Epistemology

Lecture 4: Knowledge Analysis – Inference and Defeaters

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Chapter I:
The Basics

What is knowledge?

- Up to now, we've looked at some theories of justification and also some ways of knowing.

- But what exactly is knowledge generally speaking?

- One way of going about answering this question has been to *analyse the concept* of knowledge.

What is concept(ual) analysis?

- The main methodology in philosophy (especially in the 20th century but arguably as far back as the ancients) is to provide such analyses.

- Conceptual analysis is the attempt to give definitions of concepts ideally in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions that:

  * cite other related and better understood concepts
  * do justice to all the relevant (typically) pre-theoretical intuitions

- The proposed definition is thus tested against these intuitions, much the same way that observations test a scientific theory.

- The intuitions themselves are solicited or teased out through real world cases or thought experiments.

Analysis and definition

Analysandum/Definiendum	***Analysans/Definiens***
Belief *b* is justified IFF	(i) it directly rests on one or more basic beliefs OR (ii) it rests on beliefs whose chain of justifiers ends with one or more basic beliefs.
Term *t* refers to an entity α IFF	(i) α satisfies all the descriptive claims associated with *t*, (ii) these descriptive claims are true.

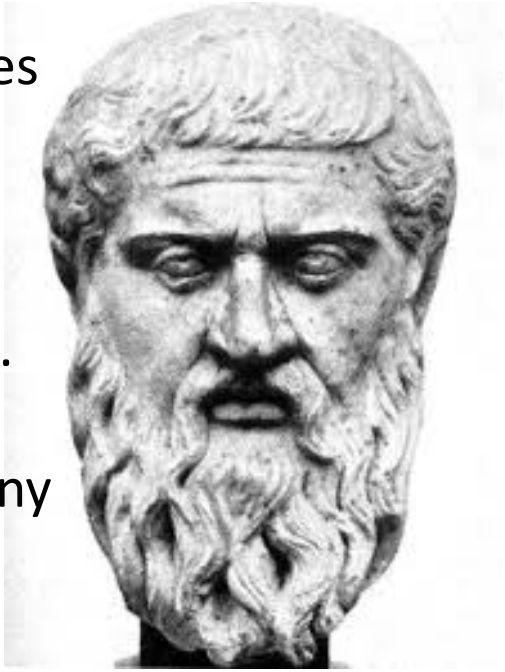
What is conceptual analysis?

Chapter II:
The Tripartite Definition

The origins of the tripartite definition

- Gettier suggests that the tripartite definition goes back to Plato's dialogues *Meno* and *Theaetetus*:

  "... knowledge is more honourable and excellent than true opinion, because fastened by a chain... that knowledge differs from true opinion is no matter of conjecture with me. There are not many things which I profess to know, but this is most certainly one of them" (*Meno*, § 98).



- Knowledge = true opinion fastened by a chain (of reasons)

- If by 'opinion' we mean belief and by 'chain of reasons' we mean justification then knowledge is justified true belief.

Knowledge as justified true belief

- More formally: the **Justified True Belief (JTB)** account holds that:

  "S knows that *P* IFF

  (i) P is **true**,

  (ii) *S* **believes** that *P*,

  (iii) *S* is **justified** in believing that *P*." (p. 121) [boldness added].

  NB: Gettier notes similar accounts given in Chisholm (1957) and Ayer (1956).

The third condition motivated

- Why bother with the third condition? Because a true belief does not appear to be enough for knowledge.

- **Stopped clock example**:
  Take a clock that has stopped at 8:21. Suppose someone looks at the clock at exactly that time.

  They form a *true belief* 'It is now 8:21'. But do they *know* that it is indeed that time?

- One intuition that seems to be shared by quite a few philosophers is that they don't know.

  Why? Because they could have so easily been misled. Hence, knowledge requires justification!

Gettier's aim

- Gettier does not propose the JTB account because he thinks it is the right account to hold.
- Rather, he mentions this and two other accounts as facing some insurmountable objections.
- In particular, he argues that all three do not provide sufficient conditions for knowledge.

Defeating a definition

- Within conceptual analysis, there are two ways to defeat a definition.

  (1) Present cases that satisfy the *definiens* but intuitively do not qualify as satisfying the concept, i.e. the *definiendum*.

  This makes the conditions **insufficient**!

  Example: Justified true beliefs that are not knowledge.

  (2) Present cases that satisfy the *definiendum* but intuitively do not satisfy the *definiens*.

  This makes at least one condition **unnecessary**!

  Example: Knowledge that's not justified true belief.

Case I: Job and coins

- Smith & Jones apply for the same job. Smith **has good evidence** that:

  (d) Jones is the man who will get the job *and* Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

- Smith then argues as follows:

  Jones is the man who will get the job and Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

  ∴ (e) **The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket**.

  NB: The argument is valid.

- The conclusion is **justified** so long as we accept this principle:

  IF (1) we're justified in believing *P* and (2) *P* entails *Q* and (3) we derive *Q* from *P*, THEN we're justified in believing *Q*.

Case I: Job and coins

- The twist in the story is that (unbeknownst to him) Smith will actually get the job and he also has ten coins in his pocket.

- *Does Smith have a justified true belief?* The answer seems to be **YES!**

  i. Smith **believes** (e), i.e.. 'The person who will get the job...'

  ii. This belief is **true**.

  iii. Smith's belief is **justified** because he has good evidence for it.

- *Does Smith know P?* Intuitively, the answer seems to be **NO!** That's because he doesn't know that *he* has ten coins in his pocket.

Truth and justification

- Note that in such cases true belief and justification (or evidence) are **not connected in the right way**.

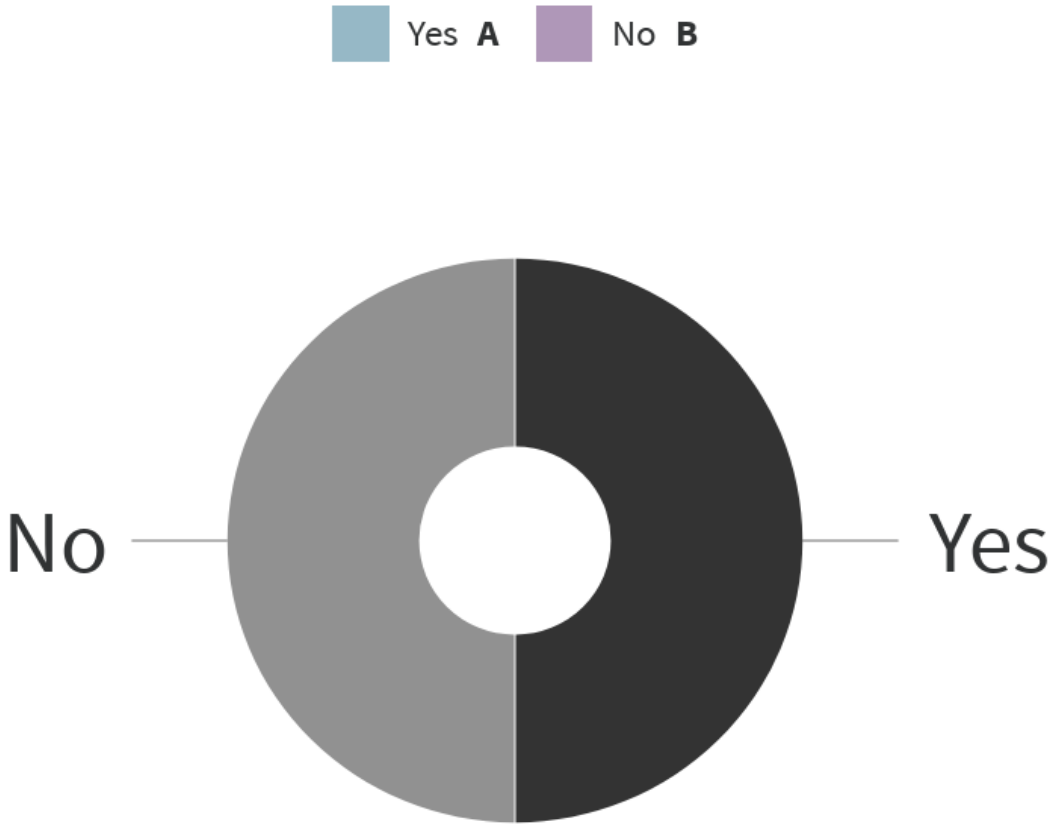
- Smith has a true belief and even has evidence for it *but* it is just not the evidence that makes *that* belief true.

- How, if at all, can we modify the account to make true belief and justification connect in the right way?

- *Hint for one solution*: Both (d) and (f) turn out to be false.

How does one defeat a definition?

Does Smith have a justified true belief?



Chapter III:
Attempts to Save the JTB Account

A question of false lemmas

- On the supposition that we accept such counter-examples, we may want to find a way to patch up the JTB account of knowledge.

- The no false lemma approach attempts to do precisely that!

- What is a lemma? An intermediate step in an argument.

- **Suggestion**: Add a fourth clause to the JTB account requiring that no false lemmas make their way into one's reasoning.

  Example: Smith's belief was defective because it originated from reasoning that involved a false lemma, viz. that Jones will get the job.

The no false lemmas account

- Here's the no false lemmas (NFL) modification of the JTB account:

  S knows that *p* if and only if:

  (1) *S* believes that *p*
  (2) *p* is true
  (3) *S* is justified in believing that *p*
  (4) *S*'s justification involves **no inference from false lemmas**

- Prominent advocate: G. Harman (1973).

Sheep-dog counterexample to NFL

- Sheep-dog counterexample in eight steps:

  (a) There is a dog disguised as a sheep in a prairie.
  (b) Looking out into that prairie, I see the disguised dog.
  (c) The image of a sheep is formed in my mind.
  (d) I believe there is a sheep in the prairie.
  (e) There is in fact a sheep in the prairie.
  (f) Thus the proposition 'There is a sheep in the prairie' is true.
  (g) Given my evidence, I am justified in believing that proposition.
  (h) My justification does not involve an inference from false lemmas.

  NB: My justification does not involve an inference at all. My belief is formed directly from seeing the cleverly-disguised dog.

What is the false lemma in the second of Gettier's examples (the Ford example)?

Chapter IV (Special Topic): Experimental Philosophy

Two options

- There appear to be some options when it comes to the conflict one finds between definitions of knowledge and counterexamples.

(1) Accept the intuitions/counterexamples and try to improve the definition through conceptual analysis.

This is, or at least used to be, the most popular approach.

(2) Reject the view that knowledge can be defined.

(a) Williamson (2000). Note that even if very few concepts can be defined, this doesn't imply that they're not useful (Fodor 1998: 45).

(b) Kornblith (2002): Knowledge is a natural phenomenon. We should investigate its instances empirically, not analytically.

Another two options

(3) Reject the view that knowledge is a central epistemic concept.

It may be argued that the right concept to use in epistemology is not knowledge but *justified belief*, *warranted belief* or *reliable belief*.

We should aim for definitions/accounts of these concepts.

(4) Reject the counterexamples.

Typically this involves either rejecting particular intuitions or undermining intuitions on the whole.

Experimental philosophy

- One of the main problems that has been raised against conceptual analysis is the **evidential role of intuitions** play in testing definitions.

  NB: In particular the kind of 'pre-theoretical' philosophical intuitions.

- This role has come under attack by experimental philosophers. They **reject conceptual analysis**, at least as it is traditionally understood.

  NB: Experimental philosophy is closely tied to naturalism.

- Experimental philosophers urge the carrying out of **studies** or even conduct their own to find out **to what extent intuitions are universal**.

Some empirical results

- Intuitions seem to vary according to:

  Age - Keil (1989): Children differ w.r.t. 'natural kind' intuitions.

  Culture – Weinberg, Nichols & Stich (2001): East-Asians have different epistemic intuitions to Westerners. Machery et. al (2004): reference.

  Order of presentation – Swain, Alexander & Weinberg (2006): Subjects first presented with clear cases of knowledge were much less willing to attribute knowledge to a Truetemp character.

  Affective content – Nichols and Knobe (2007): Subjects presented with cases about causal determinism and moral responsibility show compatibilist intuitions if a case has affective content and incompatibilist intuitions when the affective content is removed.

Two broad currents

- We may identify two broad currents within experimental philosophy:

  (1) The results of experimental studies should be used to put intuitions and philosophical claims on a proper footing – see, for example, Nahmias, Morris, Nadelhoffer and Turner (2005).

  (2) The results of experimental studies should be used to eliminate the evidential role intuitions play in conceptual analysis – see, for example, Weinberg, Nichols and Stich (2001).

The End