

## Philosophy 311: Knowledge and Justification

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### Handout 7: The Causal Theory of Knowledge

Causal theory (invented by Alvin Goldman):

(C) S knows that p = S has a belief that p, which was caused by the fact that p

Compare with JTB. Both say that knowledge is TB + something else. Difference concerns what they say the something else is.

JTB: justification / good reasons / believing as you ought to ← *evaluative condition*

C: causal connection ← *purely descriptive condition*

'Thermometer' analogy (from David Armstrong). How does a thermometer 'know' what the temperature is? It is constructed in such a way that when the temperature is *n*, this causes the thermometer to read '*n*'. C says that human knowledge is basically like this.

C can explain how we know through perception, introspection, testimony, abductive inference (though in the latter two cases it's a little bit complicated)

C can explain why lucky guesses & Gettier cases aren't knowledge.

But, some problem cases:

1. Weird causal connections, e.g. The Blow To The Head (Feldman 83), Tricky Mickey. Goldman's solution:

S knows that p = S has a belief that p caused **in an appropriate way** by the fact that p.

Uh-oh... what's "appropriate"?

2. Knowledge of generalizations. How does the fact that all men are mortal cause my belief that all men are mortal? Can adding "proper reconstruction of causal chains" as an *appropriate way* solve this problem?

3. Knowledge of math and logic. How does the fact that  $2+2=4$  cause anything?

4. Misleading environments. Trudy/Judy Case (Feldman 85), Fake Barn Country. Such considerations eventually led Goldman to abandon the causal theory altogether.