) was very successful except for one thing: cat Possum died while we were away. Not by surprise. We kept in touch with the Penn vet hospital, and they told us he was going downhill fast and there was nothing more they could do.

On or near St. Patrick's day, sessions are in the afternoon, not the evening; and, at least in the town of Donegal, they're very crowded. So we chose sight-seeing over sessions. But, to my surprise, we later found quite a good session in Belfast. (In what was clearly a Republican pub. I don't know whether the prots have sessions or not.) I hated Belfast on first sight, but came to like it a bit better as the evening went on.

Having a concept (say, of causation) is having a disposition to classify possible cases in some more or less principled way. I take conceptual analysis to be the project of investigating these dispositions. Investigating my own dispositions, at least at the outset. I'd guess mine are pretty much the same as other people's, but whether that's so or not it's wise to start with the case I know best.

Dispositions can be interfered with by other dispositions. For instance I have a disposition to multiply correctly, but it's interfered with by a disposition to make careless mistakes, and by a disposition to refuse to go on multiplying without adequate reason. So you can't just read off my concept of multiplication from my overall pattern of multiplication-behaviour; the best explanation of my overall behaviour will say that it's produced by an interplay of dispositions, only one of which is my concept of multiplication.

So likewise with my judgements of whether various possible cases are cases of causation. My concept of causation can be interfered with by various kinds of dispositions to get confused or make mistakes. Investigating the concept requires inference to the best explanation, and sometimes a candidate explanation for my offhand inclinations to classify cases will be that I'm getting confused or making some sort of mistake, so that my inclinations don't perfectly fit the concept that underlies them. Sometimes such an explanation may be the best explanation, enough ahead of its available rivals that it should be (tentatively) accepted.

What makes an explanation good or bad? Well, I have a prior sense of what sorts of hypotheses are more or less plausible, and I don't know how much more I can say. An explanation that says that a certain classification is mistaken, but has nothing further to say about why I

make the mistake, is ceteris paribus implausible and bad; an explanation that explains why I tend to make the mistake, say because I'm misled by a certain resemblance between the misclassified case and another case, is ceteris paribus better. An explanation that says that some of my very confident classifications are wrong is ceteris paribus worse than one that says only that some of my less confident classifications are wrong, or one that says only that some of my refusals to classify are wrong. An explanation that says that my concept is not so very principled, that it's full of quirky exceptions that have no apparent point, is ceteris paribus worse than one that makes the concept make more sense. An explanation that posits some familiar kind of indeterminacy or ambiguity is ceteris paribus better than one that posits some unprecedented kind ad hoc. And so on, and so forth. As always, different virtues of rival explanations must be balanced off. As always, we don't know in advance how good the best explanation will be. As always, there's no guarantee that the best explanation is true.

Suppose my classifications seem ambivalent, either because I find myself classifying the same case differently after coming at it from different directions, or because I find myself stably reluctant to classify the case one way or the other. One explanation is that there's a right answer, but something is interfering with my disposition to give it. That might be the best explanation -- especially if it makes the concept more principled than it would otherwise turn out to be, and especially if the alleged mistake is explicable. This is the 'spoils to the victor' move. It gives me license to clean up the ragged edges of my offhand inclinations to classify. But note that this is not Carnap's sort of license to clean up: the project is still to investigate the concept I already have, not to improve on it. (Improvements might perhaps be a good idea, though I think more likely not. But surely the first step is to find out where I'm starting from!) And it should not at all suggest that the truth about my concepts is for me to make up as I please -- no, what I'm making up are fallible hypotheses about an independent (mental) reality that I can't examine directly.

On the other hand, the best explanation of an ambivalence might instead be that the concept really is indeterminate: even without interferences, the disposition to classify cases one way or the other just gives out. This is the 'respect our ambivalence' move. I think it's very clear that respecting our ambivalence is sometimes the right thing to do: for instance in the cases of 'bald', 'flat', and 'know'. And sometime not. There's no easy rule for when it's the right thing to do and when not -- it depends on one's judgement of how the advantages and drawbacks of the available explanations balance out.

I hope this helps. Feel free to share it with Kate and Amelie, or others.

Yours,

David Lewis