

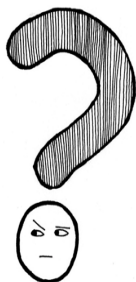
PHIL 110A
Week 2: Knowledge
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What is knowledge?

Skepticism

Foundations: Descartes

Please turn off and put
 away all electronics.



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Abductive Inference



1. Identify important related facts.
2. Generate hypotheses that explain the facts.
3. Evaluate the hypotheses concerning how well they explain the facts: most facts explained with fewest assumptions.
4. Accept the hypothesis that best explains the facts.

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Kinds of Knowledge



1. Knowledge that: I know that Feridun is president of UW. Propositional.
2. Knowledge of: I know Feridun. Knowledge by acquaintance. Object knowledge.
3. Knowledge how: I know how to type. Procedural, implicit. Know-how.

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Does Katie KNOW a pen is on the table?

- Katie is in her locked apartment writing a letter. She puts the letter and her blue Bic pen down on her coffee table. Then she goes into the bathroom to take a shower. As Katie's shower begins, two burglars silently break into the apartment. One burglar takes Katie's blue Bic pen from the table. But the other burglar absentmindedly leaves his own identical blue Bic pen on the coffee table. Then the burglars leave. Katie is still in the shower and did not hear anything.

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Justified True Belief

Claim (JTB): you know P if and only if you have a true justified belief that P.

Problem: Gettier cases like Katie's pen where you have JTB but something weird happens.

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Justified True Belief

Philosophy (and science) should not look for strict definitions: Concepts have *typical* conditions, not necessary and sufficient ones. Gettier cases are minor, and intuitions are unreliable.

Knowledge is not just a matter of belief about propositions (sentences). Other kinds of representations: visual, etc.

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The Concept of Knowledge

Exemplars: good examples of knowledge.

E.g. height, snow, evolution, Canada

Typical features: e.g. true, justified, belief.

Also: representation, approximately true, reliable.

Explanatory function:

Knowledge explains effective action.

Knowledge is reliably acquired, approximately accurate, representation of reality.

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Discussion Question

Is knowledge justified true belief?

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Skepticism

Complete skepticism: ALL of people's beliefs are not justified.

Moderate skepticism: Many of people's beliefs are not justified and not true. E.g.?

Can philosophy refute the skeptic? Should we bother?

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Knowledge Terminology

Justified: belief based on good reasons.

True: belief that corresponds to the world.

A priori: belief whose justification is prior to all sensory experience, by reason alone.

A posteriori: belief whose justification comes from the senses.

Rationalist: philosopher who thinks that knowledge comes by pure reason. E.g. Plato, Kant.

Empiricist: philosopher who thinks that knowledge comes from the senses. E.g. Hume.

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Descartes & Foundations

Foundationalism: Knowledge has a foundation, i.e. a set of indubitable beliefs from which all other beliefs can be deduced.

Method of doubt: Doubt everything, and replace previous beliefs with ones that can't be doubted.

Starting point: I think, therefore I am.

Foundation: I can't doubt that I'm thinking, because doubting is thinking.



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Problems with Foundations

Are there any other foundational (indubitable) true beliefs?

Introspection: Are my beliefs about my own mind beyond doubt?

Descartes: Existence and perfection of God.

Can other reasonable beliefs be derived from the foundation? E.g. physics, biology, psychology.

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Discussion Question

Did Descartes succeed in establishing a foundation for knowledge and refuting skepticism?

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Descartes' God Argument

1. My idea of God is an idea of a perfect being.
2. There must be at least as much perfection in the cause as there is in the effect.
3. So, the cause of my idea is a perfect being – God.

Alternative form of ontological argument: God is by definition the perfect being. Existence is a perfection. So God exists.

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Other Kinds of Foundation

Plato: acquaintance with heavenly objects, the Forms.

Other indubitable principles: Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant.

Empiricism: look for foundations in the senses.

Alternative metaphors: don't look for foundations at all, but think of knowledge as a cable (Peirce) or raft (Schlick) or web (Quine).

Don't worry about complete skepticism, but work out ways of achieving reliable knowledge.

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