

# Defining Knowledge II: Causes and Reliability

# Causal Theories

- Requirement: The belief in the proposition is caused by the fact(s) that make(s) the proposition true.
- Either replace third clause or add a fourth one.
- X knows that p if and only if:
  - (1) X believes that p
  - (2) p is true
  - (3) the fact(s) that p caused X to believe that p
  - (4) X is justified in believing that pand perhaps
- Aim: The condition of causal relevance is meant to eliminate cases of accidental truth.
- Prominent Advocates: Goldman, Swain and Kitcher.

# Causal Theories (2)

- Smith-Jones Case Revisited
  - (a) Smith believes that the person who gets the job has ten coins in their pocket.
  - (b) The proposition ‘The person who gets the job has ten coins in their pocket’ is true.
  - (c) The facts (that Smith’s boss tells him Jones will get the job AND that Smith gave Jones ten coins) cause Smith’s belief that p.
  - (d) The facts (that the boss gives Smith the job AND that Smith has exactly ten coins in his pocket) *do not* cause Smith’s belief that p.

Verdict: Causal condition not satisfied so Smith doesn’t know.

# Causal Theories (3)

- Sheep-dog Case Revisited

- (a) Looking out into the prairie, I form the image of a sheep in my mind.
- (b) I believe there is a sheep in the prairie.
- (c) The proposition ‘There is a sheep in the prairie’ is true.
- (d) The fact that there is a cleverly-disguised dog in the prairie causes my belief that there is a sheep in the prairie.
- (e) The fact that there is a sheep in the prairie *does not* cause my belief that there is a sheep in the prairie.

Verdict: Causal condition not satisfied so I don’t know that p.

# Causal Theories: Problems

- Henry and the fake barns
  - (a) Henry believes that there is a real barn in this area.
  - (b) The proposition ‘There is a real barn in this area’ is true.
  - (c) Henry’s belief is caused by the real barn.

True belief caused by the relevant fact: YES

Knowledge: NO

Intuition: Henry was lucky to have looked out at that time.

**NB:** Also a counterexample for the no false lemmas account.

# Reliabilism

- Requirement: The process by which we acquired the given belief produces a high proportion of true beliefs.
- *We could say*: A belief is justified if and only if it is produced by a reliable belief-forming process.
- X knows that p if and only if:
  - (1) X believes that p
  - (2) p is true
  - (3) X employed a reliable process to acquire p
- Aim: The condition of reliability is meant to eliminate accidental truth cases like the lottery example.
- Prominent Advocates: Goldman, Alston, Plantinga and Nozick

# Reliabilism (2)

- Unreliable processes tend to produce erroneous beliefs

## EXAMPLES:

- wishful thinking
- astrology
- entrails-reading

- Reliable processes tend to produce true beliefs

## EXAMPLES:

- memory
- perception
- good reasoning

# Reliabilism (3)

- Henry-Fake Barns Case Revisited
  - (a) Henry believes that there is a real barn in this area.
  - (b) The proposition ‘There is a real barn in this area’ is true.
  - (c) Henry’s belief is not ‘justified’ because *glancing out of the window of a moving car* is not a reliable process.

Verdict: Reliability condition not satisfied so Henry doesn’t know.

OR

- (c’) Henry’s belief is justified because perception is a generally reliable process.

Verdict: Reliability condition satisfied so Henry does know. The intuition that he doesn’t know is just wrong.



# Reliabilism: Problems

- Truetemp
  - (a) Truetemp believes that the temperature in this room is 13C.
  - (b) The proposition ‘The temperature in this room is 13C’ is true.
  - (c) Truetemp’s belief is acquired by a reliable process, viz. the thermometer and temperature-belief-generator implanted in his head.

True belief acquired by a reliable process: YES

Knowledge: NO

Intuition: Truetemp has no reasons for these beliefs.

**NB: It all depends on what we take to be the desideratum.**

# Reliabilism: Problems (2)

- Reliable clairvoyance  
True belief acquired by a reliable process: YES  
Knowledge: NO  
Intuition: Surely clairvoyance cannot lead to knowledge.
- The Generality Problem  
Processes can be individuated in many ways. How do we choose the right process?
  - If too narrow, then some knowledge will slip away.
  - If too broad, then anything will count as knowledge.

# Food for Thought

- What is the relationship between the causal and the reliabilist accounts?

# Reading

- A. Goldman ‘What is Justified Belief?’ in Kim and Sosa (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology*.