PHILOSOPHY PAPER

In this paper I will talk about the True Justified Belief theory, the three conditions needed to satisfy the JTB theory and how having JTB cannot be considered equal to knowledge by showing that it is possible to arrive at the right conclusion/answer while having incorrect beliefs/premises.

The pursuit of knowledge is one of mankind’s noblest endeavors. It is what drives innovation, development and most importantly allows to make sense of the world we exist in. Knowledge is what helps us decipher our experiences and draw inferences from our surroundings to use at our disposal. The question that arises is what makes up knowledge, and how information or data we observe around us can be treated as knowledge. This is one of the questions first addressed by Plato in the form of True Justified Belief. (Cite: IEP)

The JTB account holds that knowledge is equivalent to justified true belief; if all three conditions: Truth, Belief and Justification are met then we have knowledge of that claim.

So, X has knowledge that p if

1. p is true
2. X believes that p
3. X has justification to believe that p

[cite: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy]

I will use the example of a sheep in the field to prove the necessity and sufficiency of each condition of the justified true belief theory. E.g., You are driving by a field and you see a sheep in the field. The entity you see looks like a sheep, smells like a sheep and sounds like a sheep. So, you believe that there is a sheep in the field. [cite: Dr. Adam Sennet]

1. TRUTH:

For X to know that p, p needs to be true i.e., it needs to be factually correct. It is necessary for p to be true in order to have knowledge about it. A statement or a fact might be true but that alone is not sufficient to claim that we knowledge about it. E.g. There is in fact a sheep in the field, satisfying the truth condition which is necessary as you cannot have knowledge of something which is not true.

1. BELIEF:

In the second condition, for X to have knowledge that p, X needs to believe that p. This means that in order to have knowledge about something (p) it is required that one believes in that something (p). Our experiences, our memories, our senses, the things we can see and hear and feel, all of these shape up our beliefs and how we interpret the world around us. So, X believes that p means that through all the experiences, senses and perceptions that X has about the world around him/her X considers p to be the case. E.g. Upon closer inspection you notice that it looks, smells and sounds like a sheep so you believe that it is a sheep. Belief precludes knowing so you have to believe in (p) in order to have knowledge that (p). You can only have knowledge of something that you believe in but you could believe in something and still be wrong. So, belief too is a necessary but not sufficient for knowledge.

1. JUSTIFICATION:

Following the second condition, for X to believe that p, X needs to have valid justification to believe that p. To be justified in believing that p is to have reasonable and valid reasons to believe that p i.e., to have good reasons to consider your justification over other alternatives.

E.g., You are justified in believing that it is a sheep based on your past experiences, memories and understanding of what a sheep is. It has all the qualities associated with a sheep which align with your perception and information about sheep. But is this condition enough to say that we have knowledge that there is a sheep in the field? It is possible for you to believe that there is a sheep in the field and be justified in your belief based on your individual senses and experiences but the claim to knowledge is incomplete without the belief being true. Hence, justification is a necessary condition but not a sufficient one as it is possible to arrive at the correct conclusion even with the wrong premises for your belief.

All three are necessary conditions but none of them are sufficient by themselves. But they can be sufficient together

GETTIER CASES:

Gettier cases are counterexamples that challenge the justified true belief account of knowledge. Gettier cases which get their name from the philosopher Edmund Gettier present examples in which an individual has justified true belief of something but it cannot be called knowledge. These represent instances where someone has JTB but it fails to qualify as knowledge because the underlying belief turns out to be false or the premises used to arrive at the conclusion turn out to be false.

E.g., Arth, an amateur astronomer in the early modern ages (d) believes the sun and all the other heavenly bodies in the sky revolve around the earth. Through his days he notices that every morning (p) the sun rises in the east and as the day progresses moves through the sky and sets in the west. So, through (d) he has justified belief that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. As it turns out it is true that from the surface of the earth the sun does appears to rise in the east and set in the west. But we know that the sun moves from east to west in the sky due to the rotation of the earth on its axis and not because it revolves around the earth. All the evidence Arth has points to the model that the sun and all the other heavenly bodies in the sky revolve around the earth which causes the sun to move from east to west in the sky. Arth is justified in his belief due to his personal experiences and observations. He has no reason to doubt his belief, the sun and other object in the sky do appear to move across the sky, he doesn’t have a reason to believe an alternative like the earth moving around on its axis because for him there is no evidence for it. He doesn’t feel the earth moving or things around him shifting due to the movement of the earth.

So even though Arth has justified belief that (p) and (p) is in fact true, he cannot be said to know or have knowledge that (p) as his underlying beliefs (d) are incorrect. Thus his primary premise that the sun rises in the east and set despite being true cannot be considered to be knowledge as his underlying belief that all heavenly bodies revolve around the earth is incorrect.

Over the years many people have debated what is it to have justified reasons, one of the solutions for this is to rule out other (within reason) alternatives to the justification of the case. This falls under the shade of infallibilism. The infallibilism theory states that in order to have knowledge that p we need to eliminate any fallible justification of the belief that p. It entails that there should be no chance of any alternatives of the justification being true and that the case presented for the claim to knowledge should have infallible justification (in a way that there is no other truth than the justification provided). The infallibilism theory falls short in the sense that is usually neither practical nor possible to have infallible beliefs about all the things around us. There is some amount of fallibility present with all our experiences, perceptions and senses. Our general fallibility in justification combined with the infallibilist approach to Gettier cases leads to skepticism which posits the question of how we can ever have knowledge of anything.

The problems addressed by Gettier cases can be claimed to be solved by having infallible justifications for an instance of knowledge but the quest to find non skeptical definitions of knowledge will continue. The three conditions required for true justified belief: truth, belief and justification are all necessary and can be jointly sufficient in order to have knowledge. However, as I have talked about, we cannot have knowledge based purely on the Justified True Belief of a claim.