

PHIL 2606: Knowledge, Reason and Action

Lecture 4: Undefeated justification

Reading:

Lehrer, K. and Paxson, T. (1969), 'Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief', *Journal of Philosophy* **66**, pp. 225-37.

1. L&P propose a counterexample to Chisholm's causal account. Their example involves a vase and a hologram in a box. Here is a variation (an extension of the farmer case):

Mr Farmer later discovers that he had mistaken a fake sheep for a real sheep, but that he is nevertheless right about there being a sheep in the paddock. This will not effect the causal etiology of his belief that there is a sheep in the paddock – it is still not causally connected in an appropriate way with the fact that there is a sheep in the paddock. But now he *knows* that there is a sheep in the paddock.

2. They also propose a counterexample to an account from Peter Unger:¹

S knows that P iff it is not at all accidental that S is right about it being the case that P.

Here is a farmer-style variation of their example:

It is not at all accidental that Mr Farmer is right about there being a sheep in his paddock – Mr Deceiver used the fake sheep to make sure that he formed this true belief. But Mr Farmer still does not *know* that there is a sheep in his paddock.

Unger might reply: it is to *some* extent accidental that Mr Farmer is right, because he might have had the same visual experience even if there had been no sheep in the paddock.

But, that leads to widespread skepticism: for any true belief that I form by perception it will be to some extent accidental that I am right – I might have had the same experience and yet been wrong.²

3. L&P offer their own account of knowledge. Following Brian Skyrms and Roderick Chisholm³, they point out that justifications are *defeasible* – that a justifying proposition can be *defeated*. Suppose I believe that today is Thursday, my justification being that yesterday was Wednesday. My justification is defeasible – it is defeated by the fact that yesterday was *not* Wednesday. (We can see that any false justifying proposition is defeated – by its negation (and maybe other facts as well).)
4. L&P diagnose the problem with, for example, the ten coins Gettier case as being that Smith's justification for believing that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket is *defeated*. They propose:⁴

S knows that P iff

- It is true that P

¹ See Unger, P. (1968), 'An Analysis of Factual Knowledge', *Journal of Philosophy* **65**, pp. 157-70.

² I am following L&P here.

³ See Chisholm, R. (1966), *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall), p. 48.

⁴ L&P refer the reader to an earlier version of this account: Lehrer, K. (1965), 'Knowledge, Truth, and Evidence', *Analysis* **35**, pp. 168-75.

- S believes that P
 - S is justified in believing that P
 - *Either* there is no proposition that justifies S in believing that P (basic knowledge), *or* there is and it is undefeated (nonbasic knowledge).
5. Note the distinction between *basic* and *nonbasic* knowledge. They allow that one may be justified in believing that P without there being any particular proposition that justifies one's belief that P (not just that you don't *know* of one, but that there *isn't* one – this is not the same thing as externalism).

Consider a gypsy crystal-ball gazer. The gypsy truly believes each prediction, but can supply no justifying proposition – she 'just knows'. If she *does* just know, then there is no justifying proposition, and this can only be a case of *basic* knowledge. But it might not be knowledge: to be knowledge, the gypsy must have some way of being right that justifies her beliefs.⁵

Another case: perceptually acquired knowledge? But there does seem to be a justifying proposition. How do you know that the book is red? Because I can *see* that it is red.

6. Note: JTB is fine for basic knowledge. But not fine for nonbasic knowledge, because of Gettier cases.
7. What is it to be defeated? Their answer:

If the proposition that J justifies S in believing that P, then this justification is defeated by the proposition that D iff:

- It is true that D
- The proposition that J and D does not justify S in believing that P
- S is justified in believing that it is false that D (to distinguish the Grabit case from the ten coins case)
- If the proposition that D entails that C and the proposition that J and C does not justify S in believing that P, then S is justified in believing that it is false that D (to rule out the St. Paul variation)

8. How does their account handle the Gettier cases?
- a. Ten coins case
 - b. The farmer case
9. Why is it better than the 'no false lemmas' account?

⁵ This is L&P's example.