

Introduction to Epistemology

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A Quick Explanation of Epistemology

- ▶ Epistemology is the branch of philosophy and is called the theory of knowledge.
- ▶ One of the characteristic questions concerns what the things called knowledge have in common: what is knowledge?

Types of Knowledge

- ▶ ◎ Propositional knowledge: “I know it is fine today.”
- ▶ Ability knowledge: “I know how to swim.”
- ▶ Scientific knowledge
- ▶ Religious knowledge
- ▶ Moral knowledge
- ▶ ⋮

Scientific Knowledge

- 1 It is guided by natural law;
- 2 It has to be explanatory by reference to natural law;
- 3 It is testable against the empirical world;
- 4 Its conclusions are tentative (i.e. are not necessarily the final word); and
- 5 It is falsifiable. (Overton, 1982)

Defining Knowledge

Two Requirements on Knowledge

- ▶ The truth requirement: knowledge must be true.
- ▶ The belief requirement: knowledge must be belief.

Is Knowledge a true belief?

Consider Harry, who forms his belief that the horse Lucky Lass will win the next race purely on the basis of the fact that the name of the horse appeals to him.[...] Harry's belief turns out to be true, in that Lucky Lass does win the next race. Is this knowledge? (Pritchard, D., 2013, p.5).

Justification

- ▶ *Justification*: being in possession of good reasons for thinking that a belief is true.
- ▶ The classical (tripartite) account of knowledge: it is necessary to justify one's belief to gain knowledge.

Gettier Cases

- ▶ Gettier showed cases where one has justified true belief but still lacks knowledge.

Imagine a man, let's call him John, who comes downstairs one morning and sees that the time on the grandfather clock in the hall says "8.20." On this basis John comes to believe that it is 8.20 a.m., and this belief is true, since it is 8.20 a.m. Moreover, John's belief is justified in that it is based on excellent grounds.... Suppose, however, that the clock had, unbeknownst to him, stopped 24 hours earlier, so that John is now forming his justified true belief by looking at a stopped clock. (Pritchard, D., 2013, pp.24-25)

Responding to the Gettier Cases

- ▶ Proposal: add a new requirement “justified not in any way based on false presuppositions” into the account.
- ▶ It is difficult to spell out presuppositions to justify a belief.

- ▶ Reliabilism: a view that knowledge must be a true belief gained in a reliable way.

Imagine, for example, that you find out what the temperature of the room is by looking at the thermometer on the wall.[. . .] The thermometer is, in fact, broken and is fluctuating randomly. Crucially, however, this isn't making the thermometer an unreliable indicator of what the temperature in the room is for the simple reason that someone is hidden in the room and adjusting the temperature of the room to match whatever reading is on the thermometer whenever she sees you look at the thermometer (we won't concern ourselves with why). (Pritchard, D., 2013, p.56)

Virtue Epistemology

- ▶ Virtue epistemology: a view that knowledge must be a true belief gained by employing epistemic virtue and cognitive faculties.
- ▶ Epistemic virtue: a character trait which makes you better suited to gaining the truth.

Externalism and Internalism

- ▶ Epistemic externalism: a view that one's epistemic standing can sometimes depend on factors outside one's control.
- ▶ Epistemic internalism: a view that one controls one's epistemic standing.

Conclusion of Section 1

- ▶ The classical account of knowledge: knowledge must be a justified true belief.
- ▶ The defect of the account has shown in Gettier's paper.
- ▶ Reliabilism: knowledge must be a true belief gained in a reliable way.
- ▶ Virtue epistemology: knowledge must be a true belief gained by employing epistemic virtue and cognitive faculties.

Perception, Testimony, and Inference

Where does knowledge come from?

- ▶ Perception
- ▶ Testimony
- ▶ Inference

A Problem of Perceptual Knowledge

- ▶ The argument from illusion: a visual impression by seeing a genuine oasis could be the exact same as a visual impression of an illusory oasis.

Direct realism and Indirect realism

- ▶ Indirect realism: we gain knowledge of an objective world indirectly via our sense impressions.
- ▶ Direct realism: we gain knowledge of an objective world directly from perceptual experiences at least in non-deceived cases.

Idealism and Transcendental idealism

- ▶ We gain only knowledge of a constructed world by our perception and does not have knowledge of an objective world independent of perception.
- ▶ Idealism: there does not exist an objective world.
- ▶ Transcendental idealism: there exists an objective world that gives rise to this sensory experience.

Testimony

- ▶ How is gaining belief/knowledge by a testimony justified?
- ▶ Reductionism: testimonial justification is reduced to non-testimonial justification such as though perceptions.
- ▶ Credulism: It is defaultly presumed that beliefs/knowledge are justifiably held unless there is a special reason for doubt.

Inference

- ▶ Deduction: inference through a valid argument.
 - ▶ A valid argument: the truth of the premises entails the truth of the conclusion.
- ▶ Induction (enumerative induction): inference in which a general principle is derived by a large and representative sample.
- ▶ Argument from analogy
- ▶ Abduction: inference to the best explanation.

Abduction

For example, consider the following inference:

1 There are feet exposed under the curtain in the hall. Therefore:

C There is someone hiding behind the curtain. (Pritchard, D., 2013, p.96)

- ▶ Abduction are inductively grounded.

Conclusion of Section 2

- ▶ There are three ways to support a belief and to gain knowledge: perception, testimony, and inference.

Radical Skepticism

Radical Skepticism

- ▶ Radical skepticism: it is impossible to know anything much about the world.
 - ▶ Skeptical hypothesis: A brain in a vat.
 - ▶ The closure principle: $K\varphi \wedge K(\varphi \rightarrow \psi) \Rightarrow K\psi$ (K + MP)

- ▶ φ : “I am standing on the ground”
- ▶ ψ : “My brain is in a vat”

$$\begin{array}{c} 1: K\varphi \quad 2: K(\varphi \rightarrow \neg\psi) \\ \hline K\neg\psi \qquad 3: \neg K\neg\psi \\ \hline \perp \end{array}$$

Responding to Radical Skepticism

- ▶ Attack against ignorance of the hypothesis
 - ▶ Mooreanism: One can know the skeptical hypothesis from the knowledge of a dairy fact and the closure principle.
- ▶ Attack against the closure principle
 - ▶ The sensitivity principle: Knowledge must be sensitive in the sense that if the proposition had been false, the one would not have believed it.
- ▶ Contextualism: One has knowledge relative to everyday standards but does not have knowledge to skeptical standards.

REFERENCES

- Pritchard, D. (2013). *What is this thing called knowledge?*. Routledge.