PHIL 110A

**Week 4. Justifying Knowledge**

Paul Thagard

Reliable coherentism

Aims of knowledge

Applications:

- law
- induction
- math

1

## Thinking about Knowledge

| **Abandon:** | **Embrace:** |
|---|---|
| dogmatism | moderate skepticism |
| infallibility | fallibility (mistakes) |
| certainty | risk |
| permanence | change |
| foundations | reliability & coherence |

2

## Goals of Knowledge

1. Truth: describe the world as it is.
2. Explanation: say *why* things happen.
3. Usefulness: practical applications.

Normative procedure (Thagard 2010): adopt practices that are best at accomplishing these goals. Compare Sober: recipe.

3

## Accomplishing Knowledge

Normative procedure: adopt practices that are best at accomplishing the goals of truth, explanation, usefulness.

Choices: skepticism, foundationalism, reliabilism, coherentism, reliable coherentism, pragmatism.

Use generally reliable processes (senses, memory, testimony, inference) evaluated for overall coherence.

4

## Application to Law

Fairly reliable processes: eyewitness observation, instruments (e.g. blood, DNA), testimony, legal principles.

Reach overall coherence judgment about whether someone is guilty.

Keep in mind goals of legal system: don't convict the innocence.

5

## Application to Induction

Fairly reliable processes: observation, experiments, statistical inference, causal theories.

Reach overall coherence judgment about whether something is generally true.

Keep in mind goals of induction: true generalizations that are also useful.

6

## Application to Abduction

Fairly reliable processes: observation, experiments, statistical inference, hypothesis evaluation.

Reach overall coherence judgment about which hypotheses are the best explanation of the evidence.

Keep in mind goals of explanation as well as truth and usefulness.

7

## Application to Mathematics

Fairly reliable processes: number sense, observation, theorem proving, computer simulations.

Reach overall coherence judgment about which mathematical principles are true.

Keep in mind goals of mathematics: truth, usefulness, explanation?

8