PHIL 2606: Knowledge, Reason and Action
Lecture 1: What is Knowledge?

Readings:
Gettier, E. L. (1963), 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis* **23**, pp. 121-3.
Feldman, R. (1974), 'An Alleged Defect in Gettier Counter-examples', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* **52**, pp. 68-9.

1. Three questions we shall be concerned with over the next nine weeks:

   a. What is knowledge? (3 weeks)
   b. Can we have knowledge? (3 weeks)
   c. How is perception a source of knowledge? (3 weeks)

2. A distinction is often drawn between three kinds of knowledge; we shall be concerned with the first:

   a. Propositional knowledge
   b. Knowledge by acquaintance
   c. Knowledge-how[1]

3. Question for today: What is (propositional) knowledge? Or: What is it for S to know that P?[2]

4. An answer that was thought correct for a long time is the 'tripartite' or 'JTB' account:

   S knows that P iff:
   - It is true that P (the truth condition)
   - S believes that P (the belief condition)
   - S is justified in believing that P (the justification condition)[3]

   (In short: S knows that P iff S **j**ustifiably and **t**ruly **b**elieves that P.)

   The idea is that these three conditions are *individually necessary* and *jointly sufficient* for S to know that P.

5. Is it plausible to think that each of these three conditions is individually necessary?

6. Gettier (1963) argued that these conditions are not sufficient – it is possible for all three conditions to obtain and yet S not know that P (so the analysis *over*generates). One of his two counterexamples:

   > Smith and Jones have applied for a job. Smith has good evidence that (a) Jones will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. From (a), Smith deduces and hence is justified in believing that (b) the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. As it turns out, and unknown to Smith, it is Smith who will get the job, and Smith also has ten coins in his pocket. So, (b) is true, Smith believes that (b) is

[1] See Stanley, Jason and Williamson, Timothy (2001), 'Knowing How', *Journal of Philosophy* **98**, pp. 411-44.
[2] See Dancy, Jonathan (1985), *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell), ch. 2, and SEP 'Analysis of Knowledge'.
[3] See Plato's *Theatetus* and *Meno* (c. 400 B.C.), Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), and Ayer's *The Problem of Knowledge* (1956).

true, and Smith is justified in believing that (b) is true, but Smith does not *know* that (b) is true – a counterexample to the JTB account.

7. Possible responses:

   a. Deny that this is actually a counterexample, either by denying that all three conditions obtain, or by maintaining that Smith *does* know that (b) is true, or both.

      The most promising approach here is to deny that Smith is *justified* in believing that (b) is true.

   b. Accept this as a counterexample and modify the account.

      One approach here is to add an extra condition, to stop the account overgenerating.

8. Denying that Smith is justified.

   Problem for this approach: Smith's belief seems clearly to be justified, so if we claim that it is not then it raises concerns about other occasions on which we take ourselves to be justified – justification is harder than we think.

   If he is not justified, *why* is he not justified? Perhaps because he deduced (b) from a false belief. But then we can just modify the example so that he *is* justified (Feldman):

   > Smith is justified in believing (m): that Mr Nogot in his office has always been reliable and honest and has just announced that he owns a Ford (true). Smith deduces and hence is justified in believing (n): that someone in his office has always been reliable and honest and has just announced that he owns a Ford (true). Smith deduces and hence is justified in believing (h): that someone in his office owns a Ford (true). But on this occasion Mr Nogot is lying, and (h) is true because someone else in the office owns a Ford, so that Smith does not *know* that (h) is true.

9. Accepting the counterexample.

   We might try adding a fourth condition, to stop the account overgenerating:

   - S's justification for believing that P does not rely on any falsehoods (the 'no false lemmas' condition)

   But the modified example above will be a counterexample to this new analysis – it shows that the new account still overgenerates.

10. We will be considering other ways of modifying the account to stop it overgenerating.[4] And we will consider the possibility that no account can be given.

11. Final point: there are Gettier-style cases that do not involve inference.

[4] For a comprehensive survey, see Shope, Robert K. (1983), *The Analysis of Knowing: A Decade of Research* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).