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Introduction to Philosophy

Epistemology 2

Recapitulation

- We want to know what knowledge (in the sense of 'knowledge that' – propositional knowledge) exactly is: necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge.
- In order to be knowledge, a belief must not only be true, but also linked in some way to reality > formed in response to reality.
- First proposal: knowledge = true **justified** belief > justificationism
- A belief is justified if it is formed in accordance with a set of **rules** > rules of inference (deductive and inductive) and non-inference rules (e.g. do not form beliefs on the basis of hallucinations)

Recapitulation II

- Sometimes one follows the rules, but the belief is not knowledge, because it is false.
- Sometimes the belief is true, but one does not follow the rules, so that the belief is not knowledge.
- However, sometimes the belief is true, and one does follow the rules, but **we still think that the belief is not knowledge** > Gettier's counterexample, Russell's clock
- Therefore, justified true belief is not a good definition of knowledge.

Gettier Problems

- Someone is going to be promoted, but it has not been told yet who. The boss, who has never been mistaken, tells x that y will be promoted. X also knows (by checking) that y has a further feature *F* (say that y has 10 coins in his pocket). Thus x infers deductively that the very person who will be promoted is *F* – x is **justified** in believing that.
- Now as it happens x is the person who gets promotion (thus the boss was mistaken, for once), and it also happens that x is *F*. Thus it is still true that x's justified belief is true.
- Why is this a counterexample against justificationism?

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- Now as it happens x is the person who gets promotion (thus the boss was mistaken, for once), and it also happens that x is *F*. Thus it is still true that x's justified belief is true.
- Why is this a counterexample against justificationism?
 - X's belief that the person who will be promoted is *F* is arrived at in accordance with the rules: the boss has always been right, x checked the pocket himself, and x combined the two bits of information in a deductively valid way – he could not have done better, so his belief is justified.
 - The belief is also true.
 - Still, the belief does not constitute knowledge, because x is just lucky that he got it right with the belief that the person who will be promoted is *F*, for x was not thinking that s/he/her/himself would be that person – x thought y would be that person.

Russell's Clock

- You look at the clock, which indicates that it is 12pm exactly. So you form the belief that it is noon. This belief is true and it is justified, because you have checked this clock very often, and it always gives you the right time (what kind of rule is this?).
- However, as it happens, this clock stopped working exactly 24 hours ago, and thus coincidentally indicated the right time.
- Why is this a counterexample? The belief is true, and you could not have done a better job at forming the belief that it is 12pm – it is a justified true belief. Still the belief is only coincidentally true, and thus not knowledge.

Escaping from the Problem of Justificationism

- There seem to be four possibilities:
 1. You acknowledge that justificatory rules cannot be perfect, and thus that therefore they might always give the right result in the wrong way – while holding onto justificationism >> there might be cases that your justified true belief is knowledge, even though your justification only coincidentally works >> that seems weird!
 2. You interpret the word 'justified' much more strictly, so that any 'justification' which does not track reality, but works coincidentally, is not really a justification >>> but that amounts to giving up the core idea of justificationism, that by following the rules you arrive at a belief which is justified and true.
 3. You try to identify beliefs which cannot be false, and you infer from them all further beliefs and rules for justification deductively (why not inductively?) >> foundationalism.
 4. You try to give a completely different account altogether > reliabilism.

Foundationalism: The Strategy of Descartes

- René Descartes (1596-1650) wanted to establish that we can have knowledge which is absolutely certain, and that we can normally rely on our perceptions for knowledge.
- He used a 'sceptical strategy': he tried to doubt as much knowledge as possible > only that bit of knowledge which survived his doubt would be absolutely certain knowledge.
- From this absolutely certain foundation he then tried to infer other parts of what we would normally call knowledge.

Levels of Cartesian Doubt I

- 1. Our senses deceive us sometimes, so our perceptions might be wrong
 - > Descartes' own objection: some perceptions could be wrong, those which are dim, but not every – the clear ones not
- 2. We might be dreaming, and we do not have a way of determining whether we are or not; so everything we perceive might be wrong.
 - > Descartes' own objection: but the things appearing in our dreams are still taken from reality; so we cannot be wrong about them, e.g. space, time, quantity, magnitude
 - > thus we have thrown into doubt the whole of physics, but not mathematics

Levels of Cartesian Doubt II

- 3. God, or better, an evil demon could deceive me and give me experiences of space, time, quantity, magnitude
 - > We cannot find out whether there is this evil demon that is deceiving us.
 - > Therefore it seems that there is nothing one might not be wrong about!



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