

## Basics of Epistemology

### Bertrand Russell- a founder of analytic philosophy

- analytic philosophy: a tradition focused on logical techniques and clarity of language in philosophy
  - ex: talking about free will depends on defining free will
- appearances vs reality
- can we KNOW how things really are from how they seem or appear?

### Is there any knowledge that we can't doubt?

- Candidate: knowledge about immediate/current experiences
  - Ex: I am sitting in a chair
- Russell's table:

## Russell's Table

1. The color of the table is **brown**
2. The table is smooth
3. The shape of the table is rectangular
4. The table is hard



1. Brown is not "the color" of the table. Table appears to have different colors from different points of view, different lighting, observers. No reason to think that **brown** is "the color" of the table over others.
2. The table appears smooth from the naked eye. But the table appears to not be smooth through a microscope. Which is it?
3. Rectangular is not "the shape" of the table. The table appears to have different shapes from different points of view. No reason to think some of these are "the shape" of the table over others.
4. The table appears to be hard only when we press upon it in a certain way with our limbs. But the sensation we get depends on how we touch the table and with what we touch the table. The table can seem to be hard or soft depending on what we touch it with (imagine we touch the table with some of the hardest substances on Earth!).

- My point: Can't we prove some of this, though? Since color is the surface reflection properties of light? If we define brown as a certain wavelength, then can't we prove this?
  - CA: The SSR of red is closer to green than orange so colors might just be a figment of the imagination
- My next point: Can't we define rough and smooth by the texture? Which is a fact? And can't we define a rectangle and then measure it?

- Do we have any knowledge that is certain?
  - Yes, things that we can't do, things that are current properties, things that are factual (such as math)
  - Adding "now" or a tie to the present makes it easier to prove
    - Ex: "Humans can't fly" could be false because someday they might be able to
  - Negatives (as in that something is not something) are easier to prove
    - Ex: I cannot fly
  - Math is certain
    - Ex:  $1+1=2$
  - CA: The sun might have set every day but we don't know for sure that it won't. We might feel that it is likely but we are not certain.
- Does knowledge require certainty?
  - Yes, knowledge means knowing something to be true

### JTB Analysis

- Candidate: justified true belief
  - a "justified" belief: a belief that we form in an appropriate way based off good evidence
    - Ex of not justified = "It is going to rain" after looking into crystal ball.
    - Ex of justified = "It is going to rain" by checking weather data
  - Plato believed this
  - Example: know that there is snow on the ground
    - You BELIEVE that there is snow on the ground. (Believe)
    - It is TRUE that there is snow on the ground. (True)
    - You are JUSTIFIED in believing that there is snow on the ground. (Justified)

### Preserving JTB

- I think JTB is sound because prophetic knowledge is still knowledge
- However, to preserve it in the face of Gettier's critiques, having all premises be true would do the trick.
  - Leaves room for there to be 1+ premises
  - You'd reach the right conclusions for the right reasons
  - Ex: If I think that the vclub will be serving chicken on Friday because of Chicken Finger Friday, and if vclub serves bbq chicken, I lucked into believing it but I still knew it to be true even if it wasn't for the right reasons. Since the premises weren't true, this wouldn't count as knowledge if this requirement was added.

### The Gettier Problem: What is Knowledge?

- Gettier argues that knowledge  $\neq$  justified true beliefs
- Gettier is saying that prophetic knowledge doesn't count
- Gettier is saying perception is not reliable as a basis of knowledge
  - If there were basic mathematical facts that are proven to be true, then it could be true
  - $\rightarrow$  Would nothing then be knowledge unless it is proven and not based on perception
- The job case:
  - Smith and Jones apply for the same job.
  - The President of the company tells Smith that Jones will get the job.
  - Smith counts the number of coins in Jones' pocket and sees that Jones has 10 coins.
  - (A) *The man who gets the job has 10 coins in his pocket*
    - $\rightarrow$  Smith BELIEVES that the man who gets the job has 10 coins in his pocket.
      - It is TRUE that the man who gets the job has 10 coins in his pocket.
    - Smith is JUSTIFIED in believing that the man who gets the job has 10 coins in his pocket.
      - (A) *is a justified true belief.*
    - But unbeknownst to him, Smith will get the job.
    - And it just so happens that Smith also had 10 coins in his pocket—though he didn't know that he did!
    - *Smith clearly did not know (A)*
  - It's a justified true belief that happened to be true but he didn't *know* it
- My CA: Does it matter if the perception is wrong if the conclusion is right? Do the premises have to be sound and valid for the conclusion to be knowledge?
  - Ex: If I think that the vdub will be serving chicken on Friday because of Chicken Finger Friday, and if vdub serves bbq chicken, I lucked into believing it but I still knew it to be true even if it wasn't for the right reasons.
    - Justified: yes, based on a pattern
    - True: yes, they served chicken
    - Belief: yes, I believe it
  - If someone came up to me and asked what I was planning to have for lunch, I'd say I know I am going to have chicken and I do.
    - The premises were false but justified. The conclusion was true—does it matter that the premises didn't lead me to it? That I lucked into the knowledge?
- If knowledge is not JTB, then what is it?
  - Missing ingredient

- Such as true premises?
- Knowledge-first epistemology
  - Knowledge is a basic or primitive notion
- Reject the Gettier cases all together
  - Some people think they amount to knowledge and some don't
  - Weinburg did an experiment that found that Western university participants think JTB is not knowledge whereas Asian backgrounds would say it is

### Analyzing Knowledge

Can we give an analysis of what knowledge is?

- Yes, we can analyze but not know

### Role of Intuition

- Defining intuition would be important
  - Dictionary def: the ability to understand something immediately, without the need for conscious reasoning.
- → If there isn't conscious reasoning, there's not much solid data or inferencing to go on
- On the other hand, gut instincts are based on *something*... but what?
- The example of color

### Valid vs Sound

- valid: if the conclusion necessarily follows the premises, even if they are false
- sound: valid and true