Knowledge,
Reason & Belief

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3. The nature of knowledge:
More on Gettier

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Last week

- Some responses to Gettier:
  - No False Grounds
    - worries that is it too weak (Clock)
    - worries that it is perhaps even too strong (Handouts)
  - Strengthening the proposal to Infallibility
    - worries that this is too strong (rampant ignorance)
    - supporting the move via J-Infallibility and the Lottery argument

This week

- Some further responses to Gettier, including an alternative strengthening of No False Grounds
- A worry about whether anything will work at all

INDEFEASIBILITY ACCOUNTS

'No Defeaters'

- Here is a seemingly more modest way of strengthening No False grounds:

    No Defeaters: S's belief that P was not inferred from premises whose support for P is 'defeated' by some true proposition D

- Defeaters for the support provided by some premises either

    (1) provide grounds to doubt the premises, or
    (2) provide grounds to think the truth of these premises would fail to provide a sufficient reason to believe the conclusion (P)

- There are three broad types of defeaters

- I'll illustrate these wrt an inference that a suspect is guilty from an assumption that he confessed

Types of defeaters

- Undermining: give a reason to doubt the premises are true

    'A reliable insider says the suspect *didn't* confess.'

- Defusing: give a reason to doubt the premises are at all relevant to the conclusion

    'The confession was extracted under torture.'

- Opposing: give at least as strong a reason to doubt the conclusion as the premises provide for believing it

    'CCTV places the suspect in another state.'

- Note: the terminology is mine

Graphically
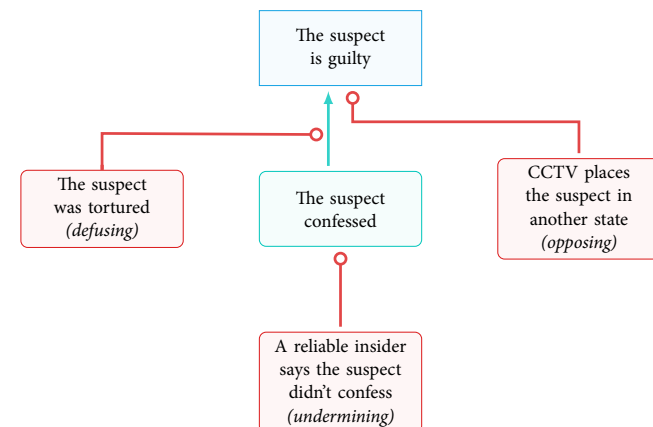
Some features of the proposal

- It strengthens No False Grounds:

  If S's premise E is false, then $\neg E$ provides an undermining defeater

- It is intuitively weaker than Infallibility
- It entails Truth:

  If S's conclusion P is false, $\neg P$ provides an opposing defeater

- It handles Ford and Clock:

  - Smith's not owning a Ford provides an undermining defeater in relation to Jones' belief that Smith has received a pay rise
  - The clock's having stopped provides a defusing defeater in relation to my belief that it is 12 o'clock

An alternative formulation

- Traditionally, No Defeaters has been characterised somewhat differently, using counterfactuals
- Lehrer's (1965) proposal:

  There is no true proposition D, such that, had it been the case that S believed that D, S would no longer have been justified in believing that P

- This formulation also handles Ford and Clock fine:

  - Had Jones believed that Smith doesn't own a Ford, he would no longer have been justified in believing that Smith received a pay rise
  - Had I believed that the clock had stopped, I would no longer have been justified in believing that it is 12 o'clock

A problem for the alternative

- But how about:

  Elvis: Mo believes that Elvis is still alive and knows that he believes that Elvis is still alive (P). But Elvis is dead (D) and had Mo believed D, he would no longer have been justified in believing that P (since, by introspection, he would have known that he believes that Elvis is dead).

- We have a seeming failure of necessity

No Defeaters defeated?

- Here is an alleged problem for both formulations of No Defeaters (Lehrer & Paxson 1969):

  Mad Mrs Grabit: I see someone, who looks very much like my best friend Tom Grabit, steal a book in the library (E). Upon this experience, I form the strongly justified belief that Tom stole the book (P). This belief is indeed true: Tom has been having to cut corners and save on his course book expenses. However, Tom's mother, Mrs Grabit has been telling library staff and police that Tom was on holiday and that it was Tom's twin brother Dom who was in the library at the time of the theft (D). However–further twist–Mrs Grabit is demented and her testimony is the product of her over-indulgent imagination (D'). My belief that P has a true defeater but still constitutes knowledge.

- Again: an alleged failure of necessity

No Defeaters defeated? (ctd)

- Rejoinder 1:

    Claim either (a) that my belief does not, as suggested, constitute knowledge or (b) that Mrs Grabit's testimony does not constitute a defeater

- Rejoinder 2:

    Require that the effect of the defeater D be not itself be 'neutralised' (as it is by D')

- Objection to Rejoinder 2:

    This still seems to weak, since, in the Gettier cases that we have considered, the defeater D is itself neutralised (e.g. the defeat provided by the clock's having stopped is neutralised by the fact that it stopped 12 hours ago)

Causal theories

The basic idea

- An influential early suggestion (Goldman 1967)

    CAUSATION: S's belief that P was caused by the fact that P

- How this handles FORD and CLOCK:

    - Jones' belief that that Smith has received a pay rise was not caused by the fact that Smith has received a pay rise
    - My belief that it is 12 was not caused by the fact that it is 12. Rather, it was caused by the fact that the clock stopped on '12'

- Note that CAUSATION obviously entails TRUTH

Objection 1: common causes

- Consider (Feldman 2003):

    SMOKE: 'Suppose Black sees a fire in the fireplace and believes that there is smoke coming out of the chimney. The smoke coming out of the chimney does not cause her belief that there is smoke coming out of the chimney. Rather, the fire causes both the smoke to come out the chimney and her belief that it is.'

- We seem to have a failure of necessity
- Rejoinder:

    Allow for the belief to be either caused by P or to share a common cause with P

- This also makes room for knowledge of future events, which unless we countenanced backward causation, was ruled out

Objection 2: fortunate causes

– Consider (Goldman 1976):

> FAKE BARNS: 'Fred drives past a cluster of barns on the side of the road. Unbeknownst to him, the cluster is part of a film set: only one of the barns is genuine whilst the others are elaborate props. Looking at the one genuine barn, he thinks to himself 'There's a nice barn'. He has a true, justified belief that there is a nice barn next to him, which is also caused by there being a nice barn next to him. He nevertheless fails to have the relevant knowledge.'

– This time: apparent failure of sufficiency

The basic idea

– Reliabilism about knowledge = a broad family of views that require for knowledge that the relevant belief be produced by a sufficiently reliable process
– The concept of 'sufficiently reliable process' is then understood in a variety of ways
– Note: there are also reliabilist analyses of *justification*; this is something else

RELIABILISM

Nomic sufficiency

'Let us compare…beliefs to the…readings given by a thermometer.

In some cases, the…reading will fail to correspond to the temperature of the environment. Such a reading may be compared to… false belief.

In other cases, the reading will correspond to the actual temperature. Such a reading is like… true belief.

The second case…is then sub-divided into two…First, suppose that the thermometer is a bad one, but that, on a certain occasion, the…reading coincides with the actual temperature. Such a reading is to be compared with…true belief which falls short of knowledge. Suppose finally that the thermometer is a good one, so that a reading of 'T°' on the thermometer ensures that the environmental temperature is T°. Such a reading is to be compared with…knowledge.' (Armstrong 1973)

Nomic sufficiency (ctd)

- Armstrong cashes out this analogy roughly as follows:

  NOMIC SUFFICIENCY: S's belief that P was produced by a process of a type such that the laws of nature guarantee that beliefs produced by processes of this type are true

  (Note: I am glossing over a distinction that he draws between 'inferential' and 'non-inferential' knowledge)

- How this handles FORD and CLOCK:

  - Believing that Jones owns a Ford on the mere basis of being shown the receipt, taken for a drive, etc., is not a process that nomically guarantees true beliefs

  - Forming a belief regarding the time on the basis of the reading of a stopped clock is not a process that nomically guarantees true beliefs

Nomic sufficiency (ctd)

- The requirement is not as strong as it could have been:

  S's belief that P is only required to be guaranteed to be true by the laws of nature *conditional* on its having been produced by a process of the relevant type

- Still, since an *absolute* guarantee is required, there could be a worry that few of our beliefs will meet the condition (see objection to INFALLIBILISM)

Sensitivity

- An alternative formulation of reliabilism appeals to counterfactuals (Nozick 1981):

  SENSITIVITY (1st pass): Had it been the case that $\neg P$, then S would have believed that $\neg P$

- This is sometimes known as the truth-tracking theory

- How this handles FORD and CLOCK:

  - Had Smith *not* received a pay rise, Jones would *still* have believed that (i) he has bought a Ford and that (ii) he could only have done so had he received a pay rise and hence that (iii) he has received a pay rise

  - Had it not been 12, I would still have believed it to be 12

Sensitivity (ctd)

- Note that, like NOMIC SUFFICIENCY, SENSITIVITY entails TRUTH (If P is false but S believes that P, it isn't the case that had P been false, S would have believed that $\neg P$)

- There is an immediate issue here (Feldman 2003):

  GRANDMA: Old frail Grandma sees grandson Johnny playing happily before her. She knows that Johnny is well and playing happily. But suppose Johnny were sick. The family would tell Grandma that Johnny is well and playing happily, but that he's doing this at a friend's house. They do not want to make Grandma worry. So, if Johnny were sick, she would still believe he's well.

- Patch (Nozick 1981):

  SENSITIVITY (2nd pass): Had it been the case that $\neg P$ and S had still formed her beliefs using a process of the same type, then S would have believed that $\neg P$

Sensitivity vs. Nomic Sufficiency

- Recall the worry that Nomic Sufficiency is too strong
- Sensitivity is much weaker:
    - Nomic Sufficiency requires that S believe that $\neg P$ in *any nomologically possible situation* such that P is false and S's belief was produced by the same type of process
    - Sensitivity only requires that S believe that $\neg P$ in *the particular situation* that would have obtained had P been false and S's belief been produced by the same type of process

    (A standard way of putting it: 'S believes that $\neg P$ in the closest possible world in which $\neg P$ and S's belief was produced…')

Objection 1: the reference class problem

- Both versions of reliabilism considered refer to the type of the process that produced the relevant belief
- But any single process will be an instance of *many* different types (belong to different 'reference classes')!
- In the Clock case:
    - A reading of a clock
    - A reading of a stopped clock
    - A reading of a clock that stopped 12 hours ago
- We clearly don't want the relevant type to be of the last variety
- But until we find a principled way of picking out the right type, the proposals are arguably empty (Conee & Feldman 1998)

Objection 2: 'Accidental reliability'

- This objection assumes we have at least an implicit grasp of the relevant type of process but claims a failure of sufficiency
- The counterexample (Pritchard 2014):

    Thermometer: '[Y]ou find out what the temperature of the room is by looking at the thermometer on the wall.…[It] is very reliable in this respect in that it will enable you to form accurate beliefs about what the temperature is. Suppose, however, that unbeknownst to you someone is playing a trick on you. The thermometer is, in fact, broken and is fluctuating randomly. Crucially, however, this isn't making the thermometer an unreliable indicator of what the temperature in the room is[:] someone is hidden in the room and adjusting the temperature of the room to match whatever reading is on the thermometer whenever she sees you look at the thermometer.'

Can Knowledge be Analysed?

Recap

- We've reviewed 4 further arguably unsuccessful responses:
    - More modestly strengthening the proposal to No Defeaters, argued by some to be too strong (Mad Mrs Grabit)
    - Causation, found to be too weak (Fake Barns)
    - Reliabilism, in the forms of both Nomic Sufficiency and Sensitivity
        - Nomic Sufficiency was suggested to be too strong (rampant ignorance)
        - Both were suggested to be either too weak (Thermometer) or possibly vacuous (reference class problem)
- These and the previous three proposals were the most basic
- A cycle of proposals and counterexamples has indeed led to some *very* convoluted suggestions
- Here is a notorious later incarnation of No Defeaters…

What next?

- This raises two issues
    (1) Is our poor track record perhaps evidence that no analysis of knowledge can be given *in principle*?
    (2) If not, doesn't the increasing complexity of conditions and counterexamples bode badly for delivering it *in practise*?
- From the 80's / 90's onwards: increasing scepticism regarding solubility of the problem even in principle

Bon Appetit!

S knows that h iff (1) h is true, (2) S is justified [by some evidence e] in believing h…, (3) S believes that h on the basis of his justification and…(4) …there is an evidence-restricted alternative F_S^* to S's epistemic framework F_S such that (i) 'S is justified in believing that h' is epistemically derivable from the other members of the evidence component of F_S^* and (ii) there is some subset of members of the evidence component of F_S^* such that (a) the members of this subset are also members of the evidence component of F_S and (b) 'S is justified in believing that h' is epistemically derivable from the members of this subset. [Where F_S^* is an 'evidence-restricted alternative' to F_S iff (i) For every true proposition q such that 'S is justified in believing not-q' is a member of the evidence component of F_S, 'S is justified in believing q' is a member of the evidence component of F_S^*, (ii) for some subset C of members of F_S such that C is maximally consistent epistemically with the members generated in (i), every member of C is a member of F_S^*, and (iii) no other propositions are members of F_S^* except those that are implied epistemically by the members generated in (i) and (ii).] (Swain 1974)

Next week

- Topic: 'Final comments on Gettier' + ''The value of knowledge'
- Required reading:
    - Pritchard, D. *WTK*, Ch. 2
- Recommended reading:
    - Hyman, J. 2010. The Road To Larissa. *Ratio*, 23: 393–414. Sections §3-§8.
    - Kvanvig, J. 2003. *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge Unibversity Press. Ch 1 'The value of knowledge is external to it', especially the section titled 'Plato and the tethering of true belief'. (Available in course reader)
    - Olsson, E.J. 2011: The Value of Knowledge. *Philosophy Compass* 6(12): 874–883. (Available in course reader)

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- Feldman, R. 2003. *Epistemology*. Pearson.
- Goldman, A.I. 1967. A Causal Theory of Knowing. *Journal of Philosophy* 64: 357–72.
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- Pritchard, D. 2014: *What Is This Thing Called Knowledge? (3rd Edition)*. NY: Routledge.