

Knowledge and Reality A: Lecture Two

1. Gettier Cases

There are situations where we have justified true belief about p but *don't* intuitively know that p .

Example one: The tennis results.

Example two: The stopped clock.

Example three: The bus and the hallucination.

So in each case we have an example of a scenario where the agent believes something true and is *justified* in believing it to be true. But, nevertheless, the agent doesn't *know* it to be true.

In these cases we can say that the tripartite theory of knowledge is *too weak*. That is, it doesn't rule out things that shouldn't count as knowledge. Where do we go with the Tripartite theory of knowledge from here? Well, recall the debate about the concept 'chair' and 'living'. Having received the counterexample, we revised the definition and saw how that fared. So we should do the same here.

2. Goldman's Analysis of Knowledge

Goldman says the problem with Gettier examples is that the *cause* for the agent believing that p isn't itself p . So the cause of me believing Murray wins Wimbledon *isn't* Murray winning Wimbledon. Instead, it's Murray winning Wimbledon last year (or whatever). As it isn't the cause, it fails to meet the standards of the revised 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.
- (iv) p is the cause of S believing that p .

3. The analysis is too strong

Future truths

Take a truth about the future:

The sun will burn out in a few billion years.

That's true, and we presume that we *know* it to be true. Scientists *know* the evolution of stars, and what will happen to them. If p is 'The sun will burn out in a few billion years' then p has to be the cause. But that means the cause of me *believing* that the sun will die out has to be the sun burning out in the future. But how can something that goes on in the *future* be the cause of something that happens *now* (namely, my believing something to be the case)? Events that take place in the future *don't* cause things in the past.

Universal truths

A 'universal' truth is one that says something of everything in the universe.

All men are mortal.

That's a true statement that people generally think they can *know* to be true. But what's the cause of it? Surely not *every* man?

Mathematical knowledge

What about propositions like:

$$2+2=4$$

How does that fact cause me to believe that it's true? Is it that there's all these numbers knocking around somewhere *causing* me to believe things? The number 2, and its buddy number 4, *causing* me to believe that $2+2=4$? That's weird isn't it? Surely these aren't the causes of my belief?

4. The analysis is too weak

Example One

Imagine that my nan loves Murray. When he wins, she decides to put on a tape of all his greatest wins – including last years. I come around, and notice it on the TV. We're back to where we were. I'm justified in believing that Murray won as I'm watching him win. Although I'm watching last year's match! It's true and I believe it. Murray's winning caused my nan to put the tape on – which means that Murray's winning caused my to see the tape and acquire the belief that he won. So Murray's winning *does* cause me to believe that he won. But, so the argument goes, I *still don't know that Murray won!* I'm still in exactly the same situation as I was when I was accidentally watching the tape of Murray winning.

Example Two

Go back to me hallucinating buses. Goldman will say that my hallucinating the bus isn't *caused* by the bus. It just *happens* to be coming towards me from the other direction. So there's no knowledge here.

But we can come up with a variant case. Causation is often said to be *transitive*. If *a* causes *b* and *b* causes *c* then *a* causes *c*. So imagine a weird scenario where a man is trying to kill me. He signals to his ally to inject hallucinogenic drugs into me when he drives his bus towards me. So the bus coming towards me causes his mate to inject me with drugs. The drugs cause me to hallucinate. The hallucination is the cause of my belief that there is a bus coming towards me. So the fact that there is a bus coming towards me *does* cause me to think there's a bus coming towards me. But we were agreed that this *wasn't* a case of knowledge even though Goldman's analysis says it is.

**OF COURSE GOLDMAN HAS RESPONSES TO THESE ARGUMENTS.
REMEMBER, IN PHILOSOPHY JUST BECAUSE YOU HEAR A CRITICISM OF A
THEORY IN A LECTURE DOESN'T MEAN THERE ISN'T AN ANSWER.**

5. Clark's Analysis

Clark argues that the mistake is that in each Gettier case the *grounds* upon which we believe *p* are false. So in the tennis match case the grounds are that the program you are watching is *this year's* Wimbledon finals. But that proposition ('that the program you are watching is this year's finals') is false. Similarly for the other examples. The grounds that I believe the time are that I *wrongly* believe that the clock tells the time accurately. The grounds that I believe there is a bus coming towards me are that I *wrongly* believe that what I see coming towards me is representative of reality.

So says Clark, if the *grounds* for your belief are false, then you cannot have knowledge. We can then ask what the grounds are for believing the grounds of our belief. For instance, you might believe that you are watching today's Wimbledon final because the tape was marked 'today's Wimbledon final'. You can keep going, asking for the grounds of the grounds of that belief and so on (next lecture, we will see whether such a chain terminates or not). So for any belief *p* there is a chain of beliefs, where each belief grounds another belief in that chain, until we eventually arrive at a belief that grounds *p*. So a belief is *fully grounded* iff every belief in that chain is true.

Clark says that to avoid the Gettier examples we must add that our belief that *p* must be fully grounded. 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.
- (iv) *S*'s belief that *p* is fully grounded.