

Knowledge and Reality A: Lecture One

1. What is Epistemology?

Epistemology is the study of knowledge: What do you know? How do you know it? What should you know? What can't you know?

This course concentrates on *how* we know things. We start by looking at general problems with knowledge: What is knowledge? What is justification?

We then end the course by looking at two specific areas of knowledge: How can we have inductive knowledge? How can we have *a priori* knowledge.

2. Conceptual Analysis

So for the next two weeks we will be looking to give a *conceptual analysis* of knowledge.

What is conceptual analysis? It is, funnily enough, the analysing of concepts and what they involve. For instance, we could analyse what it is to be a chair. Is it something you sit on? Well, that's not *all* there is to being a chair.

Counterexample: A horse.

Perhaps it has to have been designed by someone?

Counterexample: The top of the Empire State Building.

Perhaps it has to have been designed by someone with the *intention* for people to sit on it.

Counterexample: The bad carpenter's table.

This could go on. At each point we are giving the *conditions* under which something would be a chair. We are asking what is *necessary* for it to be a chair, and what is *sufficient* for being a chair. Thus we end up with the *necessary and sufficient conditions* for an object satisfying a certain concept. That's what a conceptual analysis is.

We can do this all day, for all kinds of concepts. Some are more interesting than others. Philosophers care little about analysing the concept of chair. But they care a lot about analysing concepts like what it is to be good, what it is to be just, what artworks are, what it is to be free And what it is to *know* something.

Notice how a conceptual analysis takes place. We suggest an analysis (something is chair if and only if you sit on it). Then provide counterexamples (the horse). Then we continue in this vein until we hit on something better.

3. Tripartite Theory of Knowledge

There are different types of knowing.

You might know how to swim, drive, or play *Halo*.

You might know David Beckham, the Queen or Bill down the road.

Or you might know that $2+2=4$, or that the economy is in trouble or that the successor to Ghenghis Khan was Ogedei Khan.

It's this last type that we are concerned with. This course does not deal with knowing people, or knowing certain skills. It deals with knowing *that* things are the case. This is called *propositional knowledge*.

To know something, it is not enough that it is true. You must *believe* it to be true. To know something, you must not only believe it to be true, it *must be true* (that's the difference between knowing something and simply believing it).

You know something iff (i) you believe it and (ii) it's true. (where iff =_{df} if and only if).

But this isn't a correct conceptual analysis. There are counterexamples.

Example: John McClane.

So it's not enough for you just to believe that the square root of 1,254,647,241 is 35,421 for you to know it. You have to be *justified* in that belief. For instance, by using a calculator or possessing excellent skills in mental arithmetic. Or taking my word...

So we end up with the following analysis:

Agent *S* knows that *p* iff

- (i) *p* is true
- (ii) *S* believes that *p* is true.
- (iii) *S* is justified in believing that *p* is true.

This is the tripartite theory of knowledge. Next lecture we shall look at counterexamples to it.