The Analysis of Knowledge

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PH2243: Epistemology

In Search of an Analysis of Knowledge

Big Question

What is knowledge?

In Search of an Analysis of Knowledge

Many philosophers have sought to answer this question by giving an *analysis* or *definition* of knowledge of the form:

S knows *p* if and only if…

(Here S is any subject, and *p* is any proposition—e.g., *grass is green*, *Singapore is near the equator*, etc.)

Comparison

What is a triangle?

x is a triangle if and only if

1. x is a polygon
2. x has three sides

Note that conditions (1) and (2) here are individually *necessary* and jointly *sufficient* for something to be a triangle

i.e., nothing is a triangle unless it is both a polygon and three-sided, and anything which is both a polygon and three-sided is a triangle

Comparison

What is a bachelor?

S is a bachelor if and only if

1. S is unmarried
2. S is a man

In Search of an Analysis of Knowledge

S knows *p* if and only if…

The Truth Condition

S knows p if and only if

1. p is true

The Truth Condition

(1) ?? I know it's raining, but it isn't raining.

(2) ?? Amari knows the party starts at eight. But the party doesn't start at eight.

(3) ?? S knows *p*, but *p* is false.

The Truth Condition

S knows p if and only if

1. p is true

The Truth Condition

What is truth though?

Good question! But not one that we need to take a stand on here.

That said, it will be helpful to assume that there are objective truths out there, independent of our beliefs.

The Truth Condition

- Is truth sufficient for knowledge?

(4) There's an even number of stars in the galaxy.

(5) There's an odd number of stars in the galaxy.

The Truth Condition

The Belief Condition

S knows p if and only if

1. p is true
2. S believes p

The Belief Condition

- Is true belief sufficient for knowledge?

The Belief Condition

Reasons to think true belief is not sufficient for knowledge:

- Fred believes (for no good reason) that there is an even # of stars in the universe. As a matter of fact, there is an even # of stars. Does Fred know that there is an even # of stars?
- The detective believes that the butler committed the crime. But the detective doesn't believe this on the basis of the evidence; rather, the detective believes this bc he is irrationally suspicious of all butlers. As a matter of fact, the butler did commit the crime.

Note that in both of these cases, the agent is not *justified* in their belief. They believe the truth, but their belief does not seem to be rational, or well-supported by the evidence.

The JTB Analysis

JTB Analysis

S knows p if and only if

1. p is true — **truth condition**
2. S believes p — **belief condition**
3. S's belief that p is justified. — **justification condition**

Equivalently: S knows p iff S has a justified true belief that p.

Gettier Cases

Stopped Clock

Marcy wants to know the time, so she looks at the clock. The clock reads '3:00'. Since Marcy has no reason to distrust the clock, she forms the belief that it is 3:00. Unbeknownst to Marcy, she's actually looking at a stopped clock. However, it just so turns out that Marcy looked at the clock at exactly 3:00.

Gettier Cases

According to the JTB analysis, Marcy knows that it's 3 o'clock if and only if:

1. It's true that it's 3 o'clock ✓
2. Marcy believes that it's 3 o'clock ✓
3. Marcy's belief that it's 3 o'clock is justified ✓

More Gettier Cases

Coins:

Smith and Jones have both applied for a job. Smith has strong evidence both that Jones will get the job, and that Jones has 10 coins in his pocket. From this Smith infers: *The person who will get the job has 10 coins in his pocket.* As a matter of fact, Smith—not Jones—is actually the person who will get the job. Moreover, it turns out that Smith also has 10 coins in his pocket.

- *Intuition:* Smith doesn't know that the person who will get the job has 10 coins in his pocket.

More Gettier Cases

Sheep in the Field

You are standing in the field, looking at something that looks exactly like a sheep. You form the belief: there is a sheep in the field. As it turns out, you are looking at a boulder that looks exactly like a sheep. Nonetheless, there is a sheep somewhere else in the field, hidden just out of view.

Historical Note

Gettier cases are so-called because they were popularized in contemporary philosophy by Gettier's article.

But structurally similar cases had been proposed by philosophers prior to Gettier.

Historical Note

For example, here's a structurally similar case from the Indian philosopher Dharmottara, in a text dating back to the 8th Century:

Smoke and Fire

A fire has just been lit to roast some meat. The fire hasn't started sending up any smoke, but the smell of the meat has attracted a cloud insects. From a distance, an observer sees the dark swarm above the horizon and mistakes it for smoke. 'There's a fire burning at that spot,' the observer says.

Where does this leave us?

S knows p if and only if

1. p is true
2. S believes p
3. S's belief that p is justified
4. ???

The Hunt for the Fourth Condition

S knows *p* if and only if

1. *p* is true
2. S believes *p*
3. S's belief that *p* is justified
4. ???

Big Question: What fourth condition could block Gettier cases?

No False Grounds Analysis

Here's one suggestion:

S knows p if and only if

1. p is true
2. S believes p
3. S's belief that p is justified
4. S's belief that p is not based on any falsehoods.

Applying the No False Grounds Analysis

Stopped Clock

Marcy wants to know the time, so she looks at the clock. The clock reads '3:00'. Since Marcy has no reason to distrust the clock, she forms the belief that it is 3:00. Unbeknownst to Marcy, she's actually looking at a stopped clock. However, it just so turns out that Marcy looked at the clock at exactly 3:00.

According to the No False Grounds Analysis, Marcy does not know it is 3:00 because her belief is based on the false assumption that the clock is working properly.

Discussion Group Questions

1. Come up with a Gettier case of your own—i.e., a case where a person has a justified true belief, but their belief does not amount to knowledge.
2. Does the No False Grounds Analysis handle the other Gettier cases covered in these lectures (e.g., Coins, Sheep in the Field, Smoke & Fire)? Can you think of any counterexamples to the No False Grounds Analysis?

Next Week

- A different approach to the Gettier Problem: the causal theory.