DISCUSSION

FINAL COMMENTS ON THE ANALYSIS OF WARRANTING

Some of Professor Pastin's comments in ‘Warranting Reconsidered’ make clear the extent to which I misunderstood the nature of his project in ‘Counterfactuals in Epistemology’. I originally thought that Pastin's analyses of warranting concepts were intended to be analyses or explications of concepts already in use (however confusedly) among epistemologists. I took him to be engaged in a project of this sort primarily because he described his enterprise in terms that would have been appropriate to it, if it had been of this sort. He said, for example, that “many notions employed by epistemologists are counterfactual notions. Among these are the notions of self-warrant, evidential support, and epistemic coherence.” He went on to present analyses that I took to be analyses of the notions in question. In light of this, I came to the conclusion that Pastin intended, among other things, to provide analyses or explications of some concepts currently employed by epistemologists, and expressible by such terms as ‘p warrants q for S at t’, ‘p justifies q for S at t’, and ‘p supports q for S at t’. In ‘On the Analysis of Warranting’, I pointed out some respects in which Pastin’s defined concepts differ from any such concepts.

It now appears that Pastin’s goal was not to provide analyses of such concepts. It appears, instead, that the definitions he has provided are stipulations, designed to call our attention to concepts not previously used or noted by epistemologists. This comes out quite clearly in Pastin’s remark that “the notions of warrant dependence and warrant making are what they are. There is no point in discussing whether they should reflect directionality.” I take this and other passages in ‘Warranting Reconsidered’ to show that the success or failure of Pastin’s project is not dependent upon the extent to which his defined concepts share important features with epistemic concepts already in use. Although I am now pretty sure that Pastin did not intend to analyse epistemic concepts already in use, I must admit that I am not entirely clear about just what he did intend to do.

In spite of the fact that I do not fully understand the nature of Pastin’s project, it still appears to me that some of his technical apparatus does not
work in anything like the way in which he assumes it does. As an example, let us reconsider the definition of ‘basic contraction’.

Pastin provides the following definition:

Contraction \( R' \) of \( S \)'s e-system \( R \) at \( t \) is a basic contraction of \( R \) with respect to \( E \) iff \( R' \) is attributable to \( S \) at \( t \) on the assumption that \( S \)'s condition at \( t \) be changed only as required on epistemic grounds by the fact that \( E \) is not part of \( S \)'s e-system at \( t \).

This definition is obscure and ambiguous. Part of the obscurity arises from the occurrence in it of such phrases as ‘attributable’, ‘on the assumption that’, ‘condition’, and ‘required on epistemic grounds’. Another part of the obscurity arises from the somewhat unconventional grammatical structure of the definiens. However, remarks made in other contexts in ‘Counterfactuals’ as well as in ‘Warranting Reconsidered’ shed some light on Pastin’s intentions.

It now seems to me that at least one version of the idea behind this definition can be brought out in the following way:\(^7\) Consider some person, \( S \), at some time, \( t \), and suppose that \( R \) is \( S \)'s e-system at \( t \). Suppose also that \( R' \) is a contraction of \( R \) with respect to some element, \( E \). In order to determine whether \( R' \) is basic, we must consider what sorts of changes in \( S \)'s ‘condition’ would have to occur in order to make the ascription of \( R' \) to \( S \) possible. If some of these changes are changes that would not be required on epistemic grounds by \( E \)'s being absent from \( S \)'s e-system, then \( R' \) is not basic. Otherwise, \( R' \) is basic.

In order to clarify this interpretation of Pastin’s concept, we need to give some account of what might be meant by saying that some change is ‘required on epistemic grounds’. We must also give an account of what might be meant by ‘the fact that \( E \) is not part of \( S \)'s e-system at \( t \)’. After all, we are assuming that \( E \) is a part of \( S \)'s e-system at \( t \). So there is no such ‘fact’. Furthermore, it is not clear that a fact can require a change. It seems more reasonable to suppose that only a change can require a change. I shall make this supposition.

One way in which we might explain epistemic requirement is by appeal to Pastin’s concept of epistemic possibility. We can perhaps say that \( c \) epistemically requires change \( c' \) iff it is not epistemically possible that \( c \) occurs but \( c' \) does not occur. In other words, it is epistemically necessary that if \( c \) occurs, then \( c' \) occurs.

Next, we can say that the change that is to do the requiring is the change from the state of affairs in which \( E \) is in \( S \)'s e-system to the state of affairs in