Philosophy 311: Knowledge and Justification
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Geoff Pynn

Handout 1: Thinking about Knowledge

Varieties of knowledge

Knowledge of persons, places, and things
Knowledge how
Knowledge that, or propositional knowledge

Propositional knowledge

Relation between *subjects* and *propositions*; expressed using `S knows that p'

What kinds of subjects can have propositional knowledge?

Yes:
Persons: sentient human beings, angels, gods, demons (if there are any)
'Higher' animals

Maybe:
People in comas? Infants?
'Lower' animals? Plants?
Computers? Simple machines?
Groups?

Propositions are meanings of complete declarative sentences.
Propositions can be true or false. True propositions are (or refer to) facts.
"Propositional attitudes" = belief, desire, regret, hope

Analyses and counterexamples

Analysis of X = attempt to define precisely what X *is.* E.g.:
M: A *mother* = a woman who has given birth

Counterexample: case where something is X but not A, or vice versa. E.g.:
Adoptive mothers are apparent counterexamples to M.

There are always three ways to respond to a counterexample:
Add something to X. (E.g., add `biological' to the left side of M)
Add something to A. (E.g., add `or adopted a child' to the right side of M)
Reject the counterexample. (Deny that adoptive mothers are really mothers)

First part of this class: considering possible *analyses* of propositional knowledge

The JTB analysis of knowledge

The oldest analysis of knowledge, going all the way back to Plato:

JTB: S knows that p = S has a justified true belief that p

(1) p is true
p is true = (roughly) it is a fact that p
Evidence that what is known must be true: it's bizarre to say that S knows that p, yet p is false.
If p is false, S may *think* she knows that p, but she doesn't

(2) S believes that p
S believes that p = (roughly) S accepts that p is true
Evidence that what is known must be believed: it's bizarre to say that S knows that p, yet S doesn't believe that p

(3) S is justified in believing that p
S is justified in believing that p = (roughly) S believes that p for good reason(s)

Some seemingly good reasons for believing p (usually):
- You saw that p
- A reliable source told you that p
- You have a proof that p
- You know that there's a 99.999% chance that p

Some seemingly not so good reasons for believing p (usually):
- You want p to be true
- You had a dream where you saw that p
- The magic 8-ball said that p
- You know that there's a 50% chance that p

Next class: more on (1) and (2), and a famous counterexample to JTB