

Knowledge and Reality

Part A: Epistemology

Handbook, Notes & Study Questions

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1. Course Outline

Aims: This is the first half of ‘Knowledge and Reality’. The aim of this course is to give you a good, broad introduction to some of the key themes in epistemology (the theory of knowledge). Now, epistemology is a big subject, and in one term we have to be selective. Our strategy will be to start with questions about what knowledge is, we’ll then move on to raise some issues about the *justification* of our beliefs, and how this has implications for thinking about the ‘structure’ of knowledge. We’ll cover quite a few ‘-isms’ that are central to epistemology: internalism; externalism; foundationalism; empiricism; scepticism; naturalism, and, *en route* we will look at different *sources* of knowledge (e.g., perception; introspection; testimony). The first 6 lectures focus on what we might call the ‘classical’ tradition in epistemology (from Descartes onwards), one that is individualistic, and bound up with individual subjects and their subjective points of view. In the final three lectures we examine various contemporary epistemological debates about whether this ‘classical’, Cartesian, epistemology is correct (see “core readings” below for list of weekly topics).

Objectives: By the end of the course, you should be able to:

- Explain some of the central problems of epistemology and explain how epistemology relates to other areas of philosophy.
- Understand and apply key epistemic concepts in the critical analysis of epistemological problems and more widely.

- Explain and critically assess some of the central theories and approaches to epistemological problems and understand their implications for wider concerns.
- Construct and critically analyse arguments and philosophical and other theoretical positions that bear on epistemological issues.

Teaching and learning: One lecture and one workshop per week. THURSDAY 2pm, Furness LT1.

Course Website: <https://domino.lancs.ac.uk/ieppp/phil201.nsf>

Assessment: Essay of 2500 words

Essay Deadline: End of WEEK 10. 5pm Friday 12th December.

Hard copy and electronic submission via LUVLE.

Lecturer: Neil Manson (n.manson@lancaster.ac.uk). Room C41 Furness.

2. Weekly Topics & Core Readings

Please make sure you have read the long lecture notes and attempted the study questions.

Because the lecture is on Thursdays and the seminars are on Fridays, you will need to be reading ahead (there is not enough study time between Thursday and Friday). A lot of these topics are interconnected, so it is important to keep on going back and forth over your notes making connections.

Week 1: What is knowledge?

Robert Audi, 'The Analysis of Knowledge' Chapter 8 of his *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (2nd edn.) Routledge 1998. This will be useful as a reference point across the term.

Keith De Rose 'What is epistemology: a brief introduction to the topic'

<http://pantheon.yale.edu/~kd47/What-Is-Epistemology.htm>

Week 2: Justification: reasons and the 'internal' perspective

- A.J. Ayer 'Knowing as having the right to be sure' excerpt in Huemer and Audi (eds); also in Bernecker and Dretske *Knowledge*; originally in his *The Problem of Knowledge* (Macmillan 1956)
- Duncan Pritchard, 'Rationality' Chapter 4 of his *what is this thing called knowledge?* (Routledge: 2006)

Week 3: The architecture of knowledge.

- Jonathan Dancy ‘Foundationalism’ Chapter 4 of his *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985)

Rene Descartes *First Meditation* (reprinted in Huemer and Audi; in the *Reason and Responsibility* volume for PHIL100, and available online (in English) at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/phi/desc/med.txt>)

Week 4: Perception and empiricist foundationalism

- Dan O’Brien ‘The Epistemology of Perception’ *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/e/epis-per.htm>

Jonathan Kvanvig, ‘Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification’ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justep-coherence/>

Week 5: Reading Week

Week 6: Self-knowledge

- Brie Gertler’s Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry ‘Self Knowledge’ (Sections and 1 and 2 and 4 are of particular relevance to this course and provide a good, succinct overview of the main views about self- knowledge and its limits).
<http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/self-knowledge/>

Week 7: Testimony

- Lipton, P. (1998). The epistemology of testimony. *Studies*

in History and Philosophy of Science, 29, 1–33. (Especially pp.14-31 as the “core”, but the earlier discussion is worth a look too).

Week 8: Gettier cases and some responses

- Edmund Gettier, ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge’ *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121-123.
<http://www.ditext.com/gettier/gettier.htm006C>
- Linda Zagzebski, ‘The Inescapability of Gettier Problems’ *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 174. (Jan., 1994), pp. 65-73. (JSTOR)

Week 9: Externalism.

- Robert Nozick ‘Knowledge’ Chapter 3 of his *Philosophical Explanations* (Harvard UP 1981) excerpt in Huemer and Audi (eds); similar excerpt in Sosa and Kim (eds);

Laruencc Bonjour ‘Internalism and Externalism’ *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Week 10: Epistemology beyond Descartes. Some contemporary developments.

No set core reading.

3. Essay Titles and Readings.

Do ONE of the essays below, 2,500 words. Items marked with a * are a good place to start your further reading. If you want to write on something else within the topics covered in this lecture course, contact me.

A word of warning!! I hope that by the end of this course you think that epistemological questions are interesting and worthwhile ones. Your enthusiasm for these questions might be dampened a bit if and when you read some of the articles below. Epistemologists, especially since the 1960s, seem to have been through some mysterious process that renders them incapable of writing readable prose. This is especially true of the “responses to Gettier” industry. There are very many papers out there that give very obscure and technical “counter-examples” to other people’s obscure and technical “analyses” of knowledge. There are lots of long, detailed definitions of the “S knows that p if S forms the belief that p in manner Φ such that where S to have formed no other belief whose content q is such that were S come to believe q she wouldn’t believe that p unless she believed r, where r is a content that is not entailed by p” and so on. I’ve tried to steer you away from the worst excesses of this kind, but this kind of stuff is so abundant in epistemology that you will come across some of it. Some of you might find this kind of detailed analysis challenging and interesting, and that’s great, but many of you won’t, and for those latter folk, simply *don’t worry*. Ignore the detailed technical stuff and concentrate on making sense, as best as you can, of the central issues.

ESSAY TOPIC 1

Justification: Reasons and the 'Internal' Perspective

1. 'If you can't give reasons for your belief in something then you don't *know* it'. What are the implications of this claim?

- Laurence Bonjour (short excerpt) *The Structure of Empirical knowledge*. (Harvard University Press, 1985)

George Pappas 'Internalist vs. Externalist Conceptions of Epistemic Justification' on Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy

<http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/justep-intext/>

A.J. Ayer 'Knowing as having the right to be sure' excerpt in Huemer and Audi (eds); also in Bernecker and Dretske *Knowledge*; originally in his *The Problem of Knowledge* (Macmillan 1956)

Richard Fumerton 'The internalism/externalism controversy' *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 2, Epistemology. (1988), pp. 443-459.

William P. Alston 'Epistemic Desiderata' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 53, No. 3. (Sep., 1993), pp. 527-551.

Alvin Goldman 'Internalism Exposed' *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 96, No. 6. (Jun., 1999), pp. 271-293

Earl Conee and Richard Feldman 'Internalism Defended'

<http://www.ling.rochester.edu/~feldman/papers/intdef.html>

ESSAY TOPIC 2

The Architecture of Knowledge: Foundationalism

EITHER

1. Is foundationalism the best response to the epistemic regress problem?

OR

2. Can an externalist theory of knowledge avoid the regress problem?

- Richard Fumerton's essay "Foundationalist theories of epistemic justification"

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justep-foundational/>

- Jonathan Dancy Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology Chapters 4-5.

William Alston 'Has foundationalism been refuted' in Huemer and Audi (eds)

Ernest. Sosa, 1980. "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* V: 3-25. Reprinted in Sosa. *Knowledge in Perspective* (Cambridge: CUP 1991); also in Moser and Van der Nat (eds) *Human Knowledge* (this is a difficult article where Sosa argues that both foundationalism and empiricism are problematic, and that we need, instead, to think of justification and knowledge in terms of epistemic virtues).

William P. Alston 'Two Types of Foundationalism' *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 73, No. 7. (Apr. 8, 1976), pp. 165-185.

ESSAY Topic 3

Testimony

EITHER:

1. “Reliance on the testimony of others is, at root, the same as relying upon anything else that we observe in the world”. Discuss.

OR:

2. Does our reliance on testimony suggest that Cartesian epistemology is mistaken? If so, what’s the mistake?
- Robert Audi ‘Testimony’ Chapter 5 of *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge 1998)

Elizabeth Fricker. (1995). Telling and trusting: Reductionism and anti-reductionism in the epistemology of testimony (review of Coady, *Testimony: a philosophical study*). *Mind*, 104, 392–411. (This is a critical notice of Coady’s book and distinguishes issues to do with the ‘global’ reduction of testimony, from ‘local’ reduction (and saves you from reading Coady’s book *Testimony*).

C.A.J Coady, “Testimony and Observation”, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 10 (1973). pp. 149–55. Reprinted with minor alterations as chapter 4 of his *Testimony*; also in Huemer and Audi; and in Bernecker and Dretske.

John Hardwig, (1985). ‘Epistemic dependence’ *Journal of Philosophy*, 82, 335–349.

Elizabeth Fricker, 'The Epistemology of Testimony.' *Aristotelian Society Supp.* 61 (1987): 57-83.

Michael Welbourne, 'The Transmission of Knowledge' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (1979): 302-314.

David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Eds. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch. (Oxford: Clarendon. 1992), sections 88-91.

John Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Ed. John Yolton. (London: Dent, 1961), book IV, chapter xvi.

ESSAY TOPIC 4

Gettier and Some Responses

ONE of these:

1. What do Gettier cases show about the standard ‘tripartite’ analysis of knowledge?
 2. What is the proper response to Gettier problems?
 3. ‘Because *truth* and *justification* can always be prised apart in some context or other, there can never be a plausible ‘justified true belief’ account of knowledge.’ Discuss.
- Edmund Gettier, ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge’ *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121-123.
<http://www.ditext.com/gettier/gettier.htm006C>
 - Mathias Steup, ‘The Analysis of Knowledge’ in *Stanford Online Encyclopedia*.
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis>.

Peter D. Klein ‘A Proposed Definition of Propositional Knowledge’ *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 68, No. 16. (Aug. 19, 1971), pp. 471-482.

Linda Zagzebski, ‘The Inescapability of Gettier Problems’ *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 174. (Jan., 1994), pp. 65-73. (JSTOR)

Alvin Goldman ‘A causal theory of knowing’ excerpt in Huemer and Audi (eds); also in Bernecker and Dretske (eds)

If you like your philosophy technical, and like working through detailed counterexamples, then also:

Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson 'Knowledge: undefeated true belief' *Journal of Philosophy* 1969 (JSTOR) reprinted in Huemer and Audi.

ESSAY Topic 5

Externalism

EITHER:

1. 'A belief is justified if it is formed by a reliable process'. Discuss this claim with reference to foundationalist theories of knowledge.

OR:

2. Does externalism undermine the view that justification is a necessary condition of knowledge?
 - Jonathan Dancy *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* Chapters 1 and 3.
 - Robert Nozick 'Knowledge' excerpt in Huemer and Audi (eds); similar excerpt in Sosa and Kim (eds)

Ernest Sosa "Skepticism and the Internal/External Divide" in Greco and Sosa (eds) *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*

Alvin Goldman "What is Justified Belief?" in Pappas (ed) *Justification and Knowledge*, in Cumley (ed.) *Reading in Epistemology*, and in Kornblith (ed.) *Naturalizing Epistemology*.

Richard Fumerton "The Internalism/Externalism Controversy" *Philosophical Perspective* 1988 (JSTOR) and in Cumley (ed.) *Reading in Epistemology*

Alvin Goldman 'A causal theory of knowing' excerpt in Huemer and Audi (eds); also in Bernecker and Dretske (eds)

4. Further Readings

Introductory, general readings (including anthologies)

Huemer, M. and Audi, R eds. 2002. *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*. Routledge. (Contains lots of classic and central articles, not just contemporary readings but also from the history of philosophy).

Audi, R. 1998. *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, London: Routledge. (Good, thorough, advanced introduction. The second half of the book is of particular use for this course, though the first half is worth using too for clear discussion of debates about different “sources” of knowledge).

Dancy, J., and E. Sosa. eds. 1992. *A Companion to Epistemology*. Oxford: Blackwell. Contains many short articles by leading epistemologists, arranged alphabetically by subject matter – some are a bit tough, but many provide a very succinct overview of topics that we will be discussing).

Greco, J. and Sosa, E. eds. 1998. *Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. Oxford: Blackwell. (This contains a number of essays on key epistemological topics. It is a good overview of contemporary debates but tough going in places

Other Introductory Texts

Adam Morton, *A Guide Through the Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd ed. (Blackwell, 2002). (Good introduction with lots of questions to allow you to check whether you've understood the chapters, and further questions/readings to allow you to develop your thinking on epistemological matters).

Dancy, J. 1985. *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*. Oxford: Blackwell. (Bit dry in places, maybe don't approach this until you've read one of the online intros, but has a good account of sceptical arguments, externalism, and Nozick's theory of knowledge).

General Anthologies

Ernest Sosa and Jaegwon Kim *Epistemology: An Anthology* (Blackwell 1999). Lots of key papers, good sections on scepticism; foundationalism and externalism

Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (OUP 2004). Lots of key papers, good sections on scepticism; foundationalism and externalism, plus papers on Gettier problem and upon the various "sources" of knowledge.

Moser, P and A Vander Nat *Human Knowledge Classical and Contemporary Approaches* (OUP 1995) (Contains many classic articles with a larger selection of "historical" pieces than the Huemer and Audi).

Topic-Specific Anthologies

Pappas, George S., and Marshall Swain, eds. 1978. *Essays on Knowledge & Justification*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. A collection of articles from the late 1970s, including many key papers in the development of 'externalist' theories of knowledge.

Kornblith, H. ed., 2001. *Epistemology: Internalism and Externalism*. Oxford: Blackwell. (Good collection of articles on the internalism/externalism debate – the first three essays by Bonjour, Goldman and Bonjour (again) provide a good, but advanced, introduction).

Quassim Cassam (ed) *Self-Knowledge* (OUP, 1994). (Good collection of articles on self- knowledge, including classic excerpts from Ryle, Davidson, Shoemaker, Armstrong, Anscombe)

Jonathan Dancy (ed) *Perceptual Knowledge* (OUP 1988) (Good collection of articles on perceptual knowledge, including classic excerpts from Goldman, Jackson, Dretske, Grice and Nozick)

Online Resources

Most of the journal articles referred to in the longer reading list are available via JSTOR (i.e., via the e-journal link on the library webpage)

Wikipedia article on “Epistemology”

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_\(philosophy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_(philosophy))

Very short overview, with links to other “labels” in philosophy

(like “empiricism” “pragmatism” etc) useful for a quick flick through to get started, or for revision; has good set of links down at the bottom to further “epistemology” resources)

Keith de Rose’s ‘What is epistemology? A Brief Introduction to the Topic’ at

<http://pantheon.yale.edu/~kd47/What-Is-Epistemology.htm>

Good, short introduction with some useful links. Part of his larger “Epistemology” website, with lots of links, references, pointers etc.

Matthias Steup’s ‘Epistemology entry for the Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy’

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/>

(This is a good reference resource, but DON’T START WITH THIS ONE, it is tough and technical!)

5. Long Notes & Study Questions

EPISTEMOLOGY

**A Brief & Selective Introduction
with Study Questions**

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Lecture 1

What is Knowledge?

1. Introduction

Knowledge is of central importance to our lives. If we don't know anything we cannot survive. For example, unlike plants and drifting sea bacteria, we need to do things to ensure that our bodily needs are met. If we don't know where to find food, water or shelter, our chances of survival and flourishing are slim.

Human beings thus have an interest in knowledge. The simplest kind of interest in knowledge is that of acquiring knowledge. We do this all the time and for all sorts of reasons. We can go about acquiring knowledge in many different ways. If we want to know where our keys are, we may go and look for them; we may ask someone; we might try to remember where we put them; we might try to work out where they are likely to be. But what is it that we are after when we seek knowledge? What is knowledge?

How do we know when we've got knowledge? Might we think that we know things when we don't? Suppose someone says that they know that God exists, or that Einstein is right, suppose someone else says that they *know* otherwise: how are we to settle who is right?

Philosophers have been concerned with questions like these. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that focuses on knowledge (sometimes it's said that epistemology is "the theory of knowledge"). Rather than asking questions like "where are my

keys?”, or “what temperature does lead boil at?” (Which are questions which you would ask in order to *gain* knowledge) the epistemologist raises a lot of abstract questions *about* knowledge. For many philosophers—Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Bertrand Russell to name but a few—epistemology seemed to be of the utmost importance. If we don’t have a good account of what it is to *know* things, or an account of how it is that we know things, then we can’t be sure that we do anything at all, or we might be basing our lives on false beliefs. How can science be possible if we don’t have an account of what it is that makes *some* claims about the world acceptable (e.g., the claim that water boils at 100 degrees C) whilst others are not (e.g., the claim that water is made of little sprites).

Or, consider this important contemporary example: suppose one politician claims that global warming does not exist, and that the “scientific” evidence that supports such claims is really a manifestation of an alternative political agenda. Or, consider claims made by creationists (or “intelligent design” enthusiasts) that the Biblical story about the world’s creation is true, whilst the scientific account, including the theory of evolution, is not.

These are all *knowledge claims*. They are important. But if we don’t have a clear understanding of what knowledge is, we may have no clear way of settling these disputes.

Epistemology is also of importance in another way, insofar as knowledge is of great social importance. Many of the things that we know are things that we have learned from others. We learn many things that we have not checked ourselves. We have to trust others and some people—but not others—are viewed as authorities about what is the case. A good theory of knowledge needs to be able to say something about knowledge in its social

context – how groups of people go about seeking and sharing knowledge. We'll come back to the social dimension of knowledge towards the end of this series of lectures. But to start we will follow a long philosophical tradition and focus on individual's knowledge: me, or you, or Tom or Sue's knowing something.

2. What is knowledge? A simple starting point.

But what is knowledge? We might think that this is really easy to answer. If a child asks a question like “What is a helicopter?” or “what is a platypus” one thing we might do is *show* them some examples. “Here's a picture of a platypus” or “Look, up in the sky, *that's* a helicopter”. Can't we do the same thing with knowledge? Can't we point to some examples and wouldn't this settle what knowledge is?

There are two problems with this line of response. The first problem is that knowledge isn't observable in the way that helicopters and platypuses are. If a child asks “what is knowledge?” pointing is not going to help. The second problem is a bit more subtle, but in many ways even more problematic. When the child asks the question “what is a helicopter” the adult *already knows* what helicopters are. The adult, in effect, shares what she knows with the child. But when we ask the question things are not like this. If we already know what knowledge is, then there's no need to ask.

Now, one response we might have at this point (and this is a response that you may feel from time to time as you read philosophy) is: why bother? Why ask such a question? Surely we *already know* what knowledge is, otherwise we wouldn't be able to say things like “Tom knows where the best beaches are”. We

wouldn't be able to do things like *correcting* people's speech. E.g., suppose Emma says that Tom knows where the best beaches are. James might object. "No he doesn't. He has no idea at all". Emma and James might then have a bit of dispute about whether or not Tom knows where the best beaches are, and they would cite evidence (if you go where Tom suggests the beaches are *awful*), they might ask other people, and so on. All of this seems to presuppose that James and Emma *know what they are talking about* when they talk about knowledge. But if this is right, then the question "what is knowledge" may seem to be a bit pointless.

But when philosophers raise the question "what is knowledge" they're doing something slightly different. Go back to our example of the child asking "what is a platypus". We saw that in this context the question could be answered by showing a picture, or by doing a bit of pointing at the zoo. But now suppose a zoologist raises the question. It doesn't seem daft to do so. Is a platypus a mammal (it has fur)? A bird (it lays eggs and has a bill?) This kind of question is not answered by saying "Oh, that's easy that's a platypus over there". The zoologist will say "I know that's a platypus, I want to know what a platypus is" (it would be really annoying to then carry on pointing "I've told you that is a platypus"). In other words, the zoologist wants something that makes explicit some of the key features of being a platypus (about its body, its origins, its habitat and so on), that then *shows* something of interest about how it relates to other creatures. When the zoologist asks "what is a platypus" she seeks to place it in a richer theoretical and explanatory context (in this case by introducing a new name for warm-blooded egg-laying animals whose young feed on the mother's milk) – monotremes)

This is what the epistemologist is after when she asks her question

“what is knowledge?” (No! not a theory of platypuses, a theory of knowledge). The epistemologist wants to spell out what is involved in knowing, how knowledge relates to other things that might be confused with it (e.g., certainty, belief, faith, conviction, opinion). The epistemologist wants to be able to say something (correct) that is general, and illuminating about the *nature* of knowledge – where does it come from? How do we keep it? What’s so good about having it?

3. Varieties of Knowledge (including “propositional Knowledge” or “Knowledge *that*”)

Now we have a bit more of an idea about what the epistemologist wants, we still face the problem of *where to start!* Where should the epistemologist start her “theorising” about knowledge? One place would be start with our everyday speech. We use the term *knowledge* (“knows”; “know”; “will know”; “doesn’t know” etc.etc.) an awful lot in our everyday lives. We talk of knowing *things* (objects; people; places) (Tom knows Sue; Jim knows Paris really well; Emma knows German). We talk of knowing *how* to do things. We talk of knowing *when, why, what, whether, whom* and so on. We also talk of knowing *that* something is the case, knowing that snow is white, knowing that Tom is a poor judge of beaches etc.

Epistemologists, at least for the bulk of the history of philosophy, have tended to focus on this last kind of knowledge: **knowledge *that*** – sometimes called ***propositional knowledge***, or ***factual knowledge***.¹ One reason is that much of our talk about knowledge

¹ It is worth spending a little while discussing what “propositional” means in this context. Some of you may be familiar with the term already, but many of you may not be. One simple way of understanding what propositions are is to focus on the idea of *proposing* something – that is, saying it, stating it, asserting it, claiming it. When we

can be expressed in terms of propositional knowledge. E.g., if Tom knows *what* Jim has drawn (when Jim has drawn a horse), he knows *that* Jim has drawn a horse, or he knows some *fact* (that Jim has drawn a horse). Or, suppose you want to know *what time the bus leaves*. There are lots of ways of going about this, but you succeed when you know *that* the bus leaves at a certain time (you know this *fact* about when the bus leaves). So, in these lectures

make a claim or a statement, we say something that can be *true* or *false*. It makes little sense to speak of objects—things like dogs, stones, cats, dogs, Peter Andre, tea, clouds, cities—being true or false. Statements, claims, and propositions typically say something *about* an object.

- (a) Paris is hot in summer.
- (b) Peter Andre is a man
- (c) Peter Andre is a woman.
- (d) That rose is red.
- (e) Peter Andre is red.
- (f) Peter Andre is hot in summer.
- (g) That rose is hot in summer.

Each of these sentences (a)-(f) is either true or false (depending on when they are said and in what context).

Each of them has the same “structure”. That is, in each of these sentences there is

- (i) A *subject* [Paris; Peter Andre; that rose]
- (ii) A *predicate* [is hot in summer; is a man; is red]

Propositions are of “subject-predicate” form. Subject-predicate sentences are used to state how things are: are they hot, red, a man, a woman, etc. Statements of how things are can be true or false. Now, lots of different people can say the same thing, and they can say it in different ways, or in different languages. For example:

- (i) On Tuesday at noon Tom says out loud “Snow is white”.
- (ii) On Friday Sue writes down, in English, “Snow is white”
- (iii) On Saturday Tom types out the claim that snow is white in morse code.
- (iv) On Wednesday Pierre says “La neige est blanc”

Now, these are different actions done by different people. But they all have something in common: they all, in a certain sense, *state* the same thing, or, as philosophers tend to put it, all these actions *express the same proposition*.

Propositional knowledge is knowledge *that* something is the case (e.g., all of our sentences (a)-(g) above could be prefixed by “Tom knows that”)

we'll be concerned with what is really a *species* of knowledge (and I'll leave it up to you to think further about whether this narrow focus matters).² Propositional, or factual, knowledge seems to be a fundamental kind of knowledge (whilst knowing *when*, knowing *whether*; knowing *what*, all seem to be different ways of talking about propositional knowledge).

The second reason why philosophers have focused on propositional, factual, knowledge is that knowledge seems to have something to do with *truth* and with *reasoning*. Or, to put it another way, philosophers are interested in when, and how we get to discover **the facts**; they are interested in **finding out the truth** about things. Facts, like statements, claims, and so on, are *propositional*. [It's a fact that: snow is white; Paris is in France; etc. it makes no sense to say "It's a fact that snow" or "It's a fact that Paris"]. Similarly, *truths* are propositional. We can say that it is *true* that snow is white, we can't say "It is true that snow". One conception of what good reasoning is is that reasoning is all about reaching *true* conclusions, but *true* conclusions are propositional in their form too.

So, if we want to know how the world is, then its *propositional* knowledge that we are after. If we are interested in finding out the truth, or in discovering facts, then it is propositional knowledge that we are after. Epistemology—at least for the bulk of its history—is primarily concerned with saying something useful, sensible, and general about this kind of knowledge.

4. The “analysis” of knowledge

So far we've just said something about the *kind* of knowledge that

² Those interested in pursuing this further would do well to read Michael Welbourne's short introduction to epistemology called *Knowledge* (Acumen, 2001)

philosophers are interested in. This is a good step to make in theorising about knowledge (scientists do this kind of thing all the time, focusing their attention on specific phenomena that are of interest). We are focusing, then, on “knowledge that” — propositional knowledge. But what else can we say about propositional knowledge?

An analogy with natural science might help. Suppose that a scientist wants to know what water is. What she wants is to say something about what water is made of: is water just something simple? (i.e., its not made of anything else more simple), or is it made of other things? These days, of course, we know (how do we know) that water is made of hydrogen and oxygen. We also know something of how these atoms are arranged in molecules, and, physics and chemistry can tell us why it is that the underlying constituents of water give rise to water having the features that it has (being wet, transparent etc.).

The epistemologist seeks to do the same kind of thing with knowledge. But knowledge is unlike water. Knowledge does not slop around in rivers. Knowledge is a much more abstract notion. Even so, the epistemologist can approach her question (“what is knowledge?”) in a way similar to the scientist who asks “what is water?”

The epistemologist seeks to give an *analysis of knowledge*. She can do this—and we can too—without having to go out into the laboratory: what we have to do is to *think* about what is involved in knowing.

What has to be true of a something (e.g., a person) in order for it to *know* that something is the case?

The first point to note is that propositional knowledge seems to be a *relation* between

(i) **A knower** (a *subject* of knowledge or *epistemic subject*) (e.g., me, you, Peter Andre)

(ii) **A proposition or fact that is known** (the *object* of knowledge) (e.g., *that* Paris is in France).

But what makes someone stand in the *knowing* relation to a proposition (as opposed to just *believing* it, or *hoping that it is true*)?

The answer to this kind of question will state ***necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge***.³

5. The necessary conditions for knowledge.

Necessary conditions are those conditions that something has to meet if it is to know anything. What might the necessary conditions for knowledge be?

5.1 The “belief” condition

Let’s think about knowledge. The following seem to be pretty obvious truths:

- (1) Some things don’t know anything at all. [Stones, bananas, twigs]
- (2) There are countless facts that aren’t known by anyone. [e.g., there is a fact about how many grains of sand (or mud?) there are in Morecambe bay. There is a fact about how many hairs there are on Tony Blair’s head.]

³ More properly we would say *individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions* that is, conditions that are necessary (one by one) which *if you meet all of them* then that is enough for having knowledge.

(3) Each of us knows some things, but not others things [e.g., I know my mother's maiden name, but none of you do.]

Why are (1)-(3) true? One simple explanation is that knowledge is, or essentially involves, a kind of *mental state*. Human beings, but not rocks or bananas, can “represent” how the world is. We can *perceive* the world, we can *notice* things, we can be *aware* of facts, we can *judge* that certain things are true. But we don't notice everything. We don't have a view about everything. Each of us has a unique point of view. Each of us has a unique history. Even though lots of us can and do *share* knowledge (e.g., we all know that TB is Prime Minister), there are lots of things that each of us knows that nobody else does (we'll come back to this line of thought when we focus on *self-knowledge* in lecture 5).

Now, one popular way of spelling out this line of thought is to say that ***belief is a necessary condition for knowledge***. For the moment, let's run with this idea. In order to know something, you have to *believe* it. Belief is taking something to be *true*. If you believe that it is raining, you take it to be true that it is raining. But this can't be a *sufficient* condition for knowledge. Why not?

5.2 Truth as a necessary condition for knowledge

When we say that somebody *knows* something we imply that they are *right* in their beliefs. Consider the following examples:

- (a) “Tom knows that it is raining, but it is isn't raining”
- (b) “Sue knows that her partner is unfaithful, but he isn't unfaithful”
- (c) “Jim knows that there are tiny aliens living in every branch of Asda, but, of course, there aren't”

These are odd, and seem to involve some kind of mistake. But the

following statements are OK.

- (a) “Tom believes that it is raining, but it is isn’t raining”
- (b) “Sue believes that her partner is unfaithful, but he isn’t unfaithful”
- (c) “Jim believes that there are tiny aliens living in every branch of Asda, but, of course, there aren’t”

From examples like these we can conclude that belief and knowledge are not the same thing. Beliefs can be *false*, but knowledge has to be true. So we have our second necessary condition. You can’t *know* something that isn’t the case. You can *believe it*, but the term knowledge is reserved for, at the very least, *true beliefs*.

DANGER: you need to be careful here! What these examples show is that it is a mistake to say of someone (Tom) both that he *knows* that it is raining AND that it is not raining. Of course, someone might say, of Tom “Tom knows it’s raining” and be *wrong* in that claim (e.g., it turns out that Tom only thought it was raining).

The analysis of knowledge is NOT that whenever we claim that someone knows something *we* are right, rather, it is that in claiming that someone else knows something, we are claiming that *they* are right

5.3 The “justification” condition

We now have two necessary conditions for knowledge. Knowledge requires *belief* and knowledge implies *truth*. So, does this mean that knowledge is just *true belief*?

At first sight this might seem to be OK.

For example, suppose you believe that Tony Blair is Prime Minister. He *is* Prime Minister. Doesn't this suggest that you *know* that he is Prime Minister? It might *seem* to do so....

If we think about things a bit more carefully, however, matters look a bit more puzzling.

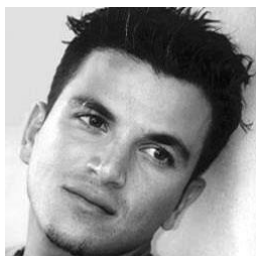
Consider the following examples – **and we will come back to these in later weeks.**



(i) **The lucky guess.** Every week Tom believes that his national lottery ticket will win. One week it wins. Did Tom *know* that week that it would win?



(ii) **The clairvoyant dream.** Sue wakes up one morning with the conviction that Tony Blair has died, in Rome, in the night. You ask her *why* she thinks this, and she has no idea “Oh, it just popped into my head, but I'm sure it's right” she says. Bizarrely, she is right. Did she *know* that TB had died?



(iii) **The gullible dupe who's right by accident.** Tom is a wicked liar, but also very convincing. On Monday morning he tells Emma, who happens to be a bit gullible, that Peter Andre will be the next leader of the conservative party. Emma thinks that this is absurd. But he is persistent (“On my life, Emma, it's *true*”) she believes him. Quite by chance (and unbeknownst to Tom) Peter *has* been elected leader in a secret coup. But does Emma *know* this?

(After all, if Tom had decided to say that Katie Price had been

elected leader, Emma would have believed that instead)

In all of these examples, a person has *true beliefs* but it seems to be an *accident* or a *bizarre coincidence* that makes the beliefs true. Our concept of *knowledge*, then, must be something more than just true belief otherwise we'd be quite happy to claim that Tom, Sue and Emma *know* in the examples above.

In the examples above, Tom, Sue and Emma don't seem to have the *right* to believe what they do. In the lottery case Tom doesn't really have good evidence that he will win (in fact, he has very good evidence that he will not). You *shouldn't* believe things without evidence for their truth. Similarly, Sue has no evidence that Tony Blair has died. The fact that her belief is *true* doesn't *justify* her holding it. Likewise, Emma *ought not* to be so gullible.

6. Two standards for belief: two ways in which they can succeed or fail

What these examples suggest is that **beliefs can go right or wrong in two different ways.**

TRUTH/FALSITY. First of all, beliefs can be right or wrong insofar as they are *true* or *false*. E.g., if Tom believes that aliens live in Asda you might claim "No, that's *wrong*".

JUSTIFIED/NOT JUSTIFIED. Second, beliefs can be arrived at in "good" or "bad" ways. And, even *true* beliefs can be arrived at in "bad" ways. Now, in the lectures that follow we're going to say more about what it is to arrive at a belief in a "good" or "bad" way. When philosophers talk about these "good" or "bad" ways of reaching beliefs they often talk in terms of whether or not one's beliefs are *warranted* or *justified*. Tom isn't *justified* in his belief that he will win the lottery. Sue has no *warrant* or

right to believe that Tony Blair had died. Emma is not justified in believing Tom. Merely *true* belief is not knowledge, but *warranted* or *justified true belief* seems to be.

There are, then four possibilities here.

JUSTIFIED	TRUE THE BEST!!	FALSE Justified but NOT TRUE
NOT JUSTIFIED	let's call this <i>knowledge</i> e.g., the lucky guess	plain rubbish

On the view that we are developing here, knowledge is a kind of “ideal” or “best” belief, it is both *true* and *justified*. That is, not only is the belief true, but the believer has good reason to accept or hold the belief in question.

7. The “justified true belief” analysis of knowledge

Putting together our three conditions we have an “analysis” of knowledge. In order for a person to *know* that something is the case she must:

- (i) *believe* that it is the case
- (ii) her belief must be *true*
- (iii) her belief must be *justified*

These are three *necessary* conditions and *together* they form a *sufficient* condition. That is, if Sue *believes* that snow is white, and snow *is* white, and her belief is *justified* then that is sufficient for Sue to *know* that snow is white. Similarly, Sue only *knows* that snow is white *provided* she believes it, it is true, and she is justified in believing it.

8. Conclusion

In this lecture we've introduced one of the key epistemological questions: what is knowledge? Our response to this question has been to provide an *analysis* of knowledge (a “philosophical” analysis). We've done this by *thinking* (and talking) about some examples, by thinking in an abstract way which allows us to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. On our analysis it turns out that somebody knows something (e.g., the proposition that p) if, and only if, they *believe* that p , p is true, and they are *justified* in their belief that p .

NOTE – why epistemologists have the need to p

Philosophers use a bit of shorthand when they are talking about belief, knowledge, reasoning, perception and so on, when they want to say something very *general*. Rather than using lots and lots of examples of things that people might believe (that turn out to be false), we can use a *letter* (or any symbol that we want), to stand in for any person, and any proposition that somebody might believe.

S knows that p [E.g., Tom knows that it is raining] if, and only if:

- (i) It is true that p [e.g., it is raining]
- (ii) S believes that p [e.g., Tom believes that it is raining]
- (iii) S is *justified* in believing that p , or has *the right* to believe that p [e.g., Tom is justified in believing that p]

Study Questions

Section A: Nuts And Bolts

1. Give three reasons why knowledge is important (HINT: think about *in what way*, and *for whom* and *in what contexts*)

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

2. Give three reasons why *epistemology* (i.e., the philosophical study of knowledge) is, or could be, important.

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

3. QUICK ANSWER - What is knowledge? [Then come back later]

4. Are there different kinds of knowledge? If so, what are they?
5. What kind of knowledge have philosophers tended to focus on? Why?
6. What do you take “propositional” to mean (when people talk about “propositional knowledge”)?
7. What is the connection between knowledge and *reasoning* (and why is this important)?

Section B: Applications

8. [EASY] Can you *believe* something without knowing it?

9. [HARDER] Can you *know* something without *believing* it?

10. [TOUGH!!] Can you *believe* something without knowing anything?

11. Could you believe something without having any sense of *why* you believed it?

12. Would it be right to believe something without any sense of why it is likely to be true?

13. Are lucky guesses ever knowledge?

14. Do your answers help provide us with a way of settling what knowledge is? How?

15. Tom asks “What is Knowledge?” Sue says “Let me give you the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge”. What does Sue mean?

16. What, in your opinion, are the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge? [HINT: questions 8-13 may help you here!]

Lecture 2

Justification: Internalism & Individualism

Last week we gave an “analysis” of knowledge (a bit like doing a chemical analysis). We concluded that knowledge can be viewed in terms of *justified, true, belief*. Mere belief is not knowledge (it might be wrong!). True belief is not knowledge, because you might have a true belief by luck, or without really knowing why your belief is likely to be true. This week we’re going to carry on with our process of “analysis” but we’re going to narrow the focus a bit. We’re going to focus on *justification* (and related notions).

The issue here is not about the *word* “justification” (in case any of you think that we’re just engaged in some kind of abstract linguistics). Our concern is abstract, but substantial. We’re concerned with what it is for a belief to be *warranted, or justified, or well-supported*.

In this lecture we’ll look at a tempting, plausible, and historically very popular, view of what “epistemic justification” consists in: this view is one that we’ll call *internalism* (and it’ll become clear as we go along, I hope, what this view amounts to).

We’re going to approach internalism from two directions. First of all we’re going to think about justification from the point of view of our everyday lives: knowledge is a fundamental part of our lives and it is unsurprising that normal human adults have a rich sense of what knowledge is, how we acquire it, how and when

things go wrong. After thinking about justification from this “commonsense” background, we’ll turn to the history of philosophy, and see how Descartes takes some of our commonsense thoughts and puts them to work in his epistemology.

1. Folk epistemology

We’ve already noted, in lecture 1, that knowledge is an essential part of human life. Because knowledge is so central to our existence, it is also important that we have reliable ways of thinking and talking about knowledge. We need to be able to keep track of who knows what and in which context.⁴

Suppose Tom wants to kill Bill. Tom knows that he is less likely to be caught if no-one can *see* him, or *hear* him do it. Tom knows that the trees, rocks, and wallpaper will not be able to see him or hear him. He knows something about how certain things will constitute *evidence* (in this case, for the murder). He knows that if he leaves his gloves, or leaves fingerprints, he’s likely to be traced. All of this implies an everyday “commonsense” theory of knowledge—what we might call a *folk epistemology*. Tom doesn’t have to learn folk epistemology in the way that you are learning philosophical epistemology. Folk epistemology is part and parcel of our commonsense, everyday, understanding of one another as creatures who are capable of *knowing*. For example, if I am trying to organise a surprise birthday party for my daughter I have a good idea of the kinds of situation that might lead her to suspect

⁴ Some philosophers have argued that the concept *knowledge* is *best* understood in terms of the role that it plays in, for example, allowing us to keep track of who is a reliable “informant”. E.g., see Edward Craig (1986) ‘The Practical Explication of Knowledge’ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* LXXXVII 211-226 (we return to this in the discussion of “testimony” later).

the party. We know how to *sneak* past someone who is looking the other way. If we had no idea at all about *how* people acquired knowledge, this would be a risky action. Similarly, if we did not know that all human beings are *limited* to how they acquire knowledge, we would be in trouble: e.g., suppose *some* human beings could ‘see’ out the back of their heads, and others could predict the future. If we wanted to keep something secret we would have to take these epistemic abilities into account.

2. Justification: having reasons for what one believes

Now, our “folk epistemology” (at least, in the Western world of modern times) involves certain assumptions. We expect people to have, and to be able to give, *reasons* for many of the things that they believe, reasons of the *right* kind, especially if what they believe is odd, unusual or unexpected. For example, suppose you meet Tom walking down the road. “Peter Andre is an alien” he says. You think he is joking, but Tom is serious. “Peter Andre is a visitor from a distant galaxy”. At this point it would be sensible to ask Tom something like:

- (i) “*Why* do you think that?”
- (ii) “*How* do you know that?”

Now consider some of the things that Tom *might* say by way of reply: He might cite something *true*.

- (a) “Because one plus one equals two”
- (b) “Because there are countless stars in the sky”

Although it is *true* that $1+1=2$ it doesn’t seem to provide any *basis* for, or *justification* for Tom’s claim. Truths of arithmetic are *irrelevant* in this context. Similarly for the claim about the stars: it may well be true but it doesn’t provide reason for *this* belief (that

PA is an alien).

He might be unable to give any reason at all.

(a) “No reason, it just occurred to me”

(a) “Look, he just *is*”

This seems inadequate because Tom’s belief is about the world “out there”. In order to find out things about the world we need to look, or we need to consult someone else who has looked, or observed, or worked things out. If Tom is being sincere (rather than just trying to wind us up) there is something very *wrong* with him: he seems to have no *reason* for his belief, so *why* on earth does he *believe* that PA is an alien? Why does he believe *that*? His belief, after all, is quite specific, so what is his reason for believing *that* rather than, say, believing that PA is a woman, or a robot. After all, he has *no reason to believe* these other things either. Worse still, there seems to be pretty good reason to believe that PA is *not* an alien (i.e., if he were, surely we would know about it; wouldn’t he look different from earthlings (maybe Tom is right?). In short, it seems to be completely **irresponsible** to believe something without having any *reason* to believe it.

In our commonsense understanding of knowledge and belief, it seems that we make certain assumptions about *what it is that justifies Tom’s belief*. Tom’s belief *fails* to be justified because *Tom doesn’t have any evidence for it, he knows of nothing that counts in its favour*.

Compare Tom’s case with Sue’s. Sue tells you that Peter Andre has dyed his hair pink. “How do you know?” Sue might reply:

i. “I saw him”

ii. “Emma told me”

- iii. “I heard it on the radio”
- iv. “I heard Katie Price on the radio saying “Peter’s dyed his hair pink”.

What’s the difference between Sue’s belief and Tom’s? Sue seems to have good *reasons* for her claim. This does not mean that her belief is *true*. She might have seen someone else who looks like Peter Andre. Emma may have been mistaken, or may have been lying. The radio programme might be wrong or out of date. Katie Price might have been talking about some other Peter, and not the one you might think. Even if Sue has *very good* reasons for believing that Peter has pink hair, it may not entail that her belief is *true*.

So, a little reflection on these kinds of examples suggests that a person’s belief is *justified* only if they have *grounds* for it, if they *know* of something that counts in its favour of its being true. But having grounds, having reasons, does not imply that what one knows is *true*.

3. Two ways of talking about *reasons*

It is worth noting at this point that we talk about *reasons* for belief in different ways. Consider the following examples:

- (i) “Tom doesn’t know that Emma has been unfaithful, even though all the signs are there.”

Here we might say that there *are* reasons for Tom *to* believe that Emma has been unfaithful. But Tom does not yet recognise those reasons, he is unaware of them. Someone can have reason *to* believe something but not believe it.

- (ii) “Tom thinks that Emma has been unfaithful. Here’s why”

Here, the speaker gives Tom's reasons *for* believing. Tom's reasons for believing that Emma is unfaithful must be things that he is aware of.

Finally, note that Tom's reasons for thinking that Emma has been unfaithful may be poor. When he saw Emma leaving the pub with, and then embracing, the handsome stranger he did not know that this was Emma's long lost brother.

So: a person can have *reason to believe* something (but not believe it). She can have **reasons for her belief** that, *from her point of view*, make it seem likely that something is true.

Now, from our discussion above, it seems that a person's beliefs are justified only if they have reasons *for* believing. If Tom has not yet *recognised* the evidence that Emma has been unfaithful it would be odd of him to *believe* that he has been unfaithful.

4. "Epistemic Internalism" and the subjective, rational, point of view.

If our discussion so far is right then **knowledge is justified true belief**, but *justification* is a matter of having *reasons for* one's beliefs and these reasons for belief must (a) be *known* to the subject and (b) be such that they provide good, reasonable, *grounds for* belief (e.g., *seeing* that Peter Andre has pink hair provides grounds for believing that he has pink hair, seeing that he has black hair does not provide grounds for believing that he has pink hair, nor does it provide grounds for believing that snow is white, or that $1+1=2$, or countless other things . . .).

On the analysis of knowledge and justification that we are working with, knowledge is something that requires a *conscious subject* of a particularly complex, advanced kind. Knowledge

implies justification, and justification implies a subject who is able to “see” that certain things stand as good reason for believing other things. This view is standardly called **internalism** or, often, **epistemic internalism** (to distinguish it from “internalisms” in other parts of philosophy and in other disciplines).

TAKE CARE AS TO WHAT “INTERNAL” MEANS HERE

NOTE that “internal” here *does not* mean “taking place in the brain” or “inside the body”. There are lots of events going on in your brain as you read this that you have, if you like, no *access* to. What sort of access – well, here we might seem to be going round in a circle, because epistemologists will talk of *epistemic access* or *cognitive access*. What does this mean? What do we have epistemic access *to*? Belief and knowledge, as we are considering them here, are relations to “propositions”. The internalist holds that if you are to know one thing, then you, as a conscious subject, need to know of other things which *give reason* to believe that the first thing is true, or likely to be true. This assumption has considerable implications for epistemology, and we’ll come back to it in the next lecture when we talk about the “structure” of justification.

For now, let us just note that there are two key features of epistemic internalism:

INDIVIDUALISM

First, the internalist view is *individualistic*. Knowledge, justification, and having reasons are all cast in terms of **individual subjects** having reasons for their beliefs, where the individual subject *knows* what those reasons are.

KNOWLEDGE IS HARD TO ACHIEVE: AND IS ONLY POSSESSED BY CONSCIOUS, RATIONAL SUBJECTS

Second, on the internalist view, knowledge is only possessed by conscious rational subjects. Children and animals simply don't know anything, because they are not in a position (or not yet in a position) to be able to *justify* or *recognise reasons* for what they believe.

5. Knowledge and rationality.

Note how, on this internalist view, knowledge is very tightly bound up with *rationality*. A creature *knows* something only if she is capable of understanding and accepting *good reasons* for believing certain things, but not others. The internalist will argue that this is exactly as it should be, after all, we can and do *acquire* knowledge via reasoning and, if someone is incapable of reasoned thought, then we might wonder whether they can be said to know anything at all.

6. Making sense of why lucky guesses aren't knowledge

But we might worry about this account of knowledge. After all, don't children and animals *know* things? Well, we might defend our account so far by pointing out that this "**internalist**" picture of knowledge and justification helps us to make sense of our examples (from last week), examples of true belief that seem to be something less than knowledge.

- (i) **The lucky guess.** Every week Tom believes that his national lottery ticket will win. One week it wins.

Here Tom doesn't *know* that it will win, because he has no *right* to believe that it will win. He does not *know* anything that counts as *evidence* that he will win. He knows of no good reason for his

belief (in part, because there is no good reason *to* believe).

(ii) **The clairvoyant dream.** Sue wakes up one morning with the conviction that Tony Blair has died, in Rome, in the night. You ask her *why* she thinks this, and she has no idea “Oh, it just popped into my head, but I’m sure it’s right” she says. Bizarrely, she is right.

Sue does not know that TB has died because, like Tom, she doesn’t have any *evidence* that her belief is right. Even if there is evidence available that TB has died (e.g., to people standing around him), it is not “accessible” by Sue. So, here there is a reason *to* believe that TB has died, but Sue herself does not have reason *for* believing that he has died.

The epistemic internalist argues that someone’s belief is justified only if that person has reasons for that belief, and they cash out the idea of having *reasons* for belief in terms of being conscious of, or knowing of, something that counts in favour of that belief being true. The internalist can argue that this account of knowledge makes sense of why we think that the lucky guess and the clairvoyant dream don’t count as knowledge: the person lacks reasons *for* his or her belief, so even if the belief is *true* it doesn’t count as knowledge.

If it turns out that animals and young children don’t have beliefs: so what? After all, we already accept that animals and young children are *different* from normal human adults. The internalist can argue “Look, the internalist account fits with our intuitions about what knowledge is. When we say that children and animals *know* things, we are just talking metaphorically”.

7. Epistemic responsibility

On the view of knowledge that we are developing here, individual subjects can be held *epistemically responsible*. What does this mean? Think about what responsibility means. One meaning is just: the thing or person that makes something happen (“Who or what is responsible for spilling the jug”). Another meaning, one that features in, for example, discussions of *legal* responsibility, is bound up with notions like *being in control* and *knowing what one is doing*. Normal, sober, sane, adults are *responsible* for what they do, they can shape their lives according to their best ability to *reason*. When they are comatose, or drunk, or high, they may become incapable of responsible behaviour. Similar points apply to *belief* and *knowledge*.

For example, suppose Tom really is convinced that England are going to win the next World Cup. It is only proper that we should expect Tom to have some *reasons*. It can't be *inductive* (i.e., based on past experiences of success). Suppose Tom says that he doesn't need any evidence. He seems to be acting in an irresponsible way. Why does he commit himself to *this* being the likely course of events rather than something else. The epistemically responsible agent is one who *refrains* from believing things when there is nothing to be said in their favour, one who *commits* herself to things being so only when she has grounds to believe that they are so. Of course, a person can act in an epistemically responsible way but still be wrong!! Human beings are *fallible*. Even so, the internalist can argue that this account of what knowledge is fits well with our intuitions about epistemic responsibility.

8. Epistemic Normativity.

On the account of knowledge that we are developing here, knowledge is a “normative” phenomenon. That is, there are

standards or norms by which beliefs can be evaluated as better or worse, as correct, incorrect, as justified or not justified. There are lots of nonnormative phenomena. For example, it's a fact that the boiling point of water is 100 degrees; it's a fact that Platypuses lay eggs. But it makes no sense to ask whether it is right or wrong that water boils at 100 degrees; it makes no sense to claim that it's wrong that platypuses lay eggs. But knowledge and belief are not like this. Beliefs is a normative affair. We can always ask whether we ought to believe what we do believe and, as we noted earlier, this splits into two kinds of evaluation: evaluating beliefs with regard to their truth or falsity; evaluating beliefs with regard to whether there are good reasons for believing.

The internalist account that we are exploring fits well with these. We'll come back to epistemic responsibility and epistemic normativity when we look at "reliabilist" theories of knowledge and justification in the second half of term.

9. What's next?

We've been thinking about knowledge, justification and having reasons for belief. We've been doing this by thinking about examples, and counter-examples. We seem to have reached a "picture" or "theory" of what knowledge is: knowledge is true belief that the subject has *reasons* for holding true. Over the next two lectures we're going to explore some of the implications of this view of knowledge. Next week we're going to look at the *structure* of knowledge (e.g., does knowledge rest upon a "foundation" of "basic" beliefs?); we'll then turn to the issue of *scepticism* (e.g., do we have any knowledge at all?).

This picture of knowledge (internalist, individualist) was the "standard" picture of knowledge in philosophy. In recent years,

however, [and “recent” in philosophy can mean something like “within the past fifty years”] this picture has been subject to serious criticism. In the second half of term we’re going to look at some of these criticisms. We will question the idea that knowledge is justified true belief. We’ll ask whether internalism really is the only way we can think about knowledge and look at “externalist” accounts of knowledge. We’ll see if these accounts of knowledge are more plausible, and, *en route*, see if they provide us with a simple response against scepticism. We’ll look at whether knowledge is an “absolute” concept (i.e., is there some context-free objective fact of the matter as to what a person knows) and, finally, we’ll raise questions about *individualism*, by looking at the way our beliefs seem to depend upon others (and what they say), when we don’t have access to *their* reasons for what they say (we have to *trust* them!).

Study Questions

Section A: Nuts And Bolts

1. What does ‘justification’ mean in epistemology? [e.g., justification of what? by whom?]
2. What is folk epistemology?
3. What is a *reason* for believing something?
4. What does “internal” mean in the context of “internalism”.

5. In what sense is justification “internal”?

6. What is meant by “epistemically accessible”? What sorts of things are epistemically accessible?

7. In what sense is (epistemic) justification *individualistic*?

8. What considerations count in favour of viewing epistemic justification in this internalist, individualistic way? [e.g., how would you argue *in favour* of the internalist view, if you had to!]

9. Is our *folk* epistemology an internalist one?

Section B

10.a Can someone have reason to believe that it is raining, but not believe it?

10.b Can someone believe that it is raining, without having a reason?

10.c If someone cannot explain *why* they believe something do they believe it?

10.d If someone cannot explain why they believe something, but they turn out to be right, did they *know* it all along?

11.a Tom says that Tony Blair is dead. Give four different ways that Tom might justify his belief.

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

(iv)

11.b Tom says that Tony Blair is dead. Give three ways that Tom might *try* to justify his claim but *fail* to do so.

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

12. How does folk epistemology differ from “philosophical” epistemology?

13. Can someone be *epistemically* irresponsible? Can you think of examples (people you know, people in the media) of epistemic irresponsibility? List them.
14. Can a three year old be epistemically irresponsible?
15. Suppose your thermometer is broken, is *it* epistemically irresponsible?
16. [TOUGH] Suppose your thermometer is broken, would it be epistemically irresponsible for you to *rely* on it?

17. Suppose your thermometer is OK, but you *think* that is broken. Would it be epistemically irresponsible for you to *rely* on it?

18. Is knowledge (still!) justified true belief?

Lecture 3

The Architecture of Knowledge

1. Introduction

We've been engaged in giving an "analysis" of knowledge (a bit like chemical analysis), where we try to make explicit the various *constituents* or *components* of knowledge (the things that "make it up"). Knowledge requires *belief*, not just any old belief, but *true* belief. True belief is not sufficient for knowledge — remember the example of the lucky guess, and the clairvoyant dream — knowledge (at least on our story so far) requires the knower to have *reasons* for her belief. Beliefs are justified only when we *know* something that makes the belief worth holding: e.g., if we know of *evidence* or *grounds* that make it likely that the belief is true. This view, you'll recall, is called **epistemic internalism** and, at the end of last week, we noted that such a view is *individualistic* and it sets a pretty high standard for knowledge — **children and animals** may not have knowledge on the internalist view of knowledge.

This week we're going to look at what is often called the **architecture (or structure) of knowledge** (or, sometimes, and more correctly, **the architecture (or structure) of justification**). What do I mean by this? Once again it will help if we start with some simple (true) claims.

The first point is that each of us knows *lots* of different things. I know that snow is white; that grass is green; that there is a tatty old Dell monitor in front of me; that $2+2=4$; that the Battle of

Hastings took place in 1066; that Walvis Bay is in Namibia; that I broke my leg as a child; that I have a pain in my knee, and so on, and on, and on

Now, if knowledge is justified true belief, then this implies that I have lots of justified true beliefs. I have the justified true belief that snow is white; I have the justified true belief that $2+2=4$, that there is a tatty Dell monitor in front of me, and so on.

2. Rationality and the epistemic regress problem

Justification, as we saw last week, is a matter of having *reasons* for what one believes. But this leads us into our second important point: if *having* reasons for belief implies *knowing* those reasons for belief, then she must have *further* justified beliefs (beliefs about her reasons).⁵ Remember too that we distinguished:

(i) reasons *to* believe something

from

(ii) Someone's reasons *for* believing

Here we're concerned with reasons for believing. For example. I know that Peter Andre is a man. My reason for believing that

⁵ There is a complication here: there are different "strengths" of internalism. A really **strong, or strict internalism** would require the believer to know, not just her reasons for belief, but also to *know that those reasons are likely to make the belief in question true*. E.g., Tom knows that Peter Andre is a man because he knows that he has a beard and is married to a woman, and he knows something about how those latter beliefs are likely to make the first belief true (the regress then gets going because Tom would also have to know that the higher-order principles drawn upon in justifying his first beliefs are likely to be conducive to true belief). A weaker internalism would just require that the believer have cognitive access to further reasons which *in fact* make her belief likely to be true. See Alston's Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry for further sub-divisions in the internalist position.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justep-intext/>

Peter Andre is a man, is, his beard, his manly body, his marriage to Jordan. But this means that my knowledge that PA is a man *depends* upon and is *based* upon further beliefs (my belief that he has a beard (maybe he doesn't); my belief that he has a manly body (maybe its not his body, I've never seen him "in the flesh" but only on TV, and, with digital imaging, anything is possible!!). If I believe that he looked like a woman and was married to Brad Pitt I would probably conclude that he is woman.

So – some beliefs *depend* upon and are *based* upon others.

But this creates a problem! Are these further beliefs justified? If so, *how*? There seem to be two options here.

OPTION 1: infinite regress – every justified belief is justified by some *further* belief (so, my PA is man belief is justified because I believe that he has a beard, my belief that he has beard is justified because I have seen it; my belief that I have seen it is justified etc etc.

OPTION 2: some beliefs are "basic": they are not justified in terms of any further beliefs.

Now, option 1 seems absurd. First of all, it seems to require too much of us – none of us knows an infinite number of things. Second, it just seems to be at odds with some fairly obvious facts about how we come to know things.

For example: I believe that the washing in my yard will be soaked. Why, because I believe that it is raining. Why do I believe this? Because I can *see* the rain pounding down (it is Lancaster after all). But why do I believe that I can *see* the rain pounding down: uhh, I just *do*. Here we have a "**chain of justification**" where one belief is justified in terms of another, which, in turn, depends upon

another, until we get to a point where **justification comes to an end! It stops. It runs out.**

Think of your belief that you have two hands, or your belief that you are sitting reading, or hearing, this? What justifies *that* belief? Here you can do little more than point to the page, or *show* us your hands. But we might ask: why is *that* belief justified. If this kind of belief is not justified, how can it be the *basis* for knowledge. It seems absurd to suppose that my belief that my washing will be wet is justified if I can't justify the belief that it is raining.

3. Foundationalism and basic beliefs

One philosophical response to this fact about justification (that some beliefs depend upon others until we get to beliefs that don't seem to have any further justification) is to argue that knowledge can be based on some *special* beliefs: *basic* beliefs.

But what is a basic belief?

All that we have said so far is that:

- (i) Some beliefs are justified by other beliefs (they are **indirectly, or mediatey justified**)
- (ii) Some beliefs are not justified by other beliefs: they are **BASIC beliefs.**
- (iii) The former, ultimately, *depend* upon the latter for their justification.

This view of the “architecture” of knowledge and justification is called **foundationalism.**⁶

⁶ It is not, for example, a claim about the *steps* that one might go through in order to *reach* a belief – its not about the *process* of coming to believe, its about how some beliefs *depend* upon others, whilst others don't.

The picture here, is, if you like, a bit like an inverted pyramid. [Or, if you prefer, it's a bit like a *tree* with immediately justified beliefs as the trunk, with lots of other beliefs branching off – if you take away the trunk, the branches are left hanging in the air – or come crashing to the ground!!). At the bottom are the “basic beliefs” and the other beliefs all depend upon these beliefs via “chains of justification”.

But this general claim about the structure of knowledge and justification does not tell us what these basic beliefs are, nor does it tell us anything about what it is to be justified.

There are a number of foundationalist options here.

- (i) There are no justified basic beliefs.
- (ii) There are “self-justifying” basic beliefs.
- (iii) There are basic beliefs but they *don't need* to be justified.
- (iv) There are basic beliefs but they are justified by something *other* than more beliefs.

In the remainder of this lecture I want to briefly explore one way of developing¹⁴ (ii): the idea that some beliefs are *self-justifying*.

But how can a belief be self-justifying? Well, remember that what we mean here by “justification” is that the believer has good reasons for believing that something is true. But there are some things, such that, if you believe them, then you can just tell that your belief has to be true: there's no way it could be wrong, so the belief provides good reason for its own acceptance. The classic example of this line of thinking, of course, is Descartes' *Meditations*.

4. Descartes' foundation: the *cogito* as self-justifying

Descartes saw that there was a problem with knowledge. If our knowledge of some things rests upon others, how can we have knowledge at all unless we can ensure that the *foundation* is secure. The *Meditations* begins by telling us that he's struck by the number of *false* things he used to believe.

Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently **based upon them**.

What he seems to be saying is that he believed all sorts of things, which he now doesn't, *and* that he *based* lots of others beliefs on these false beliefs. He goes on:

I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and **start again right from the foundations** if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.

But the dreaming argument and the evil demon scenario show that we can't *guarantee* that our perceptual beliefs are true. In Descartes' view this means that they can't provide us with a foundation for knowledge and science. Descartes' cunning solution (and you'll remember this from last year) involves four stages:

(1) Stage 1: the "cogito". He realises that the proposition "I think, therefore I am" *must* be true whenever he thinks it.

So, here's a belief that *has to be* accepted as true, there seems to be no other rational option. But the belief, in Descartes view,

doesn't depend upon any other beliefs. How does he know this? This was the whole point of Descartes' "sceptical scenarios": the dreaming, the evil demon, and so on. Each of these sceptical scenarios undermines the reasons for accepting countless everyday beliefs. But even if these beliefs are undermined, the *cogito* is not. The *cogito* seems to be "self-standing" as something that one has reason to believe that it is true. So, hurrah for Descartes then?

Ummm, not quite. It's no good to provide a foundation for something if nothing else will stand upon it. The foundationalist picture of the structure of knowledge is one where lots of beliefs are, ultimately, *based* upon and *depend* upon basic beliefs by "chains of justification". But how does the *cogito* ("I think; I am") provide a *basis* for any other beliefs?

5. Descartes' cunning foundationalist strategy

What Descartes does (by way of revision) takes three more stages.

(2) Stage 2: "clear and distinct ideas" He notes that the *cogito* is something that he understands very clearly and distinctly, he then asks whether there is anything else that he understands in this way.

The idea here is that clearness and distinctness is, he thinks, a "mark" or "indicator" of being justified.

(3) Stage 3: "the existence of God". He argues that he has clear and distinct ideas of the nature of God and these provide the basis for arguments for the existence of God.

(4) Stage 4: "God as guarantor". God guarantees that we are not completely deceived and that it's within our power to *know* things.

So, Descartes' foundationalism is very clever, very distinctive (and, as you know, very many people have argued that his cunning strategy simply does not work!)

6. There's more to foundationalism than Descartes' version of it

It is important to stress that foundationalism —as a picture of the structure of justification and knowledge — is something much more general than Descartes' specific version of foundationalism. Justification has a “foundationalist” structure because some beliefs seem to depend upon others and this leads to the question about *how an individual's set or “system” or “network” of beliefs gets to be justified*. As we noted earlier, there are other options. Before we move on to some of these other options I want to say a little about how foundationalism (as a general assumption about the structure of knowledge and justification) shapes and directs philosophical epistemology.

7. Foundationalism and the goals and priority of epistemology

We started a couple of weeks ago, with some simple ideas about knowledge and justification. Knowledge is justified true belief. Justified beliefs are ones where the believer knows her *reasons* for believing. It didn't take a great deal of philosophical work to reach these (tentative) conclusions. But the foundationalist structure of knowledge and justification provides *philosophers* with specific *goals*. Once we realise that many of our beliefs depend on others, a number of questions arise, questions like:

- (i) what does our knowledge rest upon?
- (ii) does it rest upon a “firm” foundation, such that we can be assured that our beliefs are, by and large, correct?
- (iii) what are the correct methods and means to secure knowledge?

With these goals in place, it is easy to see how epistemology became *central to philosophy*. If we don't have an account of the *foundations* of knowledge, and if we don't have an account of what knowledge consists in, and how we might get it or keep it, then, any knowledge claims that we make – in religion, in the sciences, in the arts, in other areas of philosophy such as *metaphysics*, and so on, might well be nonsense, unsupported, untrue. The foundationalist structure of knowledge not only gives philosophy certain *goals*, it also seems to give it a fundamental *priority* over other disciplines, especially those that deal in making claims about how things are. Recall Descartes' quote from the *Meditations*:

I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations **if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.**

If foundationalism is a correct account of the structure of knowledge, then one consequence seems to be that epistemology becomes very important indeed!!

8. Summing up.

We've covered quite a bit here, so it is worth summing up some of the key points. Our starting point was the point reached last week, where we looked at justification and saw how this was a matter of having *reasons* for believing. This led onto the question that started us off this week: given that we have lots of beliefs, and given that many of them depend upon other beliefs, how do these beliefs relate to one another? Many beliefs seem to be *based* upon and to *depend* upon others, via *chains of justification*. But these chains of justification seem to come to an end. Knowledge, or

justification, seems to have a “foundationalist” structure (like an inverted pyramid). Unless there is an infinite regress of beliefs and reasons, we seem to need some *basic* beliefs – the “foundations” of our knowledge.

But there are a number of different ways that we might think about these “basic beliefs”. The option that we looked at here was the idea that basic beliefs need to be *self-justifying*. As an example of this view we looked at Descartes’ arguments in the *Meditations*, where the *cogito* is meant to be a belief that we *can’t help* but accept as true, and this is a kind of self-justifying status: if we believe it we can tell that we have reason to believe it.

We ended up turning to epistemology itself, and I suggested that foundationalism generates certain *goals* for philosophy and has lead many to believe that philosophy has *priority* over other disciplines and that within philosophy, epistemology has fundamental priority.

Now, there are lots of problems with Descartes’ version of foundationalism, but I stressed that foundationalism is a *general* claim about the structure of knowledge and justification. There were other ways of spelling out what foundationalism is and what it is for something to be a *basic belief*. Next week we’ll carry on looking at some other versions of foundationalism.

Study Questions

Section A

1. What do we mean by the “architecture” of knowledge?
2. In what sense do some of your beliefs *depend* upon others?
3. In what sense are some of your beliefs *based* upon others (is your answer the same as for 2?)
4. What is a *chain of justification*?

10. Are basic beliefs self-justifying?

11. Why should we assume that there are “basic beliefs”?

12. Does foundationalism imply anything about *which* beliefs are basic?

13. [TOUGH QUESTION] Does the epistemic regress problem only arise for someone’s reasons *for* believing (but *not* for reasons *to* believe)?

Section B

14. Can you refute foundationalism by refuting Descartes?

15. What was Descartes' trying to achieve in the *Meditations*?

16. Does he succeed?

17. Why does Descartes' foundationalist strategy run into problems?

18. What are the goals of (philosophical) epistemology?

19. How does foundationalism help establish the goals of epistemology?

20. How does foundationalism help establish the *priority* of epistemology?

Lecture 4

Perception and Empiricist Foundationalism

1. Foundationalism without Descartes.

Last week we saw that foundationalism emerges fairly readily once we buy into the idea that knowledge is bound up with having *reasons* for what one believes. This sets up a “regress” problem: if your reason for believing that p is q , then what’s your reason for believing that q (and for believing, one level up, as it were, that q is a good reason for believing that p). The solution to the regress problem is to argue that there are *basic* beliefs. Last week we looked at one option for these basic beliefs, the idea that they are *self-justifying*. We focused on Descartes’ version of this option, but found it a bit problematic. Descartes’ *cogito* didn’t seem to be the right kind of thing to provide a foundation for, say, knowledge of the empirical world of cats, dogs, trees and atoms.

Why did Descartes’ foundationalism go wrong? It is important to bear in mind **what Descartes was trying to do. Descartes was worried about the possibility of error.** Descartes sought to provide an *infallible* foundation for knowledge – the *cogito*. But most of our beliefs are *fallible*. The fact that the *cogito* can’t be doubted doesn’t guarantee that our perceptual beliefs are true. That was where the arguments for God came into play.

Suppose we go back to the arguments that seemed to get foundationalism going.

We started with the observation that many beliefs *depend* upon

other beliefs—especially in that they were *justified* in terms of other beliefs—and this seemed to require that there were some “basic” beliefs that don’t depend upon other beliefs for their justification.

For example, my belief that it is raining is justified by, and depends upon, my belief that there is a pitter-patter sound on the window.

Descartes’ approach to knowledge was to provide an *infallible* foundation. My belief that there is a pitter-patter sound on the window might be wrong. But if we start with our folk epistemology, and if we think about what is involved in knowledge and belief, we need not follow Descartes here. That is, we should keep apart:

- (i) Descartes’ project of trying to *secure* or *guarantee* our beliefs by providing a foundation in basic self-justifying beliefs
- (ii) A different epistemological project, that of trying to *identify* and *describe* the “basic” beliefs that don’t depend upon other beliefs.

Whether or not we want to, or think that we should, *guarantee* our beliefs, the fact remains that chains of justification come to an end. Knowledge and belief is something that we *acquire*, or arrive at, or come to have. Whether or not we agree with Descartes’ aims we *can* agree that there are various *sources* of knowledge. Knowledge is something that we *acquire*, but *where do we acquire it from and how do we get it?*

Now, *some* of our knowledge is acquired from other beliefs that we have: we can *infer* things, draw conclusions, from what we already take to be the case. But where do our beliefs come from in the first place?

One option that we won't be discussing is:

Innate Knowledge – this is knowledge that we have “built in” to us, that we don't have to *acquire* it at all (some people argue that our knowledge of the “grammar” of natural language is innate knowledge).

Innate knowledge is not knowledge that we acquire, and not knowledge that one could be held *responsible* for.

2. Sources of Knowledge

There seem to be five ‘basic’ sources of knowledge (or only four if we rule out testimony)

1. *A priori knowledge*: this is not the same thing as innate knowledge. A priori knowledge is knowledge that you can *find out* without having to investigate the world, via the senses, to determine whether it is true. Many people hold that the truths of mathematic and logic are a priori.
2. *Perception*
3. *Introspection and consciousness*
4. *Memory*
5. *The speech or “testimony” of others*

We can form beliefs based on what we have seen, or heard, or know of ourselves, or what we recall and so on. We've already said something about *reasoning* and *inference*: we *infer* from one belief that another is true, but inference is, perhaps, best viewed as a way of way of extending, or adding to knowledge that we already have, but because inference takes stuff that we *already* believe and know as its material, it cannot be viewed as a source of knowledge.

By thinking about the *sources* of knowledge we have another way of thinking about the *structure* of knowledge: some beliefs are acquired via the sources noted above, whilst other beliefs are *based* upon them. This gives us a sense of what a *basic belief* might be: a basic belief is one that is formed via one of the sources of knowledge. Next week we will look at introspection and consciousness, and in the following week's lecture we will come back to the question whether testimony is a basic source of knowledge, or whether it should be "reduced" to knowledge acquired via the senses. This week we'll focus on *perception*.

3. Perception as an important (essential!) source of beliefs

Let's think about an everyday kind of example. My seeing, or hearing, the rain doesn't seem to be based upon anything else. It just *is*. There's the rain, I see it. Perceptual beliefs seem to be good candidates for being *basic* beliefs because they don't "rest upon" any *further* beliefs. The chain of justification for my belief that my washing will be wet comes to rest, in part, upon my *seeing* the rain. But my seeing the rain doesn't seem to be based on anything else.⁷ Perception is a way of *acquiring* beliefs that is not essentially based upon *further* beliefs.

Perceptual beliefs are of particular importance to us as living beings. The world is changing all the time, and our needs and desires change too. If we are to survive and flourish we need to engage with the world. Given that our bodies are finite, we can only influence a bit of the world at a time. It is thus very important

⁷ As always, matters are bit more complicated! It's not clear that perceptual beliefs are independent of other beliefs (e.g., *were* you to believe that you were hallucinating, or *were* you to believe that rain makes washing hot and dry, then this perceptual belief would have a very different significance than the one it seems to have. We'll come back to this point when we consider coherentism in the next lecture.)

that we are able *keep track* of how things are in the world, especially the world around us that we will *act* within. How do we do this? Thankfully we can *perceive* the world around and about us. We can see, hear, touch, smell and taste the world. Perception puts us in touch with the “here” and “now” of the world.

Now, perceptual beliefs, even though they are very important, won't do the job for Descartes' kind of foundationalism. Perceptual beliefs are *fallible*.

Compare:

- (i) I think, therefore I am.
- (ii) I see the rain outside.

Nonetheless it seems that perception can be a basic *source* of belief and knowledge. It is where we acquire beliefs about the world around us. But this raises a number of questions:

- (i) How does perception give rise to *beliefs*?
- (ii) How does perception give rise to *true* beliefs?

How does perception give rise to *justified* true beliefs? [That is, how and why are our perceptual beliefs about the world *justified*? Is it *right* to form beliefs about the world on the basis of perceiving how things are?]

4. What is perception? objectual seeing, “seeing as” and “seeing that”

For simplicity's sake we're going to use *visual* perception as our example of perception (many, if not all, of the issues that arise for visual perception arise for touch and hearing). Perception seems to involve, at the very least, three things.

- (1) A perceiver.
- (2) The object that is perceived.
- (3) The “perceptual relation” between the perceiver and the object of perception.

But what exactly is this “perceptual relation”, and what exactly are the objects that we perceive when we perceive, and (most importantly for our purposes) how do we gain *knowledge* of the world by perceiving objects in it?

Let’s consider some examples.

Suppose a dog sees Peter Andre walking past. The dog sees Peter Andre, but he does not *know* who Peter Andre is. Suppose the dog then sees a Porsche drive past. He sees the Porsche but does not know *that it is* a Porsche.

The underlying point here is that ***seeing an object does not imply that one knows what it is that one sees.***

Let’s consider a different example, this time using a human adult: suppose Tom sees Peter Andre walking past. Tom has no idea who Peter Andre is. He’s never read *OK* or *Heat* and has never heard of him. Tom sees Peter Andre without seeing him *as* Peter Andre. Tom’s seeing Peter normally will allow him to learn other things: he will come to know that there is *someone walking past*, he will come to know that there is a *man* in the street and so on. But it should be clear that one can see *something* or *someone* without knowing what it is, or who it is, or what kind of thing that it is.

Or, consider another example. Sue sees John Smith walking down the street. John Smith looks a bit like Peter Andre at a distance. Sue gets very excited because she thinks she has

seen Peter Andre. But she hasn't *seen* Peter Andre at all. She has seen John (maybe she has seen him *as* Peter Andre, or *as if he were* Peter Andre).

There seems to be an important difference between

- (i) simply *seeing* an object (what we might call **objectual seeing**)
- (ii) seeing the object *as* something, someone, or some kind of thing (**seeing as**).

What does this difference amount to? The key contrast is that seeing something *as* something implies having a *belief* about what the thing is. If I see John Smith as Peter Andre what is going on is that, on the basis of my seeing John, I come to *believe* that Peter Andre is walking past. Similarly, when Tom sees Peter Andre—but without any idea of who he is—he comes to believe lots of things (e.g., that there is a tanned man walking past) but doesn't believe *that* Peter Andre is walking past.

Belief, then, seems to be a crucial part of seeing something *as* something. But there is more to seeing than objectual seeing and “seeing as”. Let's consider another example. Suppose Peter Andre is surreptitiously smoking as he walks along the street. You may see Peter Andre whilst he is smoking, without seeing *that* he is smoking. In fact, at the time when you see him, there is likely to be a vast number of things that are true of Peter Andre which you don't perceive. He may be hungry. He may be thinking about Jordan. He may be exactly 10 metres from the nearest rat. When we see an object, we may also see *that* it is a certain way (but not others): we may see that it is red, round, and to our left.

So, in addition to objectual seeing and “seeing as” we seem to have:

(iii) seeing *that* something is a certain way (“**seeing that**”)

Now this kind of seeing – seeing *that* things are a certain way – is often called *propositional* seeing (or propositional perception if we’re talking about perception in general). You can see that Peter Andre is walking, you can see that he is wearing a distressed denim jacket and so on, you may hear that he is talking on his phone and that he has a cold, and so on.

Now, we have already noted that epistemologists are primarily concerned with *propositional* knowledge. Whilst we can and do talk about seeing *how* to do something, seeing *where* something is, seeing *whether* so-and-so is at home, epistemologists of perception tend to focus on perception as a source of propositional knowledge: seeing *that* something is the case.

5. Perception and belief

How is perception a source of propositional knowledge? We are working with the assumption that knowledge is justified true belief. So, we face two initial questions:

- (i) Does perception give rise to belief?**
- (ii) Does perception give rise to *true* beliefs?**
- (ii) Are perceptual beliefs justified?**

If we can answer yes to all three, then it would seem that perception can be a source of knowledge.

Let’s consider each in turn.

Perception typically, but not invariably, gives rise to belief

In many cases—in most of our waking life—we *do* believe what we perceive. If it *seems* that there is a glass of cold lager on the table in front of us we *act* accordingly and we are willing to *say* that there is a glass of cold lager on the table if asked where the lager is, and so on.

But not always. Suppose you are at the circus and you “see” a magician cut off her own hand. In this context you don’t *believe* that she has cut off her hand. What does this amount to? Well, your lack of belief means that you’re unwilling to *do* the normal things that you would do if someone cut off their hand (you don’t run onto stage trying to help, you don’t ring for an ambulance etc.).

Now this might seem to be a bit odd. You might have the same *experience* (someone in front of you, chopping off their hand, blood gushing out etc) but in one case you *believe* what you see, in the other you don’t. The key point here is that the beliefs we form are not just based on what we see at that moment. We have lots of *other* beliefs too.

If you believe that you are at a theatre, that the person in front of you is a performer who is trying to shock and trick you, then you will *suspend* your beliefs about what you see.⁸

But in general we tend to *believe* what our eyes tell us, unless we have some other reason which gives us grounds to *discount* the evidence of our senses.

⁸ Psychologists have a fancy term for this phenomenon: our perceptual beliefs are *cognitively penetrable*. What this means is that what you take to be the case depends, rationally, upon what else you take to be the case. There seem to be aspects of perception that are unlike beliefs: these aspects are *cognitively impenetrable*. For example, when you see a visual *illusion*, you may *know* that, say, two lines are the same length, but you can’t help seeing them *as* different.

We can talk of *perceptual beliefs* as a way of referring to beliefs about the observable world that are *based upon* our perception of it. But *knowledge* is more than just belief. Knowledge requires *truth* and requires *justified* belief. But does perception provide us with *true* beliefs? Are our beliefs based upon perception *justified*? [Do we have a *right* to believe what our senses tell us?]

(ii) **Fallibilism: perceptual beliefs may not be true**

Suppose you are walking down the road. You suddenly stop because there's a big black dog that has just come round the corner, running quickly. You start to walk back slowly. You look more closely. Oh, it's just a bin bag blowing in the wind. Here you formed a *belief* on the basis of how things seemed in your experience, but it turned out to be wrong.

6. Empiricist foundationalism

Let's take stock. We're now a bit clearer about what perception is; there are various kinds of perception, but perceiving *that* something is the case seems to be an important source of knowledge. Whilst perception does seem to give rise to *beliefs*, it doesn't always give rise to *true* beliefs. If perceptual beliefs aren't *guaranteed* to be true, what gives us a right to believe any of them, or this one, or that one? Remember, a justified belief is one that we have some grounds for holding that it is *true*, but if perceptual beliefs aren't based on anything else, how can we have grounds for holding that they are true? We seem to be back to the kind of worry that Descartes had – given that our perceptual beliefs *can* be wrong, what justification do we have for believing any of them?

There are different strategies that suggest themselves at this point, and these, in turn, depend upon *what we are trying to achieve*.

Epistemology, as I've stressed before, is always a *practical* affair (the same goes for other branches of philosophy).

Two kinds of foundationalist strategy

7. Infallibilist foundations and SENSE DATA

We want to *guarantee* truth.

At this point what we might do is reflect upon our perceptual beliefs. Our perceptual beliefs have a distinctive feature. Suppose you seem to see a red tomato on the table in front of you. You might be wrong that there is a red tomato actually there. But there seems to be something that you *can't* be wrong about: that you *seem* to see a red tomato.

Or, to put it in terms of *objectual* seeing: the fact that you seem to see a tomato doesn't mean that you see a tomato, but there is still something that is "there": a "tomato-like" red shape, something *within* your experience.

So, whilst we might be wrong about the existence of external objects, there are "things" that we are, as Russell put it, *directly acquainted with*. We don't *infer* that we seem to see something, there is just something "there" in experience before us, and we can't be *wrong* about that (even if the something in experience—call it an **idea**, a **sense-datum**, a **quale** (plural "qualia"), or "**the given**").

On this view our knowledge has foundations in a kind of "direct" knowledge of something in experience. Such knowledge is, so many have argued, self-justifying. We can't be wrong about how things *appear* to us.

The problem with such a view, of course, is what is the status of

our normal perceptual beliefs about tables, chairs, tomatoes, buses, etc. So this strategy seems to leave us back where we started: it's not a help to say that there we have special direct knowledge of our own minds but only fallible beliefs about the world.

There is also a deeper problem with this kind of empiricist foundationalism. Suppose that we accept that you can't be wrong about how things seem to you. The problem is: how does this direct knowledge of appearances give you any reasons for forming beliefs about the external world. You have direct knowledge of a patch of red and a certain smell: *so what!!!* Why should direct knowledge of one thing give us any grounds for inferring anything else?

So, the empiricist foundationalist faces the problem of explaining how it is that our *nonbasic* beliefs get to be justified at all. The foundationalist argues that we have

(i) *immediate* knowledge of a "red sense datum"

But we then come to believe

(ii) "There's a tomato in front of me"

The most obvious line of thought would be to say something like:

"It tends to be the case that when I see something that looks, smells and feels, like a red tomato, there's a tomato there"

or

"Millions of people see millions of things every day, so perception is a pretty reliable source of knowledge."

or: “I know my eyes are pretty good, and I don’t make many mistakes”

Whilst these statements do offer us reason to form a belief on the basis of what we see it is important to stress that we have departed from foundationalism. It is not the direct knowledge of the sense-datum that justifies ones beliefs but, rather *a further, higher-level, belief: that is, a belief about beliefs, or about perception.* E.g., the belief that beliefs formed in this way *tend to be* true, and so on.

[This is sometimes called the “**DOXASTIC ASCENT**” **argument** [see Laurence Bonjour’s *Structure of Empirical Knowledge*]

If we don’t appeal to beliefs *about* perception, we might try to justify our beliefs by appealing to, say, lots of other beliefs: e.g., that it would be odd if it weren’t a real tomato, or that it came from a bag with “tomatoes” on it and you remember buying them and so on. Here the idea is that your belief (that there is a tomato before you) is justified because it *fits* with a wide range of evidence and other beliefs that you have.

If this is right then justification of perceptual beliefs is *not* simply based upon a simple inference from direct knowledge of sense data, it draws upon a wide range of *other beliefs*.

8. The coherentist alternative

This line of response suggests an alternative picture of the justification of empirical knowledge: *coherentism*.

The *strict* foundationalist argues that there are basic beliefs and that the justification of nonbasic beliefs is derived from them. But

this seems implausible in the case of perceptual beliefs. We might argue that our perceptual states are *psychologically basic* in that they are not based upon inferences from other more fundamental beliefs (i.e., we don't *infer* that we seem to see red, or hear a pitter patter sound). It does not follow that psychologically basic states can, by themselves justify further beliefs, or even provide a sound basis for making inferences about the world. Beliefs that are *psychologically* foundational may not be *epistemically* foundational. So, a more sensible picture of justification, so the argument goes, is a *coherentist* one.

The coherentist view of justification is that a belief is justified in terms of its relation to sets of beliefs.

A belief is justified if it *coheres* with a large set of other beliefs which cohere amongst themselves. E.g., think how many of your *other* beliefs would have to be mistaken in order for your belief that you are studying in Lancaster to be false!

But there is a problem here: do you have to *know* that your beliefs cohere? Do you have to know that the coherence of your beliefs makes it likely that they are true? But how can you know this? What is the basis of this further belief? Doesn't this just set up the regress problem again?

Maybe the problem here is with internalism?

9. Internalism again.

Foundationalism and coherentism are two views about the nature of epistemic justification. Both of them presuppose the *internalist* idea that justification is bound up with individual *epistemic responsibility*. A person is justified in believing something if they act as they *ought* to with regard to their beliefs. But you can only

act on the basis of what you know (or believe), so justification will always be in terms of what is *cognitively accessible*.

Later in term we will consider whether this view of justification is correct when we turn to “externalist” theories of knowledge and justification. Next week we will continue with our exploration of internalism, and with our investigation of the *sources* of knowledge by looking more closely at what is involved in *knowledge of our own mental states*.

10. Summary

So, we’ve now spent two weeks looking at the “architecture” of knowledge and justification. But now we can see that there are two different ways of thinking about foundations, and about “chains” of belief, and, relatedly, about basic beliefs.

(A) EPISTEMICALLY – i.e., chains of *justification* or *reasons* which are grounded in self-justifying beliefs.

(B) PSYCHOLOGICALLY (or causally) where there are chains of belief which terminate in sources of knowledge (e.g., perception) and are not based upon further beliefs.

The coherentist can avoid some of the problems of Descartes’ “rationalist” foundationalism and of the “empiricist” foundationalist alternative by keeping apart the *psychologically* basic from the *epistemically* basic. Perceptual states are psychologically basic for the coherentist but what justifies them is the relations amongst sets of (fallible) beliefs which, when taken together, support a belief in the truth of each of them. This does not require “firm” or “infallible” foundations, and does not seem to leave us “trapped” in the mind (as Descartes’ view did, and the empiricist theory of direct access to sense data does).

Study Questions

Section A

1. What was Descartes trying to achieve with his foundationalism?
2. Give two (different) reasons for thinking that there are *basic* beliefs?
 - (a)
 - (b)
3. In light of your answer to 2. what *are* basic beliefs? (take care!)
4. Could there be creatures who were incapable of *acquiring* knowledge?

5. What *sources* of knowledge are there?

6. Are all the sources of knowledge in 5. equally *basic*?

7. What is *empirical* knowledge?

8. What are the sources of empirical knowledge?

9. Do sources of empirical knowledge involve the formation of basic beliefs?

10. Give an example of “Objectual” seeing.

11. Give an example of “seeing as”.

12. Give an example of “seeing that”?

13. Why are epistemologists particularly concerned with seeing *that*?

Section B: Perception and Justification

14. Does seeing imply believing? Give examples.

15. Does perception give rise to *true* beliefs?

16. Is perception fallible?

17. If perceptual beliefs are fallible, in what sense are they justified?
18. Is it (epistemically) *irresponsible* to accept perceptual beliefs as true?
19. Is it (epistemically) *irresponsible* to accept perceptual beliefs as true *without further evidence that they are true*?
20. What are “sense-data”?
21. What is Russell’s *knowledge by acquaintance*?
22. What is empiricism?

23. How can an appeal to knowledge by acquaintance provide a foundation for empiricist theories of knowledge?
24. How can an empiricist foundationalism account for the justification of everyday perceptual beliefs about the world?
25. Can the empiricist foundationalist account for the justification of everyday perceptual beliefs about the world without making appeal to further beliefs (e.g., beliefs about which sources of belief are justified)?
26. Are our perceptual beliefs justified “atomistically” (i.e., one at a time, in isolation from one another)?
27. What is “coherentism”?

28. How does the coherentist account of empirical knowledge differ from the standard foundationalist account?
29. What is the distinction between a *psychologically* basic belief and an *epistemically* (or justificatory) basic belief?
30. How are perceptual beliefs justified, according to the coherentist?

Lecture 5

Self-Knowledge

1. Summary so far

Our story about knowledge is now a bit more complicated, and a bit more detailed. We assumed that knowledge is justified true belief. We then went on to look at *justification* in more detail. We noted that justification of beliefs is bound up with *epistemic responsibility* (people can be held responsible for, say, being overly gullible). This led us on to *internalism* about justification. A justified belief is one that the subject has reasons for believing. This led to the *epistemic regress* problem and a worry about *scepticism*. Over the past couple of weeks we have seen how these assumptions have implications for the *structure* (or “architecture” of knowledge). In Descartes we saw his attempt to provide a firm foundation for knowledge in a “basic belief” that was *immune* from the possibility of error. Last week we turned to a different kind of foundationalism: empiricist foundationalism that is based upon direct acquaintance with aspects of experience (e.g., sense-data). But we also looked at an alternative to foundationalism in *coherentism*. The coherentist keeps apart psychologically basic sources of knowledge from *epistemically* basic beliefs. Any particular belief is justified by its relations with lots of other beliefs (e.g. it “fits” or “coheres” with them). These beliefs may all be fallible (so there is no self-justifying belief at the “foundation”), but *together* they give us grounds to believe that each of them is (likely to be) true.

In passing we talked about the fact that there are different sources of knowledge. This week we'll look at a very distinctive kind of, or source of, knowledge: our knowledge of our own minds. Doing so will allow us to pick up on and highlight some connections and links between epistemology and metaphysics, especially the *metaphysics of mind*.

2. What is self-knowledge?

As always it will help if we are clear about things to start. There are different things that we might mean by self-knowledge, e.g., things like knowing what kind of person you are (are you courageous, or kind). Or, we might think that self-knowledge is about knowing a special kind of thing - "the self". These are not going to be our concern here. **Our focus is going to be upon knowledge of *mental states***. So what are mental states? One point to note is that there are lots of different kinds of mental states: e.g., think of *pains*; beliefs, wishes, thoughts, imaginings, perceptions, memories; anger; joy; desire; and so on. Now, some of these mental states are things that *happen* and *pass* in your mind. They *occur*. Let's call these **occurrent mental states**. Other mental states are not like this. Think about your belief that Paris is in France. You've had this belief for a very long time and you *continue* to have it even when your mind is on other things, when you are asleep and so on. Let's call these **standing mental states** (some people call them *dispositional* states, but we'll not follow them here).

Another clarificatory point is needed before we can get started. Remember that we've been talking about different kinds of knowing, and different kinds of seeing. For example, we've talked about knowing (and seeing) *objects* (or people). But the main kind of knowledge that we have been interested in is *propositional*

knowledge. Whilst it is true that we talk of knowing our minds, or knowing our mental states, our focus will be on knowing *that* you are in, or have, certain mental states: such as knowing that you have a pain, knowing that you believe that Paris is in France, knowing that you fear spiders and so on.

At this point, then, a number of questions arise:

- (i) What is it for someone to *know* that they have or are in a mental state?
- (ii) How do they gain such knowledge?
- (iii) How does this method or way of gaining knowledge compare and contrast with other means of acquiring knowledge?

3. Seven distinctive features of self-knowledge

But how should we approach these questions? One useful way of starting is to think about some of the features that instances of self-knowledge have. We can then look at some different views about what self-knowledge *is* (or, relatedly, what is the *process* or *means* by which self-knowledge is achieved).

1) First-person/third person contrasts

The first point to note is that knowledge of mental states is not just restricted to self-knowledge. Tom can know that Sue wants coffee. Sue can know that Tom thinks that Blair is dead. But there seem to be important differences between how Tom knows about his own wants, and how he knows about Sue's; similarly, there are differences between how Sue knows about Tom's thoughts and how she knows about her own.

This raises questions: **what are these first-person/third-person contrasts?** What best *explains* why there are these contrasts?

2) *Directness.*

Let's consider some of these contrasts in more detail. One thing that seems true is that we know our own minds in a way that differs from how *other people* come to know of our minds. Take the example of *pain*. Suppose Tom has toothache. Sue can come to know of Tom's toothache, but she can only come to know it by perceiving Tom's behaviour, or facial expression, or via Tom's *testimony* ("Oh Susy, it hurts so bad . . ."). Tom seems to know of his toothache *directly*, not on the basis of something else. Or, take the example of belief. How does Sue know what Tom believes? She can *assume* that he will believe various things, but this is no guarantee that he does. But Tom doesn't have to make assumptions about what he is likely to believe: he can just *tell* what he believes in a way that Sue cannot.

Self-knowledge seems to be a *direct* form of knowledge.

3) *Non-inferential in its nature*

A related point is that Tom's knowledge of his own toothache doesn't seem to be *inferential*. It's not based on making an inference about something else. Sue has to make inferences based on Tom's behaviour, or upon what he says (and this will involve further assumptions, that Tom is rational, that he is honest and so on).

4) *First-Person Authority with regard to one's own mental states*

A fourth point is that first-person knowledge of one's own mind seems to be granted a special kind of *authority*. Suppose Sue and Bob are arguing about whether Tom's toothache has gone away. They might cite all sorts of evidence. Sue might be better placed than Bob, because she sees Tom a lot, and has seen him recently. But now suppose that Tom comes along. Surely *Tom* is the best placed of the lot to tell whether he has toothache. If Tom says that

he still has toothache, and Sue and Bob believe him, then that, in a sense, is the end of it. Compare Sue and Bob arguing about what the melting point of aluminium is. In order for Tom to be able to end the debate in a similar way, he would have to be taken to be an *authority* on matters chemical.

Each of us, then, is assumed to be *authoritative* about our own minds.

5) *Immunity to error (infallibilism)*

A fifth point, related to, but not the same as the fourth, is that first-person self-knowledge seems to be immune to error. If Tom attends to his own mind and concludes that he believes that Tony Blair is dead he can't be wrong about what he believes, or, he can't be wrong about the fact that he is in pain, when he is in pain, and so on.

6) *Exclusivity: This special kind of knowledge is restricted (to one's own mental states)*

A sixth point is that this kind of knowledge is restricted. We have already seen that Tom cannot know *Sue's* states in a first-person way. But Tom has lots of properties that are not *mental* properties. But this kind of first-person knowledge seems to be restricted to *mental* states. E.g., if Tom is 6ft tall there is no reason why he should *know* that he is, or why he should have any special authority about his own height. Of course, in many social contexts we do take people to be authoritative about their own height, but that is because it is assumed that people *know* their own height (not because one's height *automatically* is known by you).

7) *Exhaustiveness (This is more contentious)*

A seventh, final, and much more contentious assumption is that each person knows, or can know *ALL* their own mental states in

this special, authoritative way - here the point is that mentality is *essentially* a first-person-knowable phenomenon - there is nothing left over, outside the reaches of self-consciousness, which properly counts as mental. At first sight this may seem to be fairly sensible, or maybe even self-evident. After all, how could you, for example, have a toothache but *not know that you have one!!!*

OK, so we now have listed seven distinctive features of self-knowledge. This raises the question: what kind of process, relation, or phenomenon *is* self-knowledge such that it has all of these features?

4. Self-knowledge and “inner perception” or “inner sense”⁹

One tempting view is that self-knowledge involves a special kind of “inner perception”. Normal perception involves the formation of mental states—beliefs—about objects and situations in the world around us. Inner perception involves the formation of beliefs about one’s own mental states. This view has been a popular one throughout the history of philosophy, going back to John Locke. Many contemporary psychologists seem to endorse something like it, holding that self-knowledge is a matter of having the right kind of “monitoring” or “scanning” process in the brain. Just as we can perceive dogs and cats by forming perceptual states, which, stand in some kind of *causal* relation to dogs and cats, so too can we form inner perceptions, where certain causal processes “connect” first-order mental states with *higher-order* ones. This view seems, at first sight, to make sense. It can explain the differences between first-person knowledge of our own mental states and other people’s knowledge of them by making appeal to an “internal” causal relation between mental states. Similarly, it

⁹ E.g., see David Armstrong *A Materialist Theory of Mind* (Routledge Kegan Paul 1968) Chapter 15

can explain the *authority* that we grant to people's own self-ascriptions because only they are in a position to directly perceive their own mental states.

So, self-knowledge is akin to a kind of inner perception. But, on closer inspection, this view is, in some ways, puzzling. This is because self-knowledge is radically *unlike* perception in many respects. For example, there is no obvious *organ* of inner sense: all other senses seem to involve some kind of organ – the eye, the skin, the ear etc. But the inner sense theorist might reply that such organs are only needed for *external* perception, and with the perception of *inner* states such organs are not needed. But there are more worries.

(i) The problem of “no added phenomenal character”¹⁰

One problem for this view is that perception of dogs, cats and so on involves the formation of perceptual states such that it is *like* something to have the state. Look at your own hands. It is *like* something to see them. In fact, whenever we think of perceiving any kind of object there is a “phenomenal character” (a way things *appear* to us, or *feel* to us from the first person point of view) to those perceptual states. But inner perception doesn't seem to be like this.

There are two ways of expanding on this.

First, we can think about occurrent perceptual states and experiential states like pains. What is it like to *know* that one has a pain? Well, there is the phenomenal character of the pain, but there is not any *additional* phenomenal character for the supposed

¹⁰ See Sidney Shoemaker 1994, 'Self-Knowledge and "Inner Sense"', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54: (JSTOR) [Especially lecture 1 'The Object Perceptual Model']

“perceptual” state that is the *perception* of the pain. We might think here that this problem can be met by arguing that the higher-order state (the perception of the pain) has the *same* phenomenal character as the pain itself. But this runs us into a second problem.

Second, we can think about standing states like beliefs. But when someone asks you whether you think that Tony Blair is dead you can *tell* what you believe without its being *like anything* to “perceive” your belief. You just *state* what you believe. Here there is nothing like the phenomenal character associated with perception and knowing one’s own beliefs seem to be radically *unlike* knowing whether there is a tomato in the room and so on.

(ii) The problem of “transparency”¹¹

A second problem for the inner perception view is that it seems to be very mistaken about just *how* it is that we get to know our own minds. For example, someone asks you “Do you think that Tony Blair will last till the next election?”. How do you answer this? On the inner perception model what you should scan your thoughts and is try to detect whether one of them is the thought that Tony Blair will last. But this seems odd. A much more natural way to answer the question about what you think is to think about *Tony Blair*, about his chances, and so on. Mental states like belief have a kind of *transparency* to them. The beliefs themselves never really show up as objects of attention or perception, rather, it is the worldly situations that the beliefs are *about* that we focus upon when we answer questions about our own minds. Related points can be made for desires (e.g., do you want a cup of tea – you don’t answer this by trying to detect your desires, but by thinking about the prospect of a cup of tea).

¹¹ See Gareth Evans 1982, *The Varieties of Reference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (ed. J. McDowell) Chapter 7 section 4. (difficult but important)

(iii) The problem of “essential interdependence” of lower- and higher-order mental states¹²

Another worry for the perceptual view of self-knowledge is that in normal cases of perception the perceptual state and the thing that it is about are *independent* of one another. Indeed, think of the fact that there can be a dog that is unseen, or a hallucination of a dog when there is no dog there. But much of our self-knowledge *cannot* be like this. Think, once again, of a pain. How could there be a dull throbbing pain in your ankle without you *knowing* that you had it. Your self-knowledge of the pain, and of *what it is like*, seem to be inseparable from the pain itself. First, it seems that self-knowledge is *necessary* for being in pain (otherwise it would be just bodily damage without pain). Second, it seems that self-knowledge is *sufficient* for being in pain (if it seems to you that you have a pain, then *you are in pain*, even if you have no bodily damage at the point where the pain seems to be).

(iv) The problem of unconscious mental states.¹³

A fourth problem—related to the third—is that if self-knowledge is a kind of inner perception then it seems that our mental states are one thing whilst our knowledge of them is another. This seems to follow from the fact that perception and its objects are *distinct* entities. Perceptual objects exist independent of the perceiving of them, so mental states must be able to exist, and be the mental states that they are, *without the subject knowing that they exist*. But many philosophers over the centuries have argued that this is absurd. How can there be mental states that you don't know that you have!

¹² Joseph Levine *Purple Haze* (OUP 2001) Chapter 4 section 4 (tough)

¹³ See John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*. Cambridge MA.: MIT Press 1992. Chapter 7 ‘The unconscious and its relation to consciousness’.

(v) Perceptual error and the rejection of infallibilism

The perceptual model of self-knowledge seems to call into question the idea that we have *infallible* knowledge of our own minds. If perception is viewed as a *causal* relation between one kind of mental state (the first-order mental state) and another (the higher- order state that is *about* the first-order one) then it seems to be, in principle, possible that one might be *wrong* about one's own mental states. Not just in the sense that one doesn't think that one has an unconscious state, but in the sense that a subject might *mistakenly* perceive (or misperceive) a mental state.

Of course, the "inner sense" theorist might argue that this is as it should be. *If* perception is inner sense then maybe we are wrong to suppose that it is as infallible as we think it is.

It's worth spending a few minutes thinking about this final point as it feeds back into topics from last term in *metaphysics*.

5. What are mental states anyway? The possibility of unconscious mental states?¹⁴

Recall our discussion of the distinctive nature of self-knowledge. So far we have been focusing on what self-knowledge would have to be in order for it to have these features. But a related question is: ***what are mental states such that we know of them in this distinctive, first-personal way.***

One view is that mental states are *essentially* bound up with self-knowledge. Mental states are "subjective" entities, where "subjective" means something like "falling within the first-person point of view of a knowing subject. Your pains are

¹⁴ Manson, N.C. (2000) "A Tumbling Ground for Whimsies"? The history and contemporary role of the conscious-unconscious contrast' in Tim Crane & Sarah Patterson (eds) *History of the Mind Body Problem* (Routledge 2000)

subjective because what a pain is is essentially bound up with your knowing that you have it. (You might call this **epistemic subjectivity**). **Mental states are essentially subjective states.**

If this is right, then unconscious mental states—states that lack a subjective side to them—are as impossible as a round square or a married bachelor.

But this might seem a bit odd. Don't psychologists make appeal to unconscious mental states? Didn't Freud show that people's behaviour, thought and dreams are shaped by unconscious mental states and processes?

So, on the one hand, people have ascribed unconscious mental states, but, on the other hand, unconscious mental states seem to be very puzzling. So what's the solution here?

Central to the debate about whether or not there are unconscious mental states is a debate about what *mentality* is. Obviously, if you assume that a mental state just *is* a state that is “subjective” (i.e. *known* by its subject in a direct first-person way) then unconscious mental states are impossible. But there are other ways of thinking about mental states that do not put such stress on first-person knowledge. We noted earlier that we can and do know *other people's* mental states. This doesn't have to involve first-person knowledge because we can ascribe mental states by way of explaining *behaviour*.

In fact we can think about mental states in two very different ways. We can think about how our mental lives strike us from the first-person point of view, or we can think about mental states in terms of their *causal* significance: our beliefs, pains, emotions, and so on, play a distinctive *causal* role in shaping our speech,

behaviour and other mental states.

This is what makes room for the ascription of unconscious mental states. There are cases where the *best explanation* of someone's behaviour (or other aspects of their mental life) makes appeal to *mental* states but the subject herself seems to have no inkling of, and does not acknowledge, these mental states. For example, in cognitive psychology there is a phenomenon known as *blindsight*.¹⁵ Subjects with a very specific kind of brain damage suffer from a region of 'blindness' in part of their visual field (often one half of their field of vision is missing). Such subjects claim not to be able to see anything in their 'blind' field, but they do exhibit some kind of ability to detect or discriminate events in their 'blind' field – visually detectable events, rather than events which are detected via some other, undamaged, sense modality. Subjects can, when forced, reliably 'guess' the orientation of objects in their 'blind' field even though they deny that they see the object, and deny that they have any knowledge of its orientation. The blindsight subject seems to have a deficit in her subjective experiential point of view. The cognitive states and processes which underpin her reliable guesses do not make any contribution to the subjective character of experience (or, at the very least, if they do so, they fail to make the kind of contribution which places the stimulus object within the subject's normal visual perceptual field). But the best explanation of how the subject reliably makes guesses is that she has 'perceived' the stimulus in some way or other, albeit *unconsciously*.

¹⁵ Weiskrantz, L. (1986). *Blindsight: A case study and implications*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

6. The epistemology of self-knowledge & the metaphysics of mind

Now, one way of thinking about the blindsight example is that what mental states are is, first and foremost, still *conscious* mentality. Mental states are *known* by their subjects in a direct first-person way, but maybe there are some weird cases of “unconscious” mental states. But many contemporary philosophers and psychologists in fact view of mind in a way that fundamentally divorces it from self-knowledge and consciousness. The dominant conception of mind in contemporary philosophy is a *functionalist* and *physicalist* one. On this view mental states are primarily *inner causal* states of creatures (e.g., brain states) and *mentality* is a matter of standing in the right kind of causal relations.

My reason for stressing this fact is to draw attention to the way that debates about self-knowledge are shaped by further assumptions about metaphysics (and, as this course is on knowledge *and* reality it is a point worth bringing to the fore. If you assume that mental states have no essential connection to first-person self-knowledge then it becomes *feasible* to think about self-knowledge and consciousness in terms of something like “inner sense” or “inner perception”. If you don’t share this view (e.g., see John Searle) then such a view of self-knowledge is impossible. *Because* self-knowledge and the *things which are known* are so intimately intertwined we find that there is a very close tie between thinking about mind and thinking about self-knowledge. For example, Gilbert Ryle, the grandfather of *behaviourism* held that we don’t really have any special kind of first-person access to our mental states at all (see the excerpt in Cassam (ed)) instead, we explain the *seeming* authority of self-knowledge in terms of the fact that each of us spends a lot more

time with ourselves than anyone else does (so we have much more evidence to go on!).

7. Conclusion

We have now looked at knowledge, justification, the structure of knowledge, and foundationalism. We've noted that there are different *sources* of knowledge and in our lecture this week we have been focused on *self-knowledge* as a source of knowledge. We have only been able to scratch the surface of this topic (see the Stanford Online entry on Self-Knowledge for further readings and discussion). What this week's topic has shown is some of the *connections* between epistemology and other branches of philosophy.

We have focused, in particular, on the idea that self-knowledge involves a kind of "inner perception". We then looked at a number of reasons why this view might be problematic. Focusing on self-knowledge, and the distinctiveness of *first-person* knowledge carries on in our *individualistic* approach to knowledge. We have been thinking about knowledge in terms of *responsible individuals* forming beliefs on the basis of reasons and evidence and in looking at foundationalism and self-knowledge we really have been focusing on the *subjective* point of view. Next week we'll turn to the social side of knowledge and look at the way that we acquire knowledge from the "testimony" or speech of others.

Study Questions

Section A: What Is Self-Knowledge?

1. List three things that “self-knowledge” might (correctly!) refer to.
 - (a)
 - (b)
 - (c)
2. Why are we—on our epistemology course—particularly interested in people’s knowledge of their own mental states?
3. What are mental states?
4. What are “occurrent” mental states? Give examples.

5. What are “standing” or “dispositional” mental states? Give examples.

6. Give (at least) three ways that someone could come to know of Bob’s mental states.

7. What differences are there between first-person knowledge of mental states and third- person knowledge? [HINT – if you find this hard, move on to the next questions which will help you answer this]

8. What does it mean to say that first-person self-knowledge is *direct*?

9. What does it mean to say that first-person self-knowledge is *non-inferential*?

10. What is it to be an *authority* about some subject matter?

11. In what sense are we *authorities* about our own mental states?

12. Does this kind of authority rest upon our “direct access” to mental states?

13. Can first-person self-knowledge be wrong?

14. Can you be wrong about being in pain?

15. Can you think that you are in pain when you are not?

16. Can you *think* that you believe something when you don't believe it?

17. Is first-person self-knowledge restricted to mental states (and not other nonmental things)?

18. Are all of a person's mental states knowable by them in a direct first-person way?

19. Can there be *unconscious* mental states? Give examples.

Section B: Self-Knowledge as Inner Perception

20. What reasons are there for thinking that self-knowledge is a kind of inner perception?
21. Must perceptual states and perceptual objects be *distinct*?
22. What does your answer to 21 tell you about inner perception?
23. What are “first-order” or “lower-order” mental states?
24. What are “second-order” or “higher-order” mental states?

25. [HARDER] On the inner-perceptual model of self-knowledge what *kind* of mental state must the higher-order states be?
26. Is there an *organ* of inner sense?
27. Does it matter if there isn't?
28. What is the “no added phenomenal character” objection to the inner perceptual model?
29. How do you answer a question like “Do you think that Labour will win the next election?”. Does your answer count against the inner perceptual model? [HINT: see the “transparency” section on p.35 of the long notes]

30. Is *knowledge* of one's pains independent of the pains themselves?

31. How does your answer have implications for the inner perceptual model?

32. [TOUGH] Why does the inner perceptual model imply the possibility of unconscious mental states?

33. Does the fact that perception is *fallible* count against the inner perceptual model?

34. In what sense have people's views of mentality changed over the past 100 years?

35. Does it make sense to think of mental states in *independence* of first-person knowledge of them? [TOUGH but interesting]

36. How does the *metaphysics* of mind have implications for the *epistemology* of mind? [E.g., with the inner perceptual model as an example].

Lecture 6

Testimony

1. Introduction

Over the last couple of weeks we have been considering different *sources* of knowledge. Sources of knowledge seem to provide the *psychologically* basic “inputs” that allow us to form beliefs about the world. We looked at *perception* of the external world, and then, last week, looked at the view that knowledge of our own mental states might be derived from a special kind of “inner perception” or “inner sense”.

So far we have been thinking about knowledge and belief against the background assumption of the *epistemically responsible individual*. Remember – it was this idea that led us into *internalism* then into *foundationalism*, and *coherentism*. We saw how different kinds of foundationalism rested upon the idea that knowledge of one’s own mental states is *direct* and *infallible*. We then explored whether this kind of direct infallible knowledge was best understood as a form of inner perception.

But a great deal of our knowledge is obtained from *other* people. Think of the countless things that you have been read, or that you have been told, or that you have heard on the radio or seen on TV. Now, some of this stuff is not meant to bring about belief (e.g., fiction, drama, poetry), but a lot of it is.

At first sight, then, *testimony* is an obvious and important source of knowledge. But think a bit more about what is involved in

learning something from another person's say-so. We seem to be able to acquire knowledge from others without necessarily knowing, or having access to, the speaker's *evidence* for her claim. Or, in the case of *expert* knowledge, we might not have the competence or other knowledge necessary to really understand the *reasons* for the claim. For example, suppose your chemistry teacher tells you that the boiling point of aluminium is 4566 degrees Fahrenheit. She is unlikely to have established this herself. She will have learned it from others.

So, in parallel to the *chains of justification* and *chains of reasons* that we discussed when we looked at internalism, there are also *chains of testimony*, where one person tells another who tells another and so on.

But this is worrying. We have been focusing on knowledge in terms of justified true belief, and justification in terms of the *epistemically responsible* individual who has *reasons* for her beliefs. But if I don't know, or can't understand, the evidence an expert draws upon in making her claims, aren't I just being *gullible*?

2. Descartes on testimony: the “autonomous” knower

Descartes has featured quite a bit in these lectures – we've seen how he was very worried about the possibility of error and sought to provide an *epistemic* foundation: a “firm” foundation for the sciences. Descartes' project, as we saw, was one where an *individual* subject has to be able to provide that foundation for herself.

More generally, Descartes stresses the importance of *individual* epistemic responsibility. For example, in his early work *Rules for the Direction of our Intelligence* (1628 – or earlier). Rule III

begins:

In the subjects we propose to investigate, our inquiries should be directed, **not to what others have thought**, nor to what we ourselves conjecture, but to what we can clearly and perspicuously; behold and with certainty deduce; **for knowledge is not won in any other way.**

He then goes on to note the dangers of relying on past writers – they make errors. Worse still, he notes

since scarce anything has been asserted by any one man the contrary of which has not been alleged by another, we should be eternally the uncertain which of the two to believe.

He considers that one might, as it were, “total up” the competing claims made by people to see which opinions are most favoured, but this will not suffice. But there is no reason to suppose that the truth will have been discovered by the many. More strikingly, he goes on to consider another possibility. Suppose *everybody* agrees. This would still not warrant acceptance.

For we shall not, e.g., all turn out to be mathematicians though we know by heart all the proofs that others have elaborated, unless we have an intellectual talent that fits us to resolve difficulties of any kind. Neither, though we have mastered all the arguments of Plato and Aristotle, if yet we have not the capacity for passing a solid judgement on these matters, shall we become philosophers; we should have acquired the knowledge not of a science, but of history

In a later essay, *The Search for Truth by Means of the Natural*

Light (?1641?). He notes that each of us will have learned lots of things from others, but that it is a defect to spend too much time on “book-learning”. The judicious (male) person will not base his actions on what he has gleaned from books, rather, he will seek to perform those actions which ‘his own reason would have to teach him **if he learned everything from it alone**’ (p. 400)

He notes that he will explain how it is that ‘the true riches of our souls’ open up to ‘each of us the means whereby we can find within ourselves, **without any help from anyone else, all the knowledge we may need for the conduct of life, and the means of using it in order to acquire all the most abstruse items of knowledge that human reason is capable of possessing**’ (p. 400).

For Descartes, then, each of us is an individual *autonomous* (i.e., independent) knower. Even if we don’t buy into Descartes’ *foundationalist* project for epistemology, the idea that we ought to be individually responsible for what we believe has some initial plausibility from within our folk epistemology. After all, don’t we blame people for being gullible, credulous, etc.

But if we hold that knowers ought to be autonomous, if we hold that each of us ought to be epistemically responsible for our own beliefs, how does this square with the fact that *a great deal of our knowledge* is derived from the say-so of others.

3. The problem: what justifies beliefs formed on the basis of testimony?¹⁶

¹⁶ Now, obviously when someone says something, there are lots of things that we might come to believe. When Tom says “It is raining”, we might form the (true) beliefs – *Tom can speak*. Or *Tom said that it is raining*. Or *I just heard some words in English*. But the epistemological issues about testimony arise because it also seems to

The first (and perhaps most important) problem is that testimony is *no guarantee of truth*. People can *lie*. People can be *sincere but mistaken*. This is problematic, especially for our ‘autonomous knower’. The mere fact that somebody else *says* that *p* does not *entail* that *p* (except for certain reflexive logical oddities like ‘I am capable of speech acts’).

If we assume that we *can* acquire knowledge from testimony, then, working with the “knowledge = justified true belief” assumption, it seems that there are only two responses we can make.

- (1) **Reductionism.** Our reliance on testimony is justified because testimonially-acquired beliefs are justified in terms of the use of other *nontestimonial* sources of knowledge, such as perception, memory and inference.¹⁷
- (2) **Fundamentalism:** Our reliance on testimony is justified on its own terms, it does not need to be justified in terms of our reliance on other more fundamental sources of knowledge. Testimony is a *primitive* source of knowledge (along with perception, memory, inference, introspection). Thomas Reid is one example (see Coady Chapter 7 for a discussion)

be the case that there are lots of cases of the following type:

(T) S knows that *p*; S tells H that *p*; H comes to know that *p* as a result

Or, re-cast in terms of justified true belief:

(T*) S has a justified true belief that *p*; S tells H that *p*; H comes to have a justified true belief that *p* as a result.

¹⁷ Coady identifies Hume as a good example of reductionism about testimony. There is considerable dispute about whether Hume is a reductionist or not. Those interested in pursuing this question should see Paul Faulkner, "David Hume's Reductionist Epistemology of Testimony." *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 79 (1998): 302-313; Michael Welbourne, Is Hume really a reductivist?, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A* 33 (2) (2002) pp. 407-423.

4. David Hume and reductionism about testimony

Example: Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*¹⁸

We may observe that there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and from the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators. [. . .] Our assurance in any argument of this kind is derived from no other principle **than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses (p.111)**

Hume suggests that our reliance on testimony is justified because *we observe* that there is a reliable link between what people say and the states of affairs that they talk about. Hume thus offers an *empiricist* (i.e., experience-based) justification of our reliance on testimony:

had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood. Were not these, I say, **discovered by experience** to be qualities, inherent in human nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony (112)

The reason why we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any *connexion*, which we perceive *a priori*, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them (113).

Here's what seems to be Hume's line of thought. There are certain

¹⁸ References are to the Oxford Selby-Bigge edition.

good ways of acquiring knowledge (Hume is talking about belief here, but for our purposes, that does not matter). If we want to know things about the empirical world we need to use *observation*. There then seem to be two issues. Are people reliable informants *in general*? Can we rely upon a particular person on a particular occasion? In both cases, Hume seems to argue, we need to rely upon our powers of observation. The two cases are obviously related. **We need to establish, by observation, that people tend to be reliable informants.** We are thus justified in relying upon a particular person, on particular occasions. Similarly, smoke is typically caused by fire. When we see smoke on a particular occasion we are entitled to make the judgement on a particular occasion of observing smoke that it is caused by fire.

5. What's wrong with reductionism?

(i) The “phenomenological” objection.

We might object that we don't detect ourselves making such inferences. When someone tells us that it is raining, we don't seem to make inferences. But the problem with this response is that the same is true when we see the smoke and take it to be caused by fire.

(ii) The “not enough evidence” objection.

Problem. Lots of assertions are about things that I did not, cannot, observe. The reductionist seems to require a sufficiently broad “training” stage where children observe people stating that *p* and (somehow) get to correlate it with states of affairs. It is not at all clear that there is a “testimony-free” set of observations that *could* provide the basis of our general belief that there is a reliable correspondence between testimony and states of affairs.

(iii) Theory-dependence and observation

A related objection (to (ii)) is that very little observation is ‘testimony-free’. We rely upon others for our concepts, our classifications, our ‘background knowledge’ that allows us to make inferences on the basis of testimony. It is hard to conceive of how an entirely autonomous knower could ‘bootstrap’ herself into having knowledge at all.

(iv) The speech act/reliable authority problem

The Humean story works like this: I am justified in relying up on the testimony of a particular speaker because I have evidence that they are reliable, this, in turn, rests upon previous observations that have established a good correlation between:

- a) Certain types of speakers (in certain contexts)
- b) Things done by those speakers (making noises)
- c) Certain states of affairs in the world

One problem, stressed by Coady and Welbourne is that speakers make lots of different kinds of speech acts. In order to identify a speech act as an assertion we have to assume that what the speaker says *is taken to be true*. But this means that the connection between assertion and truth is not one that is established empirically. That is, the process of evidence gathering must identify certain speech acts as reliable indicators of reality.

(v) The “group knowledge” problem

Many of our knowledge-acquiring (or knowledge-producing) exercises are *cooperative*. Hardwig (1985; 1991) notes that in maths and physics, for example, many research papers cite huge numbers of authors. Certain experiments in physics, and the

calculations and analysis that goes with them, *could not be performed by an individual, even if she lived many times longer than a human being.*

There are two points here.

- (i) Certain knowledge claims depend upon *groups* of people (where no one person knows all of the evidence, or understands all of the proofs, and so on). In certain cases this might just be because there is a lot of data (and, say, each party *could* understand the work done by all the others).
- (ii) Such projects involve a ‘division of epistemic labour’ where work is divided up according to individual expertise. It takes a long time to acquire the expertise necessary to do cutting edge scientific work, and it may be that the various participants cannot themselves follow the proofs or work of those in other fields. No one person *could* know all the evidence and all the grounds for the claims made.

What conclusions might we draw from this? One conclusion might be that *nobody* knows the resulting claims. But this seems odd. These cooperative ventures seem to add to our stock of knowledge. Given that they do so, perhaps we should conclude that the *group*, as a whole is the “knower” of the facts in question.

A more plausible response is to conclude that there is a tension between our conception of what *knowledge* is and our assumption that knowledge that *p* requires some individual to know the evidence. Either way, it seems clear that the idea of the ‘autonomous knower’ sits uneasily with the *social* nature of knowledge production.

6. Global versus local reductionism

At this point it will be helpful to keep apart two “reductionist” projects.

(i) GLOBAL

(ii) LOCAL

The problems so far arise with regard to the attempt to provide a ‘global’ reductionism. That is, an attempt to show that our reliance on testimony *in general* is justified solely on the basis of observation and inference. Global reductionism seems very problematic, as there seems to be no “testimony-free” set of observations that allow one to get started. Fricker (1995) argues that although global reductionism is implausible, *local* reductionism is correct. She distinguishes a ‘developmental’ phase, when we just have to rely (without further justification) on the testimony of others, from a ‘mature’ phase where, drawing upon the knowledge that we have, we have to decide whether to accept particular instances of testimony. But as mature autonomous adults we ought not to accept testimony without evidence that speakers are competent and sincere.

But this seems to move epistemology more towards the realm of ethics. Last week, in our discussion of self-knowledge we teased out some connections between epistemology and metaphysics. This week I want to end by briefly exploring some connections with ethics.

7. The ethics of epistemic action: placing trust and being trusted

The reductionist about testimony thinks about our reliance on others in the way that we might think about our reliance upon objects in the natural world: smoke co-varies with fire, so we are

justified in forming beliefs about fire on the basis of our observation of smoke. Similarly, people normally tell the truth, so we can rely on them in the same way.

But there is an obvious disanalogy between these two examples. If we encounter a smokeless fire we don't *blame* it for not smoking: we simply add this (apparent) fact to our stock of knowledge. When we rely upon certain "natural" signs there is very little of ethical significance, but the social practices of *trusting*, *being trustworthy*, *being thought trusting*, and *being thought trustworthy* are ethically significant.

Example: **being trusted**

Being trusted is, along with being the object of other 'reactive attitudes' like respect, something of fundamental value for most of us. If others treat us *as if* we were not trustworthy, the results can be psychologically and socially devastating. Suppose a researcher, armed with clipboard, stops you in the street and asks if she can ask you some questions about your use of the 'phone. She asks you how many telephone calls you make, on average, each week. You reply. She does not write down your answer, instead, she says 'OK, so *you* say' and then asks you to supply the names of someone who might be able to corroborate your claim. You look astounded. She then asks if you can supply a recent itemised bill from your telephone service provider. If such an encounter were to take place it is likely that you would be, justifiably, puzzled and angered. The researcher does not rely on your word. Instead, she engages in certain kinds of epistemic action, aiming to acquire, say, knowledge from another (more reliable?) source. The point here is that, from the perspective of a person in the 'trustee' position of the trust relation, certain kinds of epistemic action are insulting, damaging, disrespectful, and distressing. Explicit

epistemic actions, of certain kinds, can be at the very least, *indicative* of a lack of trust and may, in some contexts, even be viewed as *expressive* of suspicion and mistrust.

What conclusions should we draw from the example above? One response is that ethics is one thing, epistemology another. This may seem tempting if we take epistemology to be concerned primarily with questions about what justifies our beliefs. But this assumption is not part of our folk epistemology. Central to our folk epistemology is the idea of epistemic agency: we do things to gain knowledge, to share knowledge, to conceal knowledge, bring about false belief and so on. These actions take place in a social context, and our epistemic actions impinge upon, and have ethical implications for other people.

How does this relate to our discussion of reductionism? What seems to drive the local reductionist account is the assumption that mature adults are autonomous knowers. Mature adults ought to have *grounds* for holding that speakers are sincere and honest. But we often do not have prior knowledge of a speaker's sincerity or competence. The acquisition of such grounds (i.e., evidence of sincerity and competence) poses us with a dilemma as epistemic agents. We want to acquire evidence of sincerity and competence *about this person*. There seem to be two ways of doing this:

- (a) Overtly. (I.e., let it be known that one is doing so, but this is insulting, socially disruptive, offensive, and hard to universalise)
- (b) Covertly. But this is deceptive.

Our social interactions with others take place within an ethical framework. Our example suggests that reductionism about testimony, whilst it might fit with a picture of the autonomous

knower, is at *odds* with our tacit understanding of the ethics of communication and testimony. A world of autonomous knowers would be a world where each of us would be constantly suspicious and under suspicion, with each party evaluating the others as potential ‘indicators’ of the truth. Hardwig’s examples of cooperative epistemic action suggest that ‘ideal’ of the autonomous knower is one that is not sustainable. If we drop that idea, then we lose one of the key motivations for reductionism about testimony. This is not to say that we should not, sometimes, be suspicious of others, the key point is that we should question the idea that knowledge *has to be* reduced to onboard justification in every case.

8. Conclusion

In recent years there has been an explosion of interest in the epistemology of testimony (for a good bibliography see Martin Kusch and Peter Lipton ‘Testimony: A primer’ *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*. 33 (2002) 209–217). One reason why is that the epistemology of testimony seems to call into question the *individualism* inherent in traditional “Cartesian” epistemology. We have, over the past six weeks, been working with the assumption that knowledge is justified true belief (not that we simply *assumed* this, we saw that there were good reasons for thinking that this was a reasonable analysis of what propositional knowledge is). Next week we are going to turn to a “classic” short paper in epistemology from the early 1960s that called into question this kind of analysis. So we will be, in effect, calling into question another element of our epistemological story so far.

Study Questions

Section A: Background Context

1. What is epistemic responsibility?
2. What are the “onboard” sources of knowledge?
3. What is it for a belief to be *justified*?
4. How does your answer to 3. relate to your answer to 1.?
5. What is epistemic *internalism*?

6. Would it be irresponsible to believe something if you don't have evidence for its being true?

Section B: Testimony

7. [HARD but worth it]. Speakers can engage in lots of different kinds of “speech act” – promising, ordering, forgiving, reciting poetry, and so on. What kinds of speech act are the focus of epistemology, and why?

8. Give three examples where people seem to acquire knowledge from the testimony of others.

(a)

(b)

(c)

9. In your examples, might the “recipient” have been wrong?

10. Similarly, might the “speaker” have been wrong?

11. Give two reasons why a speaker might be unreliable as a source of knowledge.
 - a) She might be
 - b) She might be

12. To what extent does our individual knowledge depend upon others?

13. Are we being gullible if we accept what someone says as true, without checking for ourselves?

14. Can we have communication without trust?

15. Are beliefs formed on the basis of testimony *fallible*?

Section C: The Justification of Testimonial Belief: Reductionism

16. What is reductionism about testimony?

17. What reasons are there for thinking that reductionism about testimony is correct?

18. Does reductionism depend upon the assumption that knowledge can only be possessed by epistemically responsible individuals?

19. What's *wrong* with reductionism about testimony?

20. What is *global* reductionism?

21. What is *local* reductionism?

22. Is one form of reductionism more plausible than the other? If so, why?

23. Could the acquisition of *all* testimonial knowledge be based upon experience of regular correlations between speech and situations, as Hume argued?

24. Are there any ethical implications that derive from reductionist accounts of the epistemology of testimony?

25. What's it like not to be trusted?

Lecture 7

Gettier Cases and Some Responses

1. Review

We began this lecture course with a philosophical “analysis” of knowledge. Our analysis (a bit like a chemical analysis that identifies the constituents of some compound) suggested that knowledge is best viewed as *justified true belief*. Each condition (truth, belief etc) is individually *necessary* for knowledge and the three conditions are, if met, jointly *sufficient* for knowledge. We then went on to explore this “picture” of knowledge: looking in more detail at justification, at the structure of knowledge and belief, at different kinds of foundationalism, and at different *sources* of knowledge. This week we’re going to question our analysis.

2. Is knowledge justified true belief?

Consider a simple example from Gettier’s paper.

Smith and Jones have applied for a job.

Smith has good reasons to believe that Jones will get the job.

Smith also has good reasons to believe that Jones has ten coins in her pocket (she has counted them).

Smith infers that *the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket*.

But, by chance, and unbeknownst to Smith, two things are true.

First, Jones is not going to get the job, Smith is.

Second, Smith, happens to have ten coins in his pocket.

Does Smith *know* that the person who will get the job has ten coins in her pocket?

Many people, perhaps most, think that Smith doesn't *know* this.

These kinds of examples are called "Gettier Examples" or "Gettier Cases".

They pose a problem for our analysis of knowledge

We've argue so far that knowledge is *justified true belief*.

But in these cases we seem to have cases where a person has a justified true belief but where the justified true belief doesn't constitute knowledge.

3. Gettier examples: aren't they a bit weird?

One thing you might think at this point is that these examples are, well, a *bit weird!* And, if you look at other examples in the literature they may seem even weirder. E.g., Gettier's own example where someone forms lots of beliefs of the kind "Either Smith owns a Ford or Jones is in Barcelona". Surely people don't form beliefs like this!

But Gettier examples don't have to be commonplace. What a Gettier example provides is a *counterexample* to the justified-true-belief analysis of knowledge. The JTB analysis of knowledge claims that knowledge *just is* justified true belief. If a belief is justified and true then *that is sufficient* for it to constitute knowledge. By coming up with counterexamples Gettier is, in effect, saying "No it isn't! A belief *could* be justified and true without being knowledge and it doesn't matter whether or not people *tend to have* such beliefs, all that matters is that they *could* do so!"

4. Gettier examples: what's going on?

It will help if we can get clear about what is going on with these examples, and if we can get clear about “how they work”. The underlying idea that we have been working with all term is that knowledge is bound up with justification which, in turn, is bound up with *epistemically responsible* behaviour (doing what one *ought* with regard to what one believes in etc). Gettier's own examples have the following structure.

1. A person acts in an epistemically responsible manner and forms a belief that p . Let's call this the “original” belief (or, we might call it a *basic* belief – recall our discussion of basic beliefs three weeks ago). This original belief is *justified* insofar as the person has acted as they ought to act in forming the belief.
2. From the belief that p the person validly infers something else: that q . Let's call this the *derived* belief (or a *nonbasic* belief).

So far, then, everything looks good. The belief that p is justified, and the valid inference from p to q surely means that the belief that q is justified.

But now, to make a Gettier example, three further things have to be the case.

- (i) Although the person has acted as they ought, the original belief that p is in fact *false*.
- (ii) The derived belief that q happens to be true.
- (iii) The believer has no other reason to believe that q other than p

Think for a moment about this.

The belief that q is *based upon* the belief that p . p is the person's

reason for believing that *q*. Given that *q* is true there will be all sorts of other reasons that one *might* have for believing that *q*, but the person in question doesn't *know* those reasons. So far as their concerned the only reason that there is to believe that *q* is because *p*.

5. The gap between justification and truth

The underlying general problem is that being justified doesn't entail *truth*. There is the possibility of justified *false* belief. But it is also possible that a belief can be *true by chance*. In the Smith and Jones example, Smith has a justified belief, but it is really *about* Jones. It is only because he frames it in general terms ("The person who is going to get the job . . ." that it *happens* to be true.

So there are cases where one does one's epistemic duty, and where one's beliefs are justified but it is only by some weird *fluke* or *chance* or *accident* that one is right. But this was the kind of thing that we thought that we had to rule out back in lecture 1 and 2. Remember the case of the person who simply *guesses* the winner of a race – they don't *know* the winner because they are only right by chance. But Gettier cases show that one a *justified belief* may be right by chance too! In fact there are *two* accidental elements involved.

- (a) First, the original belief (that *p*) is false. This is always a possibility because even though one is doing one's duty, and basing one's belief on available evidence, there is always a possibility that one's belief is false.
- (b) There is the accident or fluke that the derived belief (that *q*) is true

Now, on our JTB account of knowledge a *false* belief cannot be

knowledge. So if the original belief is false *it* cannot be knowledge. But a false belief may be the basis of another belief (the derived belief) which by some accident is true. The second accident cancels out, as it were, the first piece of bad luck.

6. Responses to Gettier 1: focus on the original belief and add a “fourth condition”

The Gettier paper has, over the past forty odd years, generated a huge literature (if you google Gettier you get over 60,000 hits!). Many of the responses to the Gettier problem have been that we need to add a “fourth” necessary condition to our analysis of knowledge. That is, in addition to justification, truth, and belief, we have to add a fourth condition, such that if someone meets *all four* conditions then they have knowledge. The underlying reasoning is that **knowledge must involve something more than justified true belief, otherwise we would be willing to say that, in the Gettier examples, the believer *knew* certain things.** The fact that we are not so willing, suggests that when we talk about knowledge we must have something else in mind that goes beyond merely justified true belief.

But what could such a fourth condition be?

6.1 “No false premises”

One early suggestion (Clark 1963)¹⁹ was that knowledge cannot be reached by inferences that go through a false step. This seems to work for Gettier’s original examples and works for his Smith and Jones example where Smith believes that the person who is going to get the job has ten coins in her pocket.

¹⁹ Clark, M. (1963). ‘Knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier’s Paper’. *Analysis*, 24: 46-48.

But this is because the original Gettier examples are cases where *one* belief (the derived belief) is based upon another (the original belief). But we can generate Gettier examples that don't involve the formation of one belief on the basis of another (false belief) in this way.

Bob sees that Mary is sat in the room with him. He looks across the room and there she is, as she always looks. Bob believes that Mary is in the room with him. But this is not inferred from other beliefs, it is just a "perceptual belief" - a *basic belief* formed on the basis of how things seem to him in perception.

Unbeknownst to Bob, Mary has a twin sister Tina, and it is Tina who is sat opposite him. But, quite by chance Mary is in the room behind Bob.

Does Bob *know* that Mary is in the room with him? No?

So Gettier cases can arise for perceptual beliefs that aren't based upon a false belief. Bob just forms his belief (justifiably) that Mary is in the room on the basis of his experience. Note that there are still two accidents or flukes (i) That Mary has a twin (who happens to be sitting where Mary normally sits); (ii) that Mary happens to be in the room.

A second problem with the "no false premises" response is that many of our beliefs may involve *some* false premises as part of the reasoning that supports them, but this does not stop them being justified, or cases of knowledge. For example, when people thought that the earth was flat they might have reasoned that the sun would rise the next day because the sun travelled under the earth at night. It seems absurd to say that they didn't know that the sun would rise because that belief was, in part, supported by a

false belief! The “no false premises” response seems to rule out cases of knowledge, and thus seems to be too strong a condition for knowledge.

6.2 Defeasibility

A second, popular, line of response (e.g. see Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson on the reading list; or Peter Klein on the readings for this week) is that in order to *know* something there must be *no further true proposition* which, had the subject come to believe it, she would have *not* formed the original or derived beliefs. In the Smith and Jones case, had Smith come to know something more about who was going to get the job, she *wouldn't* have formed the belief that Jones was going to get it, and so she wouldn't have come to believe that the person who was going to get the job had ten coins in her pocket.

The underlying idea here is that Gettier cases aren't *knowledge* because although the belief is justified, there are *further* things that the responsible believer *could* come to believe which would “defeat” her justification. Or, consider another example. Suppose you look at your watch to check the time. The watch says 2pm and you form the belief that it is 2pm. Your watch is normally reliable, but at this moment (a) it is stopped (so it is bad luck that your belief is false); (b) it is, by chance, 2pm (so the second accident cancels out the first) and your belief is true. But had you known that your watch was stopped then you wouldn't have believed that it was 2pm (even though it is, in fact, 2pm).

The intuitive idea underlying this “defeasibility” condition is that if you really *know* something your belief must (i) be justified, (ii) true, but also (iii) shouldn't depend upon the fact that you happen not to have come across evidence that would undermine your belief in that fact. For example, suppose your watch *is* working

reliably. There are no other truths that you might come to believe that would bring it about that you *don't* believe that it is 2pm.

But the defeasibility solution is open to Gettier counter examples. Here's one from Jonathan Dancy's *Introduction to Epistemology* (p. 30). Tom leaves the house in the morning. A few seconds after he leaves a neighbour phones inviting the children out for the day. Tom knows that normally such an invite would lead to them going out. But today his wife refuses to let them go. Later, in the afternoon, Tom believes that his children are at home. It is true that they are at home and, Dancy suggests, it would be natural to say that Tom *knows* that his kids are at home.

But the defeasibility approach faces a problem. *Had Tom* come to hear the phone call he would have assumed that the kids would be out. This means that there is a truth (e.g., that the neighbour rang up inviting the kid out) which, if he came to believe *that* he wouldn't believe that they are at home. Worse still, there is then some *further* truth (e.g., that his wife refused to let the children go out) that he could come to believe which would "flip" his belief back again. Knowledge would seem to be something that would flip in and out of existence depending upon what other things one *would* come to believe.

One response we might make at this point is that a justified true belief is only if, when we consider *all* the truths that one could come to know. That is, a justified true belief is knowledge if but only if when the believer came to know *all* the truths he would continue to believe what he does. This certain rules out most Gettier cases especially those where one belief is based upon another false one. But it also seems problematic. What on earth would *all* the truths be? Given our limitations as reasoners it seems to be beyond our power to reason on the basis of *all* the

truths, were we to come to know them. Finally, how could we ever *know* that we *know*: we would have to know that our beliefs would be maintained *no matter what else* we come to know.

Defeasibility approaches very quickly seem to leave us with a very limited range of knowledge

[Those of you who chase up some of the readings on this will see that “defeasibility” theorists come up with very elaborate ways of dealing with these objections]

7. Responses to Gettier 2: reliabilism and the causal theory of knowing

The underlying problem with Gettier examples is that there seems to be plenty of scope for having *accidentally* true justified beliefs. Now, remember that the underlying problem here is that the Gettier examples involve justified true beliefs that *fail* to be knowledge. We are still searching for our “fourth condition” that we might add to the JTB account of knowledge. So why not add a fourth condition that knowledge is *nonaccidental* justified true belief.

So far so good, but what might this mean? It can’t just be that *no accidents* or *no luck* was involved. For example, suppose you want to find out about an obscure Roman sect. You go to the library to get the book and, quite by chance, it had just been returned and you arrive a few seconds ahead of someone else who wants it. You get the book and thus you come to know things about the Roman sect. But it is sheer luck that you manage to do so. It would be crazy to say you don’t *know* the things that you learn from the book just because it was *lucky* that you managed to learn them.

7.1 Reliabilism

One proposal that has been made is knowledge is justified true belief that is arrived at via a *reliable method* so that it's *no accident* that the resulting belief is true.

Note that this kind of response in effect *replaces the justification condition with a different one: knowledge is true belief that is arrived at via a reliable method.* This is a *reliabilist analysis of KNOWLEDGE.*

The problem with this view is in spelling out what reliability means, and in spelling out why that kind of reliability (whatever it is) should be part of the concept of *knowledge*.

Consider the case of Bob seeing Mary across the room when unbeknownst to him it is Tina, her twin, but Mary is in fact in the room out of view. The problem is that forming a belief by *looking* is NORMALLY a reliable way of gaining true beliefs. So the method seems to be reliable, but not to provide knowledge. The reliabilist might then respond that the method has to be *fully* reliable. But the problem is that this would rule out most of our perceptual beliefs: no form of perception is *fully* reliable in that there is always a possibility that one's beliefs are false (this was Descartes' worry in the *Meditations*, remember!).

The reliabilist might then come back and say that the method has to be reliable in a *particular* context. Bob's method of arriving at beliefs is not reliable in the context where unbeknownst to him, Mary's twin is sat in Mary's place. Bob doesn't *know* that Mary is in the room because the method that he is using is not reliable *in this particular context*.

But *what* context? And how should we describe Bob's *method*. Is

it “perception” is “seeing” is it “looking at someone who looks like Mary”?

The underlying problem, remember, is that there is “gap” between justification and truth. You can have justified false beliefs and, in some cases justification and truth only go together *accidentally*. If we allow that a reliable process can give rise to false beliefs, then there will be cases where it is only *by accident* that the reliable process gives rise to true ones.

For example, suppose you are taking a boat trip up a river in a foreign country. At 2pm you go over to the other side of the boat and you see a barn on the river bank. You believe you’ve seen a barn. Now, the problem is that in this country there are lots of *fake* barns about, designed to make the country look more prosperous when you view it from the river (thus attracting more tourists etc). Had you looked a few minutes earlier you would have used the *same method* (looking, seeing the barn façade), but the belief you acquired would have been false. It seems that it is only by chance that you have acquired a *true* belief. So, although your belief is true, and acquired by a reliable method, and the method is *reliable in the specific context of looking at a real barn*, it is still an *accident* that you acquired your true belief!

S, on the one hand, if we are fairly loose about what a reliable method is, there is room to generate Gettier examples, but if we are very specific and strict about what counts as a reliable method then we seem to end up with an implausible conception of knowledge where one only knows things if the method that one follows *guarantees* truth across a wide range of cases, but this shrinks down what we normally take to be cases of knowledge.

7.2 *The causal theory*

Let's consider another proposal. The underlying problem is that justified beliefs can be true merely by accident. Consider Bob's belief that Mary is in the room. This belief is caused by something else: Tina's being in the room. So, perhaps the additional condition should be something like: someone *knows* that *p* if and only if they have a justified true belief that *p* that is *caused by the fact that p*

The underlying point here is that, in Gettier cases, certain facts *make the belief true* but, because the belief is only *accidentally* true, these facts don't play a role in the formation of the belief.

E.g., it is facts about *Smith* that make it true that the person who will get the job has ten coins in her pocket. But Smith's *belief* that the person who will get the job has ten coins in her pocket is, *caused* by, and justified by Smith's perception of *Jones*.

Now, this theory of knowledge might seem to have something going for it. How do we know things about the world? Surely the important thing is that things out there in the world *cause* us to have the beliefs that we have. For example, lots of people know that the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066. How do we all know this? Well, we might know of it in different ways, but what makes it knowledge is that the battle of Hastings took place in 1066 and it is *because* that is so that we believe it.

But this view as a general theory of knowledge seems to be problematic. How do I know things about the future, or about mathematics, or that bachelors are unmarried? Truths about the future, logical truths, abstract truths – these can't cause me to believe anything. More generally, we might worry about whether *facts* are the kinds of things that can cause things.

8. Summing up: is Gettier inevitable?

We've been looking at Gettier examples that seem to suggest that knowledge can't just be justified true belief because there are plenty of cases—in fact, there are indefinitely many cases—where a person has a justified true belief but where the belief is true *by accident*. To many people, perhaps most people, this seems to rule out the belief from being *knowledge*. But the responses that we have viewed seem to face Gettier problems of their own, and this seems to be inevitable if we allow a degree of independence between *truth* and the *other necessary conditions for knowledge*. So long as there is a degree of independence there seems to be room for Gettier cases where the necessary conditions are met in one way, but where the truth of the belief is, in some sense or other an *accident* or just a matter of luck (see the article by Linda Zagzebski on the reading list). That is, the truth of the belief seems to be lucky or accidental relative to the method used to reach the belief.

If Gettier problems are inescapable what should our conclusion be about the analysis of knowledge. We might argue that knowledge cannot be analysed by giving necessary and sufficient conditions. Or, we might argue that what we mean by *knowledge* varies from context to context. In the vast literature that has been generated by the Gettier examples, there is no universally accepted response.

No matter what we think about the inescapability of Gettier examples it should be clear that they tell us *something* interesting about what knowledge is. What the Gettier examples show us is that *knowing* something is a matter of not just arriving at the truth *accidentally*. Next week we'll explore how this general idea—that knowledge involves a nonaccidental relation to the facts—puts pressure on another aspect of the picture of knowledge that we

have been working with so far: we have been assuming that knowledge is bound up with epistemic responsibility and with *access* to reasons. But if knowledge is a matter of its being *no accident* that one's beliefs are true, perhaps the idea of epistemic responsibility, and the internalist picture of justification that goes with it, are not as important as we thought.

Study Questions

Section A

1. What is knowledge?
2. Must knowledge involve belief?
3. Must knowledge be true?
4. Must knowledge involve justified true belief?
5. What is an “analysis” of knowledge?

6. What does it mean to talk of an analysis of knowledge in terms of “necessary and sufficient conditions”?
7. Can someone know something by accident?

Section B

Here’s one of Gettier’s examples.

Suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. And suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following conjunctive proposition:

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

Smith's evidence for (A) might be that the president of the company assured him that Jones would in the end be selected, and that he, Smith, had counted the coins in Jones's pocket ten minutes ago. Proposition (A) entails:

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

Let us suppose that Smith sees the entailment from (A) to (B), and accepts (B) on the grounds of (A), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (B) is true.

But it is equally clear that Smith does not know that (B) is true; for (B) is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in Smith's pocket, and bases his belief in (B) on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job.

8. Does Smith know that the man who will get the job?
9. If your answer to 8 is “no”: *why does Smith not know?*
10. Describe the *structure* of the Gettier example:
- (i) The original belief is:
- (ii) The derived belief is:
11. In what sense is Smith *unlucky* with regard to the original belief?
12. In what sense is Smith “lucky” with regard to the derive belief?

15. Can one *know* something if one's knowledge is based, somehow, on false premises?

16. What is the "defeasibility" response?

17. Does the "defeasibility" response face Gettier style objections?
[HINT: think about cases where one's knowledge *would be* defeated by a further true belief]

18. Does the defeasibility response make knowledge very hard to obtain?

19. What is the "reliabilist" response?

20. Does the “reliabilist” response face Gettier style objections?
[HINT: think about the formation of a belief by a reliable method which is only “true by accident”]
21. Is perception a reliable method of forming beliefs?
22. Is perception always a reliable method of forming beliefs?
Give examples.
23. What is a causal theory of knowledge?
24. What sort of things can't be known on a causal theory of knowledge?
25. Are Gettier problems unavoidable? If so, why?

Lecture 8

Externalism

1. Review

For the bulk of this term we've been working through our "analysis" of knowledge as justified true belief. Central to this account of knowledge is the idea that knowledge is bound up with *epistemic responsibility* which, in turn, seems to require that we know our *reasons* for what we believe (otherwise, how could we believe (or disbelieve) responsibly?).

Last week, however, we had reason to question this analysis of knowledge. We looked at (and made up!) Gettier examples. Gettier examples work because there is a "gap" between justification and truth. This is important. First of all it means that one can have a justified *false* belief. Second, it means that one can have a justified belief that *would have been false* in normal circumstances but which, because of some fluke or accident, *happens to be* true. If this is right then knowledge can't be justified true belief. One kind of response is that we need to add a fourth condition over and above the JTB conditions. We looked at defeasibility and the no false premises solutions but found that these raised Gettier cases of their own. We then looked at reliabilism and causal theories, but found them to be problematic.

This week we're going to look at a subtle line of response to the Gettier problem. In the first half of the lecture we're going to look at Robert NOzick' theory of knowledge: sometimes its called **the "conditional theory of knowledge"** sometimes **"the truth-**

tracking account of knowledge”. In the second half of the lecture I want to link us back to our discussion of *testimony* back in week 6 by looking at Edward Craig’s

theory of knowledge, one that has much in common with Nozick’s but which raises interesting questions about the very idea of giving an *analysis* of knowledge.²⁰

2. The causal theory – gets something right?

Last week we touched upon the *causal* theory of knowledge. The idea was that somebody *knows* something only if the object of their knowledge—what their belief is *about*—is the *cause* of their belief. This theory runs into problems because it is a bit puzzling as to how facts might be causes, and also it seemed puzzling how we could have beliefs about the future, or about maths, or about abstract entities.

Robert Nozick argues that the causal theory gets something right. He argues that it captures something important about our everyday conception of knowledge. When we *know* something there seems to be an important *link* or *relation* between our belief and the facts. If Tom knows that snow is white it is *because* snow *is* white that he believes it. If snow were some other colour, blue, or red, say, then Tom wouldn’t believe it.

When someone knows something they are *sensitive* to how the world is.

Now, the causal theory tries to spell out this sensitivity to the world in terms of *causation*. But, Nozick argues, we don’t have to. We can keep some of the virtues of the causal theory without the

²⁰ Edward Craig, (1986) ‘The Practical Explication of Knowledge’ Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society LXXXVII 211-226

problems.

In order to understand Nozick's theory we'll have to take a very brief detour to discuss one of the key concepts that he uses in his theory.

3. Counterfactual conditionals.

Look again at the claim about Tom knowing that snow is white. In cashing out what Tom's *knowledge* amounts to we've said:

If snow were some other colour, blue, or red, say, then Tom wouldn't believe it.

Now, you're already familiar with the notion of a *conditional* statement. They are the "if p then q" statements familiar to you from introductory logic classes.

But there are different kinds of conditional statements.

Compare the following

- (1) If snow is white then it's the same colour as milk.
- (2) If snow *were* red it *would be* the same colour as tomatoes.

The former is usually called an *indicative* conditional

The latter is called a *counterfactual* conditional (sometimes called a *subjunctive* conditional).

But what's the difference between them?

The key difference is that (2) puts forward some situation that is "counter-to-fact".

We do this all the time, and, in English, this move is marked by the "subjunctive" mood.

We say things like “If I *were* you” or “If wishes were horses then beggars would ride” The key point about these is that they put forward something that is *not* the case to then say something about what *would* follow from it *if it were* the case.

4. Nozick’s theory of knowledge: the first three conditions

Nozick accepts that knowledge implies belief, and that knowledge must be *true* belief. So, this gives us our first two necessary conditions for knowledge.

If someone S knows that p

(1) S believes that *p*

(2) *p*

Now Nozick draws upon the intuitive idea introduced above.

If Tom *knows* that it is raining then if it were not raining then he wouldn’t believe it.

If Sue *knows* that her husband is cheating then *if he were not* cheating she wouldn’t believe it.

This suggests a third condition.

(3) If it weren’t the case that *p* S wouldn’t *believe* that *p*.

Nozick calls this the “**variation**” condition.

5. Solving the Gettier problem?

Nozick’s first three conditions seem to solve Gettier problems.

For example, think of the simple “stopped watch” case.

Tom looks at his normally reliable watch.

It says 2pm

He thus has good evidence that it is 2pm

It is 2pm

He believes, justifiably, and truly, that it is 2pm.

But his watch has in fact stopped at 2pm.

We concluded that Tom doesn't *know* that it is 2pm.

Nozick's account deals with this quite nicely.

Suppose it were not the case that it was 2pm – Tom *would* still have believed that it was. Suppose it were 2.15. Tom would have looked at his stopped watch and judged that it was 2pm.

Or, think of the example of Tom viewing Tina on the rocking chair and coming to believe that Mary is in the room. *Had Mary not been in the room* Tom would still have believe that she was, because his evidence for thinking that Mary is in the room is that Tina (who looks like her) is in the room.

6. The need for a fourth condition: the “adherence condition”

Whilst these three conditions deal with many Gettier examples, Nozick argues that the three conditions are not, by themselves sufficient for knowledge. It still seems to leave room for a person whose belief is true only by accident. For example, suppose a dictator takes over the country and takes over the media. Tom is casually flicking through channels on his TV and sees a true report from the one remaining free TV station just before it is closed down and replaced with one giving out false reports. All the other stations are giving out false reports. So Tom's belief that a dictator has taken over is true, and had the dictator not taken over he wouldn't have come to believe it, so it meets the three conditions so far. But it still seems to involve too much *luck*: had Tom tuned into another station, or tuned in a few seconds later, he wouldn't

have believed that a dictator had taken over.

In order to deal with cases like these Nozick adds a fourth condition. The three conditions so far are:

- (1) S believes that p
- (2) p
- (3) If it weren't the case that p S wouldn't *believe* that p .

The fourth condition is:

- (4) If the context in which S forms her belief were slightly different, and p were true in that context, S *would* believe that p .²¹

The dictator example is one that fails this fourth condition and so is not knowledge. Nozick calls this the “adherence” condition. The adherence condition and the variation condition are meant to capture the intuitive idea that when we know something our beliefs are sensitive to how things are. The two conditions, if you like, “tie” the believer to the facts.

For example, we all know that snow is white. We are sensitive to facts about how things are with snow. If snow *were not* white we wouldn't believe it. If the world were slightly different and snow were white, we would still believe it. The underlying idea here is that *knowledge “tracks the truth”*.

Now, there are many technical problems with Nozick's account and Nozick's theory has generated a technical literature akin to that which followed the Gettier paper. At this point in our

²¹ Nozick offers two different versions of his theory – a simple one that does not mention the *methods* or means by which the belief is formed, and a more complex version that does. I've spelled out this fourth condition in my own way, to try to make it a bit clearer. See Nozick's text for his own formulation.

theorising about knowledge we will not gain much by engaging with that literature. For our purposes it will be useful to focus on a couple of broad objections.

7. What about justification?

You may have already noticed that Nozick's account of knowledge is very different from the JTB account. In fact, it does not mention justification at all. Nozick argues that this is as it should be, after all, the Gettier cases show that justification isn't sufficient for a belief to be knowledge. But surely justification is a necessary condition? Nozick argues not. He argues that if a person has beliefs that reliably track the truth, then they *know* whether or not they can justify their belief. This might sound a bit odd, but consider our perceptual beliefs. We have seen that perceptual beliefs, at the very least, are psychologically basic – they are not based upon further beliefs. What makes perceptual beliefs *knowledge*? Nozick's account offers a simple answer: our perceptual beliefs count as knowledge insofar as they track the truth.

For example: if you hold up a pen and look at it. You know the pen is there. If the pen *wasn't* there you wouldn't think it is. If the world were slightly different and you were to use the same method to form your beliefs you would believe that the pen was there. So Nozick's account seems to give us an explanation of how our perceptual beliefs could be knowledge.

Furthermore, Nozick accepts that justification of belief may be important, it is just not essential to *knowledge*. Nozick argues that we can give an account of what it is for a belief to be justified in a way that is similar to his account of knowledge: a belief is justified if it is formed by a reliable process.

8. What about epistemic responsibility and internalism?

But Nozick's account of knowledge and justification may still seem to be problematic. Nozick's theory rejects *internalism*. Nozick's is not the only theory that does this: the reliabilist theory and the causal theory mentioned last week also do so.

On externalist accounts of knowledge what makes a belief knowledge is some objective relation that holds between the belief and the world. But the subject herself may not know that this relation holds, and, importantly, on externalist "analyses" of knowledge it is not *necessary* that the subject *know* or even *believe* that, say, her beliefs tracks the truth.

But if this is right how one can be *praised* or *blamed* for assenting to this or that fact? We've been stressing the idea throughout the past few weeks that there are epistemic *duties* (e.g., one ought not to believe things on the basis of no evidence). This, in turn, implies that the believer *know* something about the basis of her beliefs, and that she is capable of exercising some degree of *control* over whether or not she believes something.

The internalist typically asks us to think about knowledge from the first-person individual point of view. We're asked to think about how we shape our beliefs and so on from *within* the first-person point of view. But is this the right way to think about knowledge? Is this the only way? Nozick argues not. But, rather than carrying on with Nozick, I want to end this lecture by considering a subtle and very interesting line of response to the claim that knowledge has to be bound up with the first-person "internal" point of view and this line of response also calls into question the assumption that epistemology should concern itself with giving an "analysis" of knowledge. It also links back to our discussion of testimony earlier in the term.

9. Edward Craig on “reliable informants” and the “practical explication” of the concept of knowledge

Edward Craig notes that philosophers have traditionally taken an *analytic* approach to the question ‘what is knowledge’. We begin by making explicit what seem to be necessary and sufficient conditions for something to count as knowledge. Counterexamples and problems are then raised, and the analysis is amended in the light of the problems. But there is something odd about this process. The analyses of knowledge soon become pretty complicated (in order to answer the counterexamples and problems). **But, Craig argues, it then becomes unclear why a concept of that kind (as defined by the philosophical analysis) would be important to us, and why does it enjoy such (ineliminable) widespread use in our everyday social interactions.**

Craig suggests that we might do better to begin by giving what he calls a *practical explication* of the concept of knowledge. We should focus on what work the concept does for us: what do we do with it? Craig engages in a line of argument that will be familiar to those who study political theory, or who have studied Hobbes. He asks us to imagine a “state of nature” where people don’t have the concept of knowledge. They then introduce a concept — knowledge — whose job is to “flag” or “indicate” “good informants” (i.e., people who can be relied upon in their testimony). That is, we have a concept (“knows”) whose primary use is to identify (and indicate to others) who is a good informant. What makes a good informant? When we ask others questions, what we want to know is *the truth*.

Craig seeks to show that *if* we assume that the concept “knows” plays a role in identifying good informants, we can then make

sense of many of the features of traditional philosophical epistemology. Good informants will *reliably* track the truth: they will claim that p if and only if p (so, we can make sense of the externalist and reliabilist intuitions in epistemology). TO say of someone that they *know* something is to indicate that their belief *tracks the truth*, i.e., that it is sensitive to how things are, or that the person is appropriately “connected” to the facts.

But, Craig suggests, good informants will also be able to give *reasons* for what they say. We are more likely to rely on someone who can give reasons for what she says, and this helps to make sense of internalist, justificationist intuitions in epistemology.

Furthermore, if this is what the concept of *knowledge* does, then we should not assume that it will lend itself to the kind of complex analysis that has been found in epistemology since Gettier.

Craig’s approach to epistemology is a subtle and interesting one, because it calls into question the *standard* ways of thinking about epistemological questions: i.e., that the question “what is knowledge?” is best answered by giving necessary and sufficient conditions; and that it can be answered by thinking about evidence and belief, and about epistemic responsibility from the individual “internal” point of view.²²

10. Conclusion

This week, then, we’ve looked at another line of response to the Gettier problem. Nozick’s “truth tracking” theory gets rid of *justification* from the analysis of knowledge and, in its place, puts the “variation” and “adherence” conditions. These are meant to rule out the kinds of “luck” that the Gettier analysis traded on.

²² See Edward Craig’s book *Knowledge and the State of Nature* (Oxford: OUP, 1990)

Nozick's analysis works by explaining *why it is* that the believer in Gettier examples *fails to know* that *p* (even though she may have a justified true belief that *p*).

Nozick's theory runs into a number of technical difficulties and seems to run up against objections that any externalist theory faces: how can one *know* something without knowing that one is *right* to believe it? Craig's approach to these questions is a subtle one: he argues that epistemology has run into problems by trying to formulate a strict analysis of knowledge; instead he looks at what the concept of knowledge *does* for us, and argues that it is best understood as a device for "flagging" good informants. If this is so, then, Craig argues, we can *make sense* of the kinds of debate that tend to emerge in epistemology such as the internalism/externalism debate and the Gettier problems too.

5. Why (e.g., according to Zagzebski) are Gettier examples unavoidable?

Gettier examples are unavoidable so long as . . .

6. Why does knowledge require *justified* true belief? [I.e., why not just *true* belief?]

Section B: Nozick's Theory

7. What is a “counterfactual conditional” (or a “subjunctive conditional”)? Give three examples.

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

8. On the standard “justified true belief” (or JTB) account of knowledge if someone *S* *knows* that *p* they must meet three conditions:

(1) *S* believes that *p*

(2) p

(3) S's belief that p is *justified*

The Gettier cases show that this is not sufficient for knowledge

Nozick argues that if someone S *knows* that p they must meet four conditions. The first two conditions are the same as the JTB account above

(1) S believes that p

(2) p

What is the third condition?

(3)

9. Show how this third condition deals with the "stopped watch" example.

1) S believes that it is 2 o'clock

2) It is 2 o'clock

3)

So: (a) S *does* know that p [YES/NO] or (b) S *doesn't* know that p [YES/NO]

10. Show how this third condition deals with the Mary/Tina example [where Tom sees Mary's twin in the chair, smoking her pipe

1) Tom believes that Mary is in the room

2) Mary is in the room

3)

So: (a) Tom does know that Mary is in the room? or (b) he doesn't?

Does Nozick's theory give the right answer?

11. Why are these three conditions not enough?

12. How does Nozick's theory deal with the "dictator taking over the media" example?

Tom is absent mindedly tuning in his TV. He picks up, by accident, the one remaining "free" TV station. Had he tuned in elsewhere, or a little while later, he wouldn't have believed that a dictator had taken over.

- 1) Tom believes that a dictator has taken over.
- 2) A dictator has taken over.
- 3)
- 4)

So: (a) Tom *knows* that a dictator has taken over; or (b) he doesn't?

Does Nozick's theory give the right answer?

13. What are these third and fourth conditions called?

Condition 3 is called the _____ condition.

Condition 4 is called the _____ condition.

14. What does it mean to say that knowledge *tracks the truth*?

15. Do you think that this is a convincing account of knowledge?

16. Can there be accidental knowledge on Nozick's account
[HINT: remember what you've answered for question 3.]

Section C: A Counterexample to Nozick.

Saul Kripke came up with a counterexample to Nozick's theory [it's in his unpublished lectures, but there are plenty of references to it on the web, eg. at

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/closure-epistemic/>

Scenario 1: Fake barn country

Tom is travelling in the "fake barn" country that we encountered last week. In fake barn country most of the barns are fake. Tom looks out (from his boat, travelling up the river, say) at 2pm and sees a real barn: he believes *there's a barn on the shore*. But had

he looked a few seconds earlier, or a few seconds later, he would not. He is only correct “by accident” (i.e., he would have *falsely* believed that there was a barn before him in these other, closely similar, situations), and this seems to be a Gettier-style example.

TASK-1

Using Nozick’s analysis of knowledge show that Tom doesn’t *know* that there is a barn on the shore.

- 1) Tom believes that there is a barn on the shore.
- 2) There is a barn on the shore.
- 3)
- 4)

So far, so good

Scenario 2a: Kripke’s fake barn country

Kripke’s fake barn country is the same as the above but with an extra feature. The real barns (very few of them) are all red, but the fake barns (for some reason) cannot be painted red, they are all blue. Tom looks out (from his boat, travelling up the river, say) at 2pm and sees a real barn: he comes to believe *there’s a red barn on the shore*.

TASK 2

Using Nozick’s analysis of knowledge show that Tom DOES *know* that there is a red barn on the shore.

- 1) Tom believes that there is a red barn on the shore.
- 2) There is a red barn on the shore.
- 3)
- 4)

Scenario 2b. The red barn problem

Tom is in Kripke's red barn country but rather than believing that there's a *red* barn on the shore, he just believes that there is a *barn* on the shore.

Question: on Nozick's account does Tom *know* that there is a barn on the shore. It would seem so. [If you have doubts, run over your answer in TASK 1 above]

THE PROBLEM

If Kripke is right then, in the fake barn country where fake barns *can't* be red

- 1) Tom knows that there is a red barn on the shore.
- 2) Tom doesn't know that there is a barn on the shore.

OK, but wait a second.

- 3) If Tom knows that there's a red barn on the shore he can infer that there's a barn on the shore. So:
- 4) Tom *does* know that there is a barn on the shore.

So he

Tom both knows that there is a barn on the shore, and he doesn't know it. Do you think that this is a PROBLEM for Nozick?

Advanced exercise:

Can you think of a response that might rescue Nozick's theory?

Section D: Problems with Externalism

17. What is epistemic responsibility?

18. On the externalist account of knowledge, can someone know that p without having any idea of why they *believe that p*?

19. On the externalist account of knowledge, can someone know that p without having any idea of how they know that p ?

20. If you've answered yes to either 19 or 20 (or to both), do you think that this is problematic for externalism?

21. Is Nozick right to keep *justification* out of his definition of knowledge?

Additional exercise: a world of WONKERS

Imagine a society full of people who use the term “WONK” to “flag” reliable informants. For example, if someone is, or is likely to be, a reliable informant with regard to the fact that p it is said that they *WONK that p*. The term WONK is only used when the speaker herself takes it to be the case that p . So, in this world you can’t properly say “Tom WONKS that there are aliens spaceships buried in Morecambe bay, but, of course, there *aren’t* any” [though you could say that Tom *thinks* that there are alien spaceships there, even though there aren’t any].²³

Can you give necessary and sufficient conditions for someone’s “WONKING” that p ? [you needn’t use all the empty slots]

S wonks that p , if and only if

²³ WONKING is “factive” and is thus like our concept of knowledge, and like other concepts such as *remembering that p*, *seeing that p*.

Lecture 9

Epistemology beyond Descartes

1. Knowledge in the “classical” tradition

We have been thinking of knowledge in terms of *individual epistemic responsibility*. We then raised worries about that approach, in terms of Gettier examples, externalism, testimony, and the problem of securing a nontrivial foundation (or showing why a foundation is not necessary). In our discussion of testimony in lecture 6 we called into question the idea that knowledge is solely or primarily an *individualistic* phenomenon. But we also saw that the *reductionist* accounts of testimonial knowledge could reconcile individualism with our widespread reliance on testimony.

2. In what sense is knowledge social?²⁴

Many philosophers have argued however, that knowledge is social in much stronger way. For example:

(i) *Knowledge as a social concept.*

The concept *knowledge* is one that has its proper home in talk about *testimony* (we touched on this with Edward Craig’s theory at the end of week 8)

(ii) *Acquiring knowledge is a social activity*

²⁴ See Alvin Goldman’s piece on “social epistemology”
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology-social/>

The acquisition of knowledge involves, and sometimes requires, social action and social institutions (we mentioned this in passing in the lecture on testimony, with the example of scientific papers that are written by a hundred different authors, where *nobody* has access to, or the time to understand, everyone else's evidence).

This second claim seems to point towards a third.

(iii) Socially determined interests shape the acquisition of knowledge.

What kind of knowledge is aimed for depends upon social factors – what people are interested in. The acquisition of knowledge is time consuming, may often involve lots of people, lots of equipment, lots of support staff, and it all has to be *paid* for somehow. There are *funding* bodies that fund scientific and other kinds of research. In the second half of the twentieth century a great deal of scientific research was funded with *military* interests in mind. Although it might seem that the pursuit of knowledge is disinterested, in fact this is very unlikely to ever be the case.

These first three are fairly uncontentious. Suppose the concept *knowledge* is bound up with “flagging” reliable informants (as Edward Craig argues). Knowledge is still bound up with getting at the truth. Similarly, the fact that knowledge is sometimes possessed by groups, might be met by simply “adding on” a social dimension to the classical tradition. Knowledge is still first and foremost something to do with individuals, and knowledge is still something to do with believing, or having access to, the *truth*. The truth is still *out there*, even if there are various social factors (e.g., military interests) that determine *which truths* are come to be sought. These three claims

But there are much more radical claims:

(iv) *What counts as knowledge depends upon social attitudes*

(v) *Knowledge always reflects the interests, and the power, of certain groups within society*

Let me say a little about these.

3. What counts as knowledge?

In our lecture course we tended to use fairly obvious examples, and then, in the Gettier cases, we raised weird examples. In each case *we* decided whether or not something counts as knowledge. But in the *real* world matters are quite different. Suppose Tom claims to have made a perpetual motion machine, or to have discovered a new planet. By itself this does not achieve much. Everyone might look at Tom and dismiss his claims. In order for claims to become *established* they have to be *legitimated* by others. But which others? Suppose Tom's brother Matt says "Well I believe him!". This will not, by itself, establish the claim. But suppose Tom's brother is a Nobel Prize winning physicist, or a famous astronomer. This seems to *legitimate* Tom's claim.

We stressed a few weeks ago that lots of our knowledge—including our "everyday" knowledge about the nature of the world and about the people in it—is *derived from other people, without our being in a position to check, or understand, the evidence ourselves*. What do we rely on in accepting claims as known: the key point here is that we don't rely upon our own observation or reasoning, we rely on *authorities, institutions* and so on, who *legitimate* certain kinds of knowledge claims, but not others.

To illustrate this, think about people's "knowledge" of, say,

gender differences, racial difference or class differences. Throughout history most cultures have assumed that men and women differ radically in their abilities, psychologies, nature and so on. Such views, at the time would seem to be “common knowledge” accepted by men and women alike. Similarly, throughout history, land owners and landless peasants, might all accept that the “common knowledge” that such a distribution of wealth is “natural” and “inevitable”.

Given that much of our knowledge is derived from testimony—and thus is already social in a sense—this means that a great deal of our knowledge is “accepted” on the basis of *trust*. But who do we trust? Why do some people, at certain points in history, in certain societies, accept some kinds of things as true, but others not?

These kinds of question are *sociological* questions and suggest that *in addition* to the kinds of question that we have been considering this term there are serious *sociological* questions about knowledge.

4. The sociology of knowledge

This is where *sociologists of knowledge* come into play. The acceptance of, and distribution of, knowledge is, so they argue, a legitimate object of sociological study in same way that other social practices and institutions are.

What sorts of things do sociologists of knowledge claim about knowledge then? One important element of the sociology of knowledge is the idea that societies are typically unequal, and are organised in a way that gives some people authority and power whilst others do not. This should be obvious if you think about non-epistemological cases, like the distribution of property and

wealth. But, sociologists of knowledge argue, the same is true of knowledge. The point here is not that some people *have* lots of knowledge whilst others do not. This is true, but not the most interesting point. The more interesting point is to do with how power and authority *determine* what comes to be accepted as knowledge.

There are lots of different ways that this happens. We can distinguish two different broad categories of knowledge which are, in turn, determined by social factors in different ways.

(a) The sociology of scientific knowledge.

How do claims get to be accepted as scientific knowledge? On the classical epistemological picture that we have been working with this term it would seem that a claim or theory will be accepted as true just in virtue of the *evidence* offered for it. But this is overly idealistic. Science is an activity that is done by people with interests, aims, biases. Science takes place in a social context where *some* things are taken to be “obvious” and “true” and “worth working on”, whilst other things are obviously “wacky”. The history of science is full of examples where people have come up with theories or knowledge claims which have been dismissed as nonsense, or as impossible, or as heresy, by the then “establishment”. One obvious type of example is the way that the church suppressed scientific knowledge in the 16th and 17th centuries. But science itself acts in a way similar to organised religion, by determining what counts as science. There are scientific societies (such as the Royal Society in the UK) which act as an arbiter of what counts as good science.²⁵

²⁵ Latour, Bruno and Woolgar, Steve (1979/1986) *Laboratory Life: The [Social] Construction of Scientific Facts*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

If this is right, then how on earth does science ever *progress*? Why aren't we stuck with the same kind of science that we had three hundred years ago? The philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn argued that science changes in the same way that other social practices change. Kuhn argued that science proceeds by long periods of established "normal" science, interspersed with various scientific "revolutions" where people dismissed as heretics or abnormal eventually gain enough support, and they then establish a new "paradigm" as the advocates of the older science retire, die out, and so on.

(b) Ideology and the sociology of everyday knowledge.

We might think that the sociology of knowledge is mainly a sociology of *science*. But this is not the case. Our everyday knowledge, what we call *common sense*, can also be viewed as something that has emerged, and is held in place by, social factors. For example, Marxist sociologists have long argued that what we take to be common sense knowledge is in fact always *ideological*. What does this mean? When sociologists talk of *ideology* they mean that the "ideas"—i.e., what is taken for granted—in society reflect and maintain the interests of those who have power. For example, in many societies throughout history it was "common knowledge" that women were less able, or less intelligent than men. But this kind of "knowledge" is not presented as something based on evidence, it is presented as something *obvious* and *fundamental*. Now, the fact that such ideas are widely held *serves the interests of* certain parties: in this case, men. Similar points can be made for a wide range of "ideas" about race, class, about justice and the nature of society.

5. Epistemology as emancipatory: "consciousness raising"

In Descartes we saw that *his* project was to secure a certain

foundation for knowledge, one that could be established *without* reliance on other people or “traditional” sources of knowledge. This is one kind of epistemological project. The sociology of scientific knowledge has another project, or set of goals and methods: to characterise, as social phenomena, the social forces and elements that shape the emergence and maintenance of science.

The idea of ideology gives rise to a distinctive kind of epistemological project: a political one that is *critical* and what is often described as *emancipatory*. What does this mean? Ideologies are sets of established “common knowledge” which reflect and maintain a certain arrangement of power and authority within society. Many thinkers have argued that such arrangements of power and authority are *unjust*. But one of the problems that faces political change is the fact that those who are being unjustly treated, or who unjustly lack power, are themselves *unaware* of the injustice. For example, poor peasants might accept the “ideology” which identifies their position in society as one that is “natural” or “part of the natural order”. Or, women might accept a wide range of “common knowledge” which in effect oppresses them. This stands in the way of social change. One important part of social change then is to “raise consciousness”. But this is a kind of epistemological project. The political epistemologist seeks to “get beneath” what seem to be obvious truths about the world, and to then characterize and explain them as manifestations of the interests of various powerful groups. By *showing* this kind of context for knowledge the further hope is that people will be better able to free themselves from what may be unobvious, hidden, forms of oppression and injustice.

Sociologists of knowledge, and radical political epistemologists,

are concerned with knowledge in a quite different way to the “classical” analytical tradition that we have been focusing upon this term. Sociologists of knowledge treat knowledge like any other social phenomenon. Political epistemologists may have a political, or emancipatory, agenda, to free people from the shackles of oppression. In German and French philosophy, such approaches to epistemology are much more common, and much more well-established, than they have been in the English speaking philosophical world.²⁶ [Frankfurt School; Habermas; Foucault].

6. An alternative philosophical and epistemological project: naturalism

In the English speaking world of Anglo-American analytic philosophy there has been a similar rejection of the “classical” Cartesian tradition in epistemology. But unlike the “continental” tradition, the focus is much less sociological, and attempts to be *apolitical*. Some argue that the best approach to epistemological matters is to adopt the perspective of the *sciences*. Human beings, on this view, are parts of the natural world. Knowledge is a property that human beings have, so it should lend itself to a scientific investigation. *Epistemological naturalism* is the view that, rather than trying to secure certainty, or to refute scepticism, or to *analyse* knowledge, a proper theory of knowledge should be akin to a theory of digestion – a theory of knowledge should say something about the various kinds of conditions under which

²⁶ Good examples is the work of Louis Althusser, a philosopher and political theorist who combined Freudian and Marxist ideas and wrote a lot about *ideology*. See the introduction on Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Althusser. Michel Foucault (influenced by Althusser) argued that knowledge is always bound up with power and power relations. See the Wikipedia introduction – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_Foucault

creatures stand in the “knowledge relation” to different kinds of facts. This kind of approach is not primarily concerned with *reasoning* or with the first-person deliberative point of view (where individuals try to decide *what is right* to believe). Typically, naturalistic epistemologists assume that knowledge is a matter of the right kind of “external” link to objective states of affairs: perhaps a causal link, perhaps a reliable link of some kind, or perhaps the kind of general “counterfactual” dependence found in Nozick’s “truth tracking” account.

7. So what’s the right way to think about knowledge?

By now you may be a little bit puzzled. Why are these different ways of thinking about knowledge? Which one is the right one?

Well, there is a sense in which these different epistemological projects aim to do different things. Descartes, you’ll recall, wanted to provide a foundation for scientific knowledge that would avoid worries about human fallibility. Underlying Descartes’ project is an assumption about individual *responsibility*. Descartes is *concerned* that he might assent to things that are false, or not believe things that are true, unless and until he has established a *method* that allows him to determine *which* things ought to be believed and which *shows* that the beliefs in question are *justified* and likely to be true. Descartes’ foundationalist project gave philosophy a *special role*, that put it apart from, and, in some respects, more important than, other sciences.

There are reasons, of course, why we might worry about this kind of project. We might argue that we don’t *need* to provide a firm foundation for our knowledge, or, more strongly, we might argue that such a foundation is either going to be impossible, or if it is possible, will only establish a very small amount of knowledge

(e.g., think of the cogito; or the empiricist foundationalists’ “direct access” to sense data). A deeper worry might be that Descartes’ project is just wrong from the start, because it *assumes* the idea of a “pure” individual reasoner, isolated from the influences of her time, her culture, her society. If people’s knowledge, and people’s interests, concerns, and sense of what ought to be done is a *social, cultural, historical* phenomenon then there cannot really be knowledge that is established in the way that Descartes’ assumes. Descartes ignores, or fails to acknowledge, his own cultural, historical and social context that makes his epistemological project seem to be *the* most important one.²⁷

Similar points can be made about the kind of philosophical “analysis” that we engaged in, providing analyses of “what knowledge is” and then providing counterexamples, revising the theory, and so on. This is to assume that this kind of activity is of some *importance*. Analysing knowledge, so the argument goes, allows us to *know* something about the world. But underlying this kind of epistemological project is the assumption that there really is something—knowledge—that is “out there” with a fixed determinate nature that we can come to know. Some philosophers these days argue that this is not the case (Michael Williams²⁸) and that “knowledge” is a useful concept that plays *different roles in different contexts*, so the idea of a simple pure “analysis” of knowledge is as absurd as the idea of coming up with necessary and sufficient conditions for something’s being a *game*.

There is a sense in which *sociologists* of knowledge are not doing the same thing as philosophical epistemologists. They are, after

²⁷ Rorty, Richard (1979) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²⁸ See Michael Williams *Groundless Belief: an essay on the possibility of epistemology* 2nd edition (Princeton University Press, 1999)

all, doing sociology. Sociologists of science are not scientists, sociologists of criminal behaviour are typically not criminals themselves. Sociologists thus *study* human behaviour and talk about knowledge. Descartes' worries about scepticism and certainty are ignored—sociologists may have all sorts of worries about the *methods* of sociology, but ruling out scepticism is not likely to be one of them. Sociologists of knowledge are typically not concerned with the detailed *analyses* of knowledge that we have been looking at, they are more likely to be concerned with the social contexts within which such analyses arise, and are thought to be important (e.g., a sociologist of *epistemology* might be very interested in the way that American universities produced hundreds of epistemologists in the 1960s and 70s all primarily focused on “answering the Gettier problem”).

The radical political epistemologists are up to something else again. There is not a concern with *certainty* or with ruling out scepticism. The primary concern is a social and political one, perhaps even an *ethical* one. The sociology of knowledge may be an important *part* of this kind of epistemological project, but needs something more: an identification of the interests and forces that shape knowledge in such a way as to oppress and repress various groups of people. The concern here is not going to be with providing detailed analyses of knowledge, or with answering the “gettier problem”. Indeed, to a political epistemologist such activities may seem to be themselves a reflection of an underlying **ideology of Anglo-American epistemology**: if the *analysis* of knowledge is taken to be the most important task, then attention is diverted away from the political and social realm, and away from issues of justice and social change.

This might make it seem that the Cartesian “analytic” project is

one that is doomed, or pointless. But the classical epistemologist can reply that all these other epistemological projects are themselves in the business of making *claims* to knowledge. But how on earth do they know that these claims are right or defensible? Sociologists of knowledge and radical political epistemologists will of course respond that there are *standards* for their claims (as there are for any claims, by which they can be judged as defensible, justified, acceptable and so on).

Finally, the naturalist epistemologist may stand outside all of this shaking her head at what seems to be a strange concern with knowledge in a way that divorces it from the natural world. Knowledge is a real causal phenomenon that can be studied in the way that other natural features of the world can. Sociologists of knowledge and political epistemologists may view this as a manifestation of a certain kind of culture, or oppressive attitude. Analytic abstract epistemologists typically object that naturalism leaves out the core epistemological problems that face us all: normative questions about what we *ought* to believe.

9. Conclusion

By now your head might be spinning a bit! I still haven't said *who's right!* But that's because it is not at all clear that this is the correct way to think of these different projects. Any more than saying: who's right, the person who runs 10000m, or the one who swims 200m. These are *different activities* with different goals, different methods, different standards for success. The underlying point—and I have stressed this again and again in the lectures—is that philosophy (and sociology, and political epistemology) are things that people *do*, and things that people do for *various reasons* with *various ends in mind*. Although it may make things seem more confusing, in some ways, I hope, it may also make the

world of philosophy, and of epistemology, seem a lot more *interesting!!*

Neil C. Manson, 2008