

V74MK1 Mind and Knowledge

Seminar 1: Gettier Cases and Epistemic Intuitions

Reading: Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' and Nagel, 'Epistemic Intuitions'

- Seminar format for this half of the module
 - Close study of set readings
 - Informal discussion
 - Presentation opportunities
- Preparing for seminars
 - Read and make notes
 - Identify problematic/puzzling/false passages in readings
- Gettier cases and the post-Gettier definitional/analytic project
 - This is something a bit different; a metaepistemological project
- p. 1: 'Immediate assessments' of cases or situations (real or imaginary) ... 'easy and natural' ...
 - A subject and a belief are specified, and some further information is added
 - Then an 'intuition' is elicited
 - This happens all over philosophy
 - Is a clay statue identical to the clay from which it is made?
 - Are you the same person that was living in your house yesterday?
 - Common sense verdicts
- 'Counterintuitive' is a philosophical insult; the JTB theory has 'counterintuitive consequences' and is therefore rejected
- Questions:
 - What *are* intuitions (about epistemological matters, or in general)?
 - Should philosophers take them seriously?
 - If so, for what purposes?

- Immediate vs. inferential assessments of cases
 - Are inferential assessments never ‘intuitions’?
 - Could there also be intuitions about general principles?
 - E.g. Justification is necessary for knowledge
- The analogy with perception
 - No effort; doesn’t feel deliberate
 - A *different* kind of immediacy
 - *Prima facie* rather than conclusive evidence?
 - Conflict with theory is possible
 - What should give is questionable
 - Reflective equilibrium (cf. Goodman on usage and definition)
 - Explication (cf. Carnap)
- Whose intuitions should we listen to?
 - Our own?
 - Might be biased in favour of our theory; “corrupted” intuitions
 - Those of “the folk”?
 - Mightn’t be so good at thinking carefully about this stuff
- Clarity/strength of intuitions
 - Fake barn country (Ginet, via Goldman 1976: ‘Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge’ in *The Journal of Philosophy* 73):
 - Henry is driving in the countryside with his son. For the boy’s edification Henry identifies various objects on the landscape as they come into view. “That’s a cow,” says Henry, “That’s a tractor,” “That’s a silo,” “That’s a barn,” etc. Henry has no doubt about the identity of these objects; in particular, he has no doubt that the last-mentioned object is a barn, which indeed it is. Each of the identified objects has features characteristic of its type. Moreover, each object is fully in view, Henry has excellent eyesight, and he has enough time to look at them reasonably carefully, since there is little traffic to distract him. Suppose we are told that, unknown to Henry, the district he has just entered is full of papier-mâché facsimiles of barns. These facsimiles look from the road exactly like barns, but are really just façades, without back walls or interiors, quite incapable of being used as barns. They are so cleverly constructed that travelers invariable mistake them for barns. Having just entered the district, Henry has not encountered any facsimiles; the object he sees is a genuine barn. But if the object on the site were a facsimile, Henry would mistake it for a barn.

- Truetemp (Lehrer 1990: *Theory of Knowledge*):
 - Suppose a person, whom we shall name Mr. Truetemp, undergoes brain surgery by an experimental surgeon who invents a small device which is both a very accurate thermometer and a computational device capable of generating thoughts. The device, call it a tempucomp, is implanted in Truetemp's head so that the very tip of the device, no larger than the head of a pin, sits unnoticed on his scalp and acts as a sensor to transmit information about the temperature to the computational system of his brain. This device, in turn, sends a message to his brain causing him to think of the temperature recorded by the external sensor. Assume that the tempucomp is very reliable, and so his thoughts are correct temperature thoughts. All told, this is a reliable belief-forming process. Now imagine, finally, that he has no idea that the tempucomp has been inserted in his brain, is only slightly puzzled about why he thinks so obsessively about the temperature, but never checks a thermometer to determine whether these thoughts about the temperature are correct. He accepts them unreflectively, another effect of the tempucomp. Thus, he thinks and accepts that the temperature is 104 degrees. It is. Does he know that it is?
- Explaining variation in strength: comparison with stereotypically "virtuous" cases (Goldman)
- Sensitivity of intuitions to *apparently non-epistemic* factors
 - IRI vs. contextualism: we will come back to this later in the course
- Lottery cases
 - Our intuitions seem to be *in tension with one another*
- "Experimental philosophy" and cross-cultural variation
 - Would this suggest *unreliability*?
 - And/or that one should think of intuitions as telling you only about *how your culture* conceives of knowledge?
 - Challenges to the interpretation of the data
 - Williamson's reply (p. 809)
- What are intuitions?
 - Mentalism (Goldman and Pust): intuitions as a basic source of evidence concerning concepts
 - Usually reliable
 - Bealer: intuitions as a basic source of evidence concerning knowledge, justification etc.
 - Come along with appearance of necessity
 - Immediate and robust

- Fallible (the naïve comprehension axiom and set theoretical paradox)
 - No alternative source of basic philosophical knowledge
- Kornblith: intuitions can *only* tell you about your concepts
 - But we should be studying *knowledge, justification, etc.*
 - Is this fair?
- Weatherson: there's no 'natural property' that fits with our intuitions about knowledge
 - So we should be prepared to ditch some of them
 - Aim: a systematic/simple theory of knowledge which respects as many intuitions as possible
- Intuitions cannot be calibrated/checked, unlike e.g. vision (Cummins, Weatherson)
- Hinkikka: philosophy started using 'intuitions' to mimic linguistics, but this methodology is inappropriate to investigation of knowledge (as opposed to the *word* 'knowledge')
- No special category here; just ordinary judgments (Williamson)
 - And appealing to intuitions as our only basic source of evidence provides ammunition for a skeptical attack
- Empirical research
 - Feeling of (another's) knowing (FOK/FOAK): predictive of but imperfectly correlated with actual knowing
 - How relevant to philosophers' 'intuitions'?
 - Potential relevance of empirical understanding of how capacities for epistemic evaluation are developed and when they are impaired
 - Development and calibration (p. 816)

Some Final Thoughts ...

- Is there just one concept of knowledge? Or could there be one word but *many* concepts?
- Could philosophers' talk of 'intuitions' be conflating different things?
 - Why assume *one* thing possesses (various kinds of) immediacy; goes along with the appearance of necessity; is tied to common sense; etc..