

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH

CRRAR

RSNG ARGMNTN RHTRC

presents

UNDERSTANDING ‘PROBABLY’

Dr. Robert C. Pinto

CRRAR Senior Fellow

Abstract

Following Wilfrid Sellars I argue that, in a basic epistemic sense of probable (in relation to which other epistemically normative senses are to be understood), to say that a proposition is probable is to say that all things considered there is good reason to adopt a positive doxastic attitude toward it. However, where Sellars took the positive doxastic attitude toward P at issue to be *accepting P*, I argue that we ought to take it to be *expecting that P will turn out to be the case*. Moreover, rather than trying to understand *expecting that P* by appealing to the idea of *believing that P is probable or likely*, I reverse the order of explanation and try to understand *believing that P is probable* by appealing to the idea of *believing that it is reasonable to expect that P*. In order to implement this order of explanation, the core of the paper attempts to show how expecting can be type-identified in terms of its functional role in our cognitive lives, without reference to a prior notion of probability. I argue that its functional role can be unpacked in terms of (a) the role that expecting plays in supplying grounds for, among other things, adopting a course of action and (b) the sorts of consideration that give rise to and render reasonable an expectation that P. In the penultimate section of the paper I show how this reading of probable can help us to make sense of how objective *numeric* probabilities can play a role in epistemic appraisal.

Thursday, March 11th, 2010

4:00 p.m.

Parker House Lounge

105 Sunset Ave.

All are welcome

