



# Knowledge, Reason & Belief

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4. *The analysis of knowledge (ctd)*  
+ *The value of knowledge*



## INTRODUCTION

### Last week

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- Some further responses to Gettier:
  - A strengthening of NO FALSE GROUNDS to NO DEFEATERS, argued by some to be too strong (MAD MRS GRABIT)
  - CAUSATION, found to be too weak
  - Reliabilism (NOMIC SUFFICIENCY or SENSITIVITY), found to be either too strong, or too weak or possibly even vacuous
- The general sentiment of pessimism regarding the solubility of the Gettier problem

### This week

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- Finishing up the analysis of knowledge:
  - The suggestion that knowledge might be unanalysable by virtue of being a 'family resemblance' concept
  - Zagzebski's attempted argument for the unanalysability of knowledge
  - Williamson's 'Knowledge First' programme (very briefly!)
- Review of some basic ideas connected to a recent renewal of interest in the question of the value of knowledge

## THE GETTIER PROBLEM: POST-MORTEM

## A Wittgenstinian argument?

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- Very early pessimism from Saunders & Champawat (1964):  
‘[W]e would suggest that it is a mistake to believe that there is some...set of conditions which are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for knowledge. It is our opinion that the instances of knowledge share at most a **family resemblance**.’
- This echoes Wittgenstein (1958) on games:  
‘Consider for example the proceedings that we call “games”. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?—Don’t say: “There must be something common, or they would not be called “games””—but look and see whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that’

## A Wittgenstinian argument? (ctd)

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- Cases of knowledge do have *some* features in common: most agree that TRUTH and BELIEF are necessary
- But Wittgenstein is perhaps more charitably interpreted as claiming that games do not have *defining* characteristics (collectively necessary *and* sufficient ones)
- But is the family resemblance model of concepts, so construed, applicable to knowledge?

## Zagzebski’s argument

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- In an influential article, Zagzebski (1994) offered an argument allegedly showing that  
‘Gettier problems are inescapable for virtually every analysis of knowledge which at least maintains that knowledge is true belief plus something else’
- Zagzebski considers the prospects of an account of the form  
 $K = TB + W$
- $W$  = ‘Warrant’, *defined* as ‘the property that in sufficient quantity converts true belief into knowledge’

## Zagzebski's argument (ctd)

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- The argument:
  - (1) If a reductive analysis of knowledge of the form ' $K = TB + W$ ', is such that  $W$  *doesn't* entail  $P$ , then the account will be implausible because subject to Gettier-style counterexamples
  - (2) If a reductive analysis of knowledge of the form ' $K = TB + W$ ', is such that  $W$  *does* entail  $P$ , then the account will be implausible because too strict

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  - (3) No reductive analysis of knowledge of the form ' $K = TB + W$ ' is plausible

## Why believe (1)? (ctd)

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- As has been pointed out (Howard-Snyder *et al* 2003), this fails to establish the claim
- Consider, for sake of argument, the suggestion:
  - $W$  iff either  $\neg P$  or NO DEFEATERS is satisfied
- $W$  doesn't entail  $P$ , but ensures Gettier-proofness:
  - If the belief is true, then, by  $W$ , NO DEFEATERS is satisfied
  - We saw that BELIEF + TRUTH + NO DEFEATERS is at least *sufficient*, if arguably not necessary, for knowledge

## Why believe (1)?

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- Zagzebski tells us:

'start with a case of [warranted] false belief... The falsity of the belief will not be due to any systematically describable element in the situation, for if it were, such a feature could be used in the analysis of the components of knowledge other than true belief, and then truth would be entailed by the other components of knowledge, contrary to the hypothesis. The falsity of the belief is therefore due to some element of luck. Now emend the case by adding another element of luck, only this time an element which makes the belief true after all. The second element must be independent of the element of warrant... The situation might be described as one element of luck counteracting another. We now have a case in which the belief is [warranted], the belief is true, but it is not knowledge.'

## Why believe (2)?

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- As we have seen, nearly all our candidates for  $W$  (INFALLIBILITY, NO DEFEATERS, CAUSATION, etc.) entail TRUTH
- Some of these were faulted for being too strong, but others (e.g. CAUSATION) were not!
- Seemingly, Zagzebski trades on an equivocation between 'warrant' in the technical sense and 'warrant'  $\approx$  'justification'
- On the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading,  $W$ 's entailing TRUTH, does leave us with something close to INFALLIBILITY, which is probably too strong
- But she needs the 1<sup>st</sup> reading to be able to create trouble for 'virtually every analysis of knowledge which... maintains that knowledge is true belief plus something else'

## Knowledge-First

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- Taking cue from the lack of success regarding Gettier, Williamson (2000) urges a 'Knowledge First' approach to a number of philosophical problems
- Two key claims:
  - (1) Knowledge is a primitive concept
  - (2) Knowledge can be used to analyse other important concepts
- Regarding (2), he suggests that the concept of knowledge could be essential to the analysis of the concept of *belief*:
  - 'a knowledge first epistemologist might treat believing something as treating it as if one knew it'

## THE VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE

## Knowledge-First

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- He also suggests that the notion of *justification* might be similarly dependent:
  - 'Questions of justification and rationality concern doing the best one can on one's limited evidence; given  $E = K$ , that means doing the best one can on one's limited knowledge. If so, they are not prior to questions of knowledge. What you are justified or rational in believing depends on what you know.'

## The value of knowledge: two options

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- Knowledge, it seems, is something we value
- Why so? Two (jointly consistent) options
  - (1) Knowledge is **instrumentally** valuable, valuable as a means to promoting some further good: 'knowledge is power'
    - (e.g. leisure time is valuable, because it promotes happiness)
  - (2) Knowledge is **non-instrumentally** valuable, valuable in itself
    - (e.g. happiness, some might claim, is good as an end in itself)
- Note that a case for (1) would undermine (2), as the latter is **unparsimonious**: it postulates an independent source of value
- Regarding (1), it is tempting to suggest:
  - Knowledge is instrumentally valuable because it entails true belief and *that* is instrumentally valuable

## The instrumental value of truth

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- In what *way* is the truth of a belief instrumentally valuable?
  - In promoting the fulfilment of our desires by the actions which that belief and those desires would combine to cause
- Example:
  - The truth of my belief that the E75 leads to Larissa promotes the fulfilment of my desire to go to Larissa by my heading up the E75
- Truth, it seems, is valuable as fuel for practical success

## Socrates and Meno

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- S*: ...A man who knew the way to Larissa..., who went there and guided others there would surely lead them well?
- M*: Certainly.
- S*: What if someone had a true opinion about which way was the right way, but he hadn't gone there himself and wasn't acquainted with the place. Wouldn't he also lead the way correctly?
- M*: Certainly.
- S*: As long as he has the right opinion concerning that which other people know, he will not be a worse guide than one who knows...
- M*: In no way worse.
- S*: So true opinion is in no way an inferior guide to action than knowledge...

## Value beyond truth?

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- Many would be dissatisfied with the story so far, feeling that knowing that *P* is more valuable than merely truly believing it
- Note: a number of philosophers don't share this feeling (Kvanvig, Kaplan,...)
- The problem of accounting for this alleged surplus value has come to be known as the **Meno Problem**
- The name stems from a discussion in Plato's *Meno*, in which it is noted that this surplus value appears hard to account for in practical terms

## Socrates and Meno (ctd)

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- Socrates' observation:
  - Given* that one has a true belief that *P*, satisfaction of any *further* condition necessary for knowing that *P* is irrelevant to the success of the actions that this belief would lead us to carry out
- Example:
  - It is valuable that one's belief that *P* be justified: this arguably makes it more likely that it will lead to actions that are successful
  - But that belief's being justified *on top* of being true does *not* make it more likely that it will lead to actions that are successful (because justification promotes success only via truth)
- Analogy: that a good cup of coffee was produced by a reliable coffee machine adds no value to the cup (Zagzebski 2003)
- This is sometimes known as the **Swamping Problem**

## Added value for justification?

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- Although, as we noted
  - a belief's being justified on top of being true *does not* make it more likely that *it* will lead to actions that are successfulit may well be the case that that
  - a belief's being justified on top of being true *does* make it more likely that *other beliefs* will be true and hence lead to actions that are successful
- Analogy:
  - having a good cup of coffee that was produced by a reliable coffee machine is valuable over and above having a good cup of coffee, as it makes one more likely to have good cups of coffee in the future

## A further value problem

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- Suppose we grant that justification has added instrumental value in the rough way just suggested
- The fact remains that the JTB account provides insufficient conditions for knowledge
- We therefore haven't shown that knowledge is distinctively valuable over and above any proper subset of its parts
- Those who think there is added value to be accounted for here call this the 'secondary value problem'

## Added value for justification? (ctd)

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- In the readings for next week, Clifford (1879) seems to have offered a related thought:
  - 'if I let myself believe anything on insufficient evidence, there may be no great harm done by the mere belief; it may be true after all, or I may never have occasion to exhibit it in outward acts. But I cannot help doing this great wrong toward Man, that I make myself credulous. The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them; for then it must sink back into savagery.'

## A further value problem (ctd)

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- Some (e.g. Hyman 2010) are pessimistic:
  - The post Gettier literature has yielded some 4<sup>th</sup> conditions whose added value is far from clear (recall Swain's proposal!)
- Possible response:
  - So much the worse for these. Attempts to answer the semantic/ontological question should have been more substantially guided by the need to answer evaluative questions.
- Williamson (2000) is more optimistic than Hyman, drawing loosely on further comments of Socrates' to suggest that NO DEFEATERS provides a promising answer...

## Value in stability?

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- Plato's Socrates offers the following (referring to the statues of Daedalus, so lifelike that they could run away if not shackled):
  - S: Acquiring an untied work of Daedalus is not worth much; it's like a runaway slave—or it won't stay put. A statue that is tied down, though, is very valuable, because the man's works are very beautiful.... True opinions, for as long as they remain, are fine things and do nothing but good. But they don't hang around for long; they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one tethers them with chains of reasons why... After opinions are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge; secondly, they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized more highly than correct opinion; knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down.

## Next week

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- Topic: 'Rational belief and practical interests'
- Required reading:
  - Pojman, L. & M. Rea 2008. *The Philosophy of Religion: an anthology (5<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. Thomson Wadsworth. Section VIIa 'The Pragmatic Justification of Religious Belief' (incl. selections from Pascal, Clifford and James), pp. 362–379.
- 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 University Press. Ch 1 'The value of knowledge is external to it', especially the section titled 'Plato and the tethering of true belief'.
  - Olsson, E.J. 2011: The Value of Knowledge. *Philosophy Compass* 6(12): 874–883.

## Value in stability? (ctd)

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- Williamson (2000) then suggests:
  - 'What does Plato mean? Surely he recognized that mere true beliefs can be held with dogmatic confidence, and knowledge lost through forgetting. But belief can also be sensitive to evidence. One can lose a mere true belief by discovering the falsity of further beliefs on which it had been essentially based; quite often, the truth will out. One cannot lose knowledge that way, because a true belief essentially based on false beliefs does not constitute knowledge... In other cases, a true belief not essentially based on false beliefs still fails to constitute knowledge, because misleading evidence against that true belief is rife in one's environment, although one happens to be unaware of it oneself.'
- He probably has a more demanding notion of 'tether[ing] with chains of reasons why': his are *indefeasible* chains of reasons

## References

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- Clifford, W.K. 1879. The ethics of belief. In his *Lectures and Essays*, London: Macmillan. Reprinted in Pojman, L. & M. Rea 2008. *The Philosophy of Religion: an anthology (5<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. Thomson Wadsworth.
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- Zagzebski, L. 2003. The Search for the Source of the Epistemic Good. *Metaphilosophy*, 34: 12–28.