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What is knowledge?

TOPICS:

- I. Knowledge as Justified True Belief
 - II. The Gettier Problem
-

In the previous chapter, we learnt about the critical tools for enquiry. This chapter begins our process of inquiry by exploring the question: “What is knowledge?”

I. KNOWLEDGE AS JUSTIFIED TRUE BELIEF

DIFFERENT TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

There are different types of knowledge. Generally philosophers identify three types of knowledge. Lehrer (1990) explains the three main types of knowledge:

(1) Competence

- to know means to have some special form of competence

E.g. I know the piano means I am competent in playing the piano.

E.g. I know the multiplication tables up to 10 means I can recall the products of any two numbers not exceeding 10.

E.g. I know the way to Townsville means I have attained the special competence needed to go to Townsville.

(2) Acquaintance

- to know means to be acquainted with something or someone

E.g. I know John means I am acquainted with John.

E.g. I know Queenstown means I am familiar with the places in Queenstown.

(3) Information

- to know is to recognise something as information

E.g. I know you are right means I know that what you say is true.

E.g. I know the rest mass of neutrino means I know that the neutrino has a rest mass of zero.

The three types of knowledge are related. For example, the information sense of the word “know” is often implicated in the other senses of the word. For example, if I know Queenstown, this means I have some information about Queenstown (e.g. I know how to find my way around Queenstown and I know that the food at Queenstown is good). The type of knowledge that is of primary interest to philosophers is informational knowledge or propositional knowledge. A proposition is a sentence that is either true or false.

THE CONDITIONS FOR KNOWLEDGE

Philosophers are interested in a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. Lawhead (2003) defines the terms as follows:

A necessary condition

Statement A is a necessary condition for Statement B if the truth of B requires the truth of A.

E.g. Air is necessary for humans to survive.

Air is necessary but not sufficient since humans also need food, water etc to survive.

A sufficient condition

Statement A is a sufficient condition for Statement B if the truth of A guarantees the truth of B.

E.g. A \$1 coin is sufficient to buy a can of coke which costs \$1 at the vending machine.

A \$1 coin is sufficient but not necessary as one can also pay using two 50-cent coins, etc, to add up to \$1.

Necessary and sufficient conditions

E.g. A minimum of 75% attendance and completion of all assignments are necessary and sufficient for the participants to be awarded a certificate at the end of the workshop.

The necessary and sufficient conditions are expressed by the phrase “if and only if”:

S knows that p if and only if ...

Traditionally, knowledge is defined as justified true belief. The conditions for knowledge are as follows:

S knows that p if and only if

- (1) it is true that p
- (2) S believes that p
- (3) S is justified in believing that p

Let us examine each of the conditions.

The Truth Condition

(1) It is true that p

What do we mean when we say that something is true? There are three main theories of truth.

(A) *Correspondence theory of truth*

“p” is true if it corresponds with a fact, some situation or state-of-affairs. For example, take this statement: “There is a library at Queenstown”. For this statement to be true, it must be the case that there is indeed a library at Queenstown. The statement corresponds with the fact that the library is there. Audi (2003) explains that the correspondence theory of truth is linked to realism in the sense that the proposition “There is a green field before me” is true provided that in reality there is a green field before me. Whether there is a green field before me is not dependent on what I think. In other words, the truth of our beliefs is not mind-dependent. This theory is associated with empiricism (Hamlyn, 1970). Empirical statements in science such as “Iron expands when heated” are based on direct perceptions of the world with the help of our senses.

One criticism about this theory is that it cannot explain statements where there is no obvious fact, situation or state-of-affairs to correspond to (Hospers, 1995). For example, statements such as “The hydrogen atom has one electron”, and “Honesty is a virtue” do not correspond to a particular fact or situation.

(B) *Coherence theory of truth*

A body of beliefs is said to be coherent when:

- (a) none of them is inconsistent with any others, and
- (b) each belief adds some probability to the others.

Take for example a hit-and-run road accident where a pedestrian y has been hit by a car and left to die. Suppose the police suspect that x is the driver who knocked down y . Even if this is true, there is no existing fact or situation to correspond with this belief since the accident has already taken place. But the police could establish the truth by relying on circumstantial evidence such as the testimony of eye-witnesses who saw x dashing off, evidence from x 's car which shows a dent, and x 's own admission that he was at the crime scene. All these evidence are consistent with one another, and serve to

add probability to the others. So this is an example of how the statement that “The police know that x is the driver who knocked down y ” is true. Hamlyn (1970) notes that this theory is associated with rationalism. For example in mathematical statements such as “ $1 + 1 = 2$ ”, what is important is that the beliefs are coherent. It is not necessary to get outside one’s thought to a direct confrontation with reality.

One criticism of this theory is that it is possible to have a coherent body of beliefs that is nevertheless false. For example, the religious beliefs of certain cult groups may be coherent but false.

A possible alternative is to combine the Correspondence and Coherence theories. If there is direct evidence, then the correspondence theory should be used. If there is no direct evidence, then coherence will be used as a test of truth. Hospers (1995) explains:

... the coherence theory is applicable to situations in which no direct evidence is possible; however, “coherence with a body of belief” is acceptable only if it is coherence with a true body of belief – and the word “true” in this last occurrence then means something like “correspondence with the facts” (p. 186).

(C) Pragmatic theory of truth

This view holds that true propositions are simply those that work, in the sense that they are successful in practice – pragmatically. This means that believing them, acting on them, and otherwise confirming them lead (at least in the long run) to positive results (Audi, 2003). A false proposition, therefore, would be one where there is disconfirmation with enough testing. For example, the statement that “I know that there is a library in Queenstown” simply means that I can borrow books from it and find materials there for my research. If I (or anyone) am able to do so repeatedly, then there is confirmation that the proposition is true.

One criticism is that a false proposition may work because it survives the testing. It may be the case that repeated testing yields the result and the falsity is never discovered.

The Belief Condition

(2) S believes that p (or S accepts that p)

S cannot be said to know p, even if p is true, if he or she does not personally believe it. While most philosophers are content with using “believes” for condition (2), Lehrer

(1990) argues that it is more accurate to use the word “accepts”. He notes that it is accepting something for the purpose of attaining truth (or epistemic purpose) and avoiding error with respect to the very thing one accepts. He points out that sometimes we believe things that we do not accept for the sake of felicity rather than a regard for truth. For example, a mother may believe that a loved one is safe for the pleasure of so believing, though there is no evidence to justify accepting this out of regard for truth.

The Justification Condition

(3) S is justified in believing that p (has good reasons in believing that p)

A belief that is true just because of luck does not qualify as knowledge. Beliefs that are lacking justification are false more often than not. However, on occasion, such beliefs happen to be true. The reason why knowledge is not the same as true belief is that knowledge requires evidence. To be justified is to have good evidence for believing in something.

Steup (2001) gives the following example: Suppose William takes a medication that has the following side effect: it causes him to be overcome with irrational fears. One of his fears is that he has cancer. This fear is so powerful that he starts believing it. Suppose further that, by sheer coincidence, he does have cancer. So his belief is true. Clearly, though, his belief does not amount to knowledge. But why not? Most people would agree that William does not know because his belief’s truth is due to luck (bad luck, in this case). Philosophers call a belief’s turning out to be true because of mere luck *epistemic luck*.

MUSIC VIDEO & RECORDING

My Happy Ending by Avril Lavigne

The song *My Happy Ending* and the accompanying music video by Avril Lavigne are excellent resources to help us know about the nature of knowledge. The song is about a girl (acted by Avril) who broke up with her boyfriend. The song started with Avril recalling the good times she had with her boyfriend, before they squabbled and broke up. The song expressed Avril’s negative feelings towards her ex-boyfriend, telling him that he had misunderstood her. The word “know” and “knew” are mentioned eight times in the song. Two types of knowledge are referred to in the song:

- (1) I know what they say. They tell you I'm difficult.

(2) But they don't know me.

The first type of knowledge is information. Here “they” refers to the ex-boyfriend’s friends. Apparently, these friends told her ex-boyfriend that she is difficult. So the statement can be rewritten as: “I know that they say I am difficult.” In the second case, the knowledge is acquaintance. Avril is refuting the claim by her ex-boyfriend’s friends that she is difficult. By asking whether these friends really know her, she is effectively saying that they do not know her well. The music video ends with Avril playing the guitar in a band. This is the third type of knowledge – the competence to play the guitar.

We could also apply what we have learnt about knowledge as justified true belief to the song. Avril told her ex-boyfriend in the song:

“You were all the things I thought I knew.”

What does “I thought I knew” mean? Avril is saying that all that she believed about her boyfriend turned out to be false. So it was not a case of “I know” but “I thought I knew”. We can identify a few characteristics about knowledge from here. The first point is that knowledge involves belief. To know that x is to believe that x . Secondly, there is a difference between knowledge and belief with respect to truth. One can believe that something is true when it is actually false, but not so for knowledge. Take for example the fact that today is Monday. I cannot know that today is Tuesday since today is actually Monday. I can only believe that today is Tuesday, or claim to know that today is Tuesday. Thirdly, knowledge involves evidence to justify one’s claim. She had initially thought that her boyfriend was honest, good and caring. From the song, Avril gives evidence of what her ex-boyfriend is really like, in her view: “All the things you hide from me, all the s*** that you do. ... thanks for acting like you cared”.

SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

There are different ways for us to obtain knowledge. Hospers (1995) identifies seven main sources of knowledge:

(1) Perception (more will be covered under Empiricism)

E.g. You are asked: “How do you know that there is a book before you?” Your reply is: “I see and touch it.” Your senses (seeing and touching) help you to know that.

(2) Reason (more will be covered under Rationalism)

E.g. You are asked: “How do you know that A is smaller than C?” Your reply is: “If A is smaller than B, and B is smaller than C, then A is larger than C.” Your ability to think logically helps you to know that.

(3) Introspection

E.g. “I feel so peaceful today, I don’t know why”. In this case, the person knows the truth of how he/she feels or what he/she is thinking of.

(4) Memory

E.g. You are asked: “How do you know that you have lunch just now?” Your reply is: “I remember it.” Your ability to recount events that have taken place helps you to know that.

(5) Faith

E.g. You are asked: “How do you know that God exists?” Your reply is: “I just know it. I trust God.” Your faith or trust in God is the source of your knowledge that God exists.

(6) Intuition

E.g. You are asked: “How do you know that that was the way out of the maze?” Your reply is: “I have a gut feeling that that is the way.” Your intuition helps you to know that.

(7) Testimony

E.g. You are asked: “How do you know that Singapore became independent in 1965?” Your reply is: “I read it in my textbook.” The testimony or words of experts help you to know that.

FILM

The Village written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan (2004)

The Village is a thriller about an isolated, close-knit community in old Pennsylvania. The villagers believe that there are harmful creatures living in the forbidden woods just beyond their village. According to the village elders, a pact had been agreed upon

between the villagers and the creatures: both parties are not to trespass on each other's territories. However things changed when one brave young man, Lucius Hunt, publicly expressed his desire to go beyond the woods to seek medical supplies from the towns beyond the wood. He felt that the villagers, having been cloistered in the village, lacked the necessary medical supplies which could save lives. His act led to strange phenomena happening: the villagers heard strange sounds, saw carcasses appearing mysteriously, saw markings on their doors, and some even spotted "creatures" cloaked in red in the village. Suppose we consider this proposition by applying the necessary and sufficient conditions for justified true belief:

The villagers know that there are creatures around them.

- (1) There are creatures around them.
- (2) The villagers believe that there are creatures around them.
- (3) The villagers are justified in believing that there are creatures around them.

We shall put aside condition (1) and focus on conditions (2) and (3) first. (2) is fulfilled as the film clearly shows that the villagers believe that there are creatures lurking in the forest surrounding them. (3) is also fulfilled as the film shows how the villagers are led to believe so from a number of sources.

(a) Perception

Many villagers heard the strange sounds that came from afar which are likely to originate from the creatures. At least one saw tall beings cloaked in red – the forbidden colour associated with the creatures.

(b) Reason

Many villagers saw the animal carcasses with their fur stripped, some hanging from the door. As mentioned by one villager, these carcasses could not have been killed by coyotes since they were hanged from a high place on the door and coyotes would not be able to reach that height. Through this process of reasoning, they were able to infer that the animals were killed by the creatures. There were markings on the door which the villagers interpreted to be warnings from the creatures.

(c) Memory

The villagers were able to explain the strange happenings as they remembered the “pact” that was made between the villagers and the creatures. They concluded that the happenings were the consequences of them (specifically Lucius) breaking the agreement.

(d) Testimony

Their belief in the creatures was also based on the testimony of those who had encountered the creatures. There was the guard who saw the creature and rang the bell, and two boys who claimed to have seen the creatures. Most importantly, the villagers trusted the words of the elders who taught them from young about the creatures.

How about condition (1)? As the film proceeds, it was revealed that the belief in the harmful creatures was a lie fabricated by the village elders themselves. The sightings of the creatures and the strange phenomena were the doings of the elders to perpetuate the lie. All these were done because the village elders wanted to protect the villagers and preserve their innocence by stopping them from going to the towns. The “knowledge” the villagers have about the creatures turns out to be a false belief. Since condition (1) is not fulfilled, it is not true that the villagers know that there are creatures around them.

II. THE GETTIER PROBLEM

THE GETTIER PROBLEM

We have seen how knowledge is traditionally defined as justified true belief. Are the three conditions for knowledge really necessary and sufficient? We shall leave aside the question of whether the conditions are necessary (especially the justification condition) for the time being, and focus on whether the three conditions are sufficient. Gettier (1963) was among the first to argue that the three conditions are not sufficient. He does so by presenting a counterexample. A counterexample is any experiment of fact or thought which would falsify the resulting equivalence (Lehrer, 1990). A number of philosophers have also given their examples to show that the three conditions are not sufficient.

Example 2.1 (taken from Chisholm, 1989)

M knows that there is a sheep in the field.

- (1) It is true that there is a sheep in the field.
- (2) M believes that there is a sheep in the field.
- (3) M is justified to believe that there is a sheep in the field.

This is a case where all the three conditions are fulfilled. It is true that there is a sheep in the field, and M believes so. M is also justified in his belief as he knows what a sheep looks like, actually looks into a field, and spots what he takes to be a sheep. But what he thinks is a sheep is actually a dog. But at the same time, there is another animal further away that he sees. He thinks that animal is not a sheep but what he does not think is a sheep is a sheep. It is a case of coincidence that there is indeed a sheep on the field. Would we still say that M knows that there is a sheep in the field, although all the three conditions are fulfilled?

Example 2.2 (adapted from Southwell, 2004)

Fred knows that Sam is in his room.

- (1) It is true that Sam is in his room.
- (2) Fred believes that Sam is in his room.
- (3) Fred is justified to believe that Sam is in his room.

In this case, all the three conditions are fulfilled. Sam is in his room, Fred believes that he is and is justified in doing so by the experience of seeing him there. However, unknown to Fred, what he sees in Sam's room is not Sam at all, but his twin brother Tim. It is true that Sam is in the room but is just out of sight (e.g. he is hiding under the bed). It cannot be said to be a genuine case for knowledge because Fred is only correct through coincidence.

Example 2.3 (adapted from *Calvin and Hobbes* Comic Strip)

Another example is adapted from *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strips. There was one story about Calvin having invented a duplicator capable of creating human duplicates (Watterson, 1991, p. 58). The comic strip tells of Calvin successfully duplicating himself

so that the house was full of Calvin duplicates. However, Calvin's father is unaware of this so he takes the duplicates to be Calvin himself. When the duplicate greets Calvin's father when he returns home from work, Calvin's father assumes that the duplicate is Calvin, and that Calvin is at home.

Calvin's father knows that Calvin is at home.

- (1) It is true that Calvin is at home.
- (2) Calvin's father believes that Calvin is at home.
- (3) He is justified to believe that Calvin is at home.

All the three conditions are fulfilled. Calvin is at home but is in the bedroom with Hobbes. Calvin's father believes that Calvin is at home, and he is justified to believe so since Calvin's father knows what Calvin looks like, and Calvin usually greets him when he comes home after work. But Calvin's father actually sees the duplicates, not Calvin. In this case, can we really say that Calvin's father KNOWS that Calvin is at home?

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Because of the Gettier problem, philosophers generally agree that the three conditions are not sufficient. Some think that there is a need to add a fourth condition for knowledge. But what they cannot agree is what the fourth condition is. The fourth condition is supposed to be part of the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. This means that if the fourth condition is accepted, all the four conditions must be fulfilled for any knowledge claims.

Many of the proposed fourth conditions are criticised due to the following problems:

(1) **The condition is too vague**

Some propose that the belief should be based on a reliable method, be convincing, or be based on widely accepted or conclusive reasons. But it is difficult to define what one means by "reliable", "convincing", "widely accepted" or "conclusive".

(2) The condition is too strict

Some suggest that the fourth condition should stipulate that there must be a causal connection between the justification and belief. In Example 2.3, this means that Calvin's father's belief that Calvin is at home must be directly linked to his justification of seeing Calvin. The fact that Calvin's father saw the duplicates and not Calvin means that there is no causal connection between his justification and belief. Southwell (2004) points out that this condition is too strict as it makes it impossible for us to make knowledge claims about inductive arguments. He gives the example of the commonsensical claim that "All humans are mortal". He asks: What is the cause of this belief? If it is the fact that individuals die, then this cannot be said to cause the belief that all people die (so there appears to be no direct link between the facts and the belief). On the other hand, the fact that humans die – because it is an inductive argument – cannot be known by me. However, would we really say that we do not know that "all humans are mortal"?

Others propose that all the alternatives must be proven to be false, or that all the evidence must be made available to the knower. For instance, in Example 2.3, this means that Calvin's father has to walk around the whole house and interview Calvin's mother before he can claim that he knows that Calvin is at home. However, all these conditions are too strict as they seem to deny a number of claims that we would say we know. For example, we normally claim to know that we are awake and not dreaming, that we had breakfast this morning, and that we are surrounded by other human beings. It is too demanding to expect a person who wishes to utter these claims to prove that all the other options are ruled out or to produce evidence for them. This condition also equates knowledge with the absence of all forms of doubts, and demands that the knower conducts a thorough investigation before he or she can justifiably claim to know anything.

(3) The condition is too weak

In many Gettier-type of examples, there is a fact unknown to the subject which would defeat his or her justification should he or she be aware of it. So the proposed fourth condition is that there should be no truth which when added to the reasons justifying the belief, would make it no longer justified. For Example 2.3, this means that the truth that duplicates of Calvin are at home serves to defeat Calvin's father's justification that Calvin is at home. But this condition is too weak as it still allows other Gettier-style problems to occur even when no false belief is present. Zagzebski (2002) gives this example from the nature of induction. A doctor, Dr Jones, has very good inductive

evidence that her patient, Smith, is suffering from virus X. She observes that Smith exhibits all of the symptoms of this virus, and her laboratory tests also shows that virus X and no other known virus is present, But Smith is actually suffering from a distinct and unknown virus Y, not virus X. But Smith has very recently contracted virus X, but so recently that he does not yet exhibit symptoms caused by X. The laboratory evidence also does not show that Smith has virus X. In this case, all the evidence that Dr Jones has justifies her claim that Smith has X, and there is no information accessible to her that defeats her justification. But the fact that Smith has X has nothing to do with the evidence available to Dr Jones. In this case, Dr Jones' belief that Smith has virus X is true, justified, and undefeated, but it is not knowledge.

There have been other proposals of the fourth condition and suggested definitions of knowledge (e.g. see Hospers, 1995; Zagzebski, 2002). Despite their disagreements on the fourth condition, philosophers generally agree that knowledge requires true belief plus something.

PHILOSOPHY TEXT

Theaetetus by Plato (360 BC)

Text	Comments
Soc. Then, once more, what shall we say that knowledge is? – for we are not going to lose heart as yet.	
Theaet. Certainly, I shall not lose heart, if you do not.	
Soc. What definition will be most consistent with our former views?	
Theaet. I cannot think of any but our old one, Socrates.	
Soc. What was it?	
Theaet. Knowledge was said by us to be true opinion; and true opinion is surely unerring, and the results which follow from it are all noble and good.	Knowledge involves true opinion (belief).
Soc. He who led the way into the river, Theaetetus, said “The experiment will show”; and perhaps if we go forward in the search, we	

Text	Comments
<p>may stumble upon the thing which we are looking for; but if we stay where we are, nothing will come to light.</p>	
<p>Theaet. Very true; let us go forward and try.</p>	
<p>Soc. The trail soon comes to an end, for a whole profession is against us.</p>	
<p>Theaet. How is that, and what profession do you mean?</p>	
<p>Soc. The profession of the great wise ones who are called orators and lawyers; for these persuade men by their art and make them think whatever they like, but they do not teach them. Do you imagine that there are any teachers in the world so clever as to be able to convince others of the truth about acts of robbery or violence, of which they were not eyewitnesses, while a little water is flowing in the clepsydra?</p>	
<p>Theaet. Certainly not, they can only persuade them.</p>	
<p>Soc. And would you not say that persuading them is making them have an opinion?</p>	
<p>Theaet. To be sure.</p>	
<p>Soc. When, therefore, judges are justly persuaded about matters which you can know only by seeing them, and not in any other way, and when thus judging of them from report they attain a true opinion about them, they judge without knowledge and yet are rightly persuaded, if they have judged well.</p>	
<p>Theaet. Certainly.</p>	
<p>Soc. And yet, O my friend, if true opinion in law courts and knowledge are the same, the perfect judge could not have judged rightly without knowledge; and therefore I must infer that they are not the same.</p>	
<p>Theaet. That is a distinction, Socrates, which I have heard made by some one else, but I had forgotten it. He said that true opinion, combined with reason, was knowledge, but that the opinion which had no reason was out of the sphere of knowledge; and that things of which there is no rational account are not knowable – such was the singular expression</p>	<p>Knowledge involves true opinion (belief) and reason.</p>

Text	Comments
<p>which he used – and that things which have a reason or explanation are knowable.</p>	
<p>Soc. Excellent; but then, how did he distinguish between things which are and are not “knowable”? I wish that you would repeat to me what he said, and then I shall know whether you and I have heard the same tale.</p>	
<p>Theaet. I do not know whether I can recall it; but if another person would tell me, I think that I could follow him.</p>	
<p>Soc. Let me give you, then, a dream in return for a dream: – Methought that I too had a dream, and I heard in my dream that the primeval letters or elements out of which you and I and all other things are compounded, have no reason or explanation; you can only name them, but no predicate can be either affirmed or denied of them, for in the one case existence, in the other non-existence is already implied, neither of which must be added, if you mean to speak of this or that thing by itself alone. It should not be called itself, or that, or each, or alone, or this, or the like; for these go about everywhere and are applied to all things, but are distinct from them; whereas, if the first elements could be described, and had a definition of their own, they would be spoken of apart from all else. But none of these primeval elements can be defined; they can only be named, for they have nothing but a name, and the things which are compounded of them, as they are complex, are expressed by a combination of names, for the combination of names is the essence of a definition. Thus, then, the elements or letters are only objects of perception, and cannot be defined or known; but the syllables or combinations of them are known and expressed, and are apprehended by true opinion. When, therefore, any one forms the true opinion of anything without rational explanation, you may say that his mind is truly exercised, but has no knowledge; for he who cannot give and receive a reason for a thing, has no knowledge of that thing; but when he adds rational explanation, then, he is perfected in knowledge and may be all that I have been denying of him. Was that the form in which the dream appeared to you?</p>	<p>He who cannot give a reason for his opinion has no knowledge.</p>
<p>Theaet. Precisely.</p>	

Text	Comments
<p>Soc. And you allow and maintain that true opinion, combined with definition or rational explanation, is knowledge?</p>	<p>Knowledge involves (1) truth (2) opinion (belief) (3) rational explanation (justification)</p>
<p>Theaet. Exactly.</p>	
<p>Soc. Then may we assume, Theaetetus, that to-day, and in this casual manner, we have found a truth which in former times many wise men have grown old and have not found?</p>	
<p>Theaet. At any rate, Socrates, I am satisfied with the present statement.</p>	
<p>Soc. Which is probably correct – for how can there be knowledge apart from definition and true opinion?</p>	

LITERATURE TEXT 1

The Bottle Imp by Robert Louis Stevenson (1893)

This is a story of a man Keawe who met a man who wanted to sell him a bottle with an imp inside. The seller claimed that the imp could grant the owner any desires he or she asked for. Despite earlier disbelief, Keawe was convinced and bought the bottle.

Discussion Questions

- (1) How did Keawe know that the imp had the power to grant him his desire? Is this knowledge justified true belief?
- (2) “How am I to know that this is all true?” asked Keawe.”

What is the definition of “truth” used by Keawe?

- (3) How does the story illustrate that knowledge comes with responsibility and (unintended) consequences?

There was a man of the Island of Hawaii, whom I shall call Keawe; for the truth is, he still lives, and his name must be kept secret; but the place of his birth was not far from Honaunau, where the bones of Keawe the Great lie hidden in a cave. This man was poor, brave, and active; he could read and write like a schoolmaster; he was a first-rate mariner besides, sailed for some time in the island steamers, and steered a whaleboat on the Hamakua coast. At length it came in Keawe's mind to have a sight of the great world and foreign cities, and he shipped on a vessel bound to San Francisco.

This is a fine town, with a fine harbour, and rich people uncountable; and in particular, there is one hill which is covered with palaces. Upon this hill Keawe was one day taking a walk with his pocket full of money, viewing the great houses upon either hand with pleasure. "What fine houses these are!" he was thinking, "and how happy must those people be who dwell in them, and take no care for the morrow!" The thought was in his mind when he came abreast of a house that was smaller than some others, but all finished and beautified like a toy; the steps of that house shone like silver, and the borders of the garden bloomed like garlands, and the windows were bright like diamonds; and Keawe stopped and wondered at the excellence of all he saw. So stopping, he was aware of a man that looked forth upon him through a window so clear that Keawe could see him as you see a fish in a pool upon the reef. The man was elderly, with a bald head and a black beard; and his face was heavy with sorrow, and he bitterly sighed. And the truth of it is, that as Keawe looked in upon the man, and the man looked out upon Keawe, each envied the other.

All of a sudden, the man smiled and nodded, and beckoned Keawe to enter, and met him at the door of the house.

"This is a fine house of mine," said the man, and bitterly sighed. "Would you not care to view the chambers?"

So he led Keawe all over it, from the cellar to the roof, and there was nothing there that was not perfect of its kind, and Keawe was astonished.

"Truly," said Keawe, "this is a beautiful house; if I lived in the like of it I should be laughing all day long. How comes it, then, that you should be sighing?"

"There is no reason," said the man, "why you should not have a house in all points similar to this, and finer, if you wish. You have some money, I suppose?"

"I have fifty dollars," said Keawe; "but a house like this will cost more than fifty dollars."

The man made a computation. "I am sorry you have no more," said he, "for it may raise you trouble in the future; but it shall be yours at fifty dollars."

"The house?" asked Keawe.

"No, not the house," replied the man; "but the bottle. For, I must tell you, although I appear to you so rich and fortunate, all my fortune, and this house itself and its garden, came out of a bottle not much bigger than a pint. This is it."

And he opened a lockfast place, and took out a round-bellied bottle with a long neck; the glass of it was white like milk, with changing rainbow colours in the grain. Withinsides something obscurely moved, like a shadow and a fire.

"This is the bottle," said the man; and, when Keawe laughed, "You do not believe me?" he added. "Try, then, for yourself. See if you can break it."

So Keawe took the bottle up and dashed it on the floor till he was weary; but it jumped on the floor like a child's ball, and was not injured.

"This is a strange thing," said Keawe. "For by the touch of it, as well as by the look, the bottle should be of glass."

"Of glass it is," replied the man, sighing more heavily than ever; "but the glass of it was tempered in the flames of hell. An imp lives in it, and that is the shadow we behold there moving; or so I suppose. If any man buy this bottle the imp is at his command; all that he desires – love, fame, money, houses like this house, ay, or a city like this city – all are his at the word uttered. Napoleon had this bottle, and by it he grew to be the king of the world; but he sold it at the last, and fell. Captain Cook had this bottle, and by it he found his way to so many islands; but he, too sold it, and was slain upon Hawaii. For, once it is sold, the power goes and the protection; and unless a man remain content with what he has, ill will befall him."

"And yet you talk of selling it yourself?" Keawe said.

"I have all I wish, and I am growing elderly," replied the man. "There is one thing the imp cannot do – he cannot prolong life; and, it would not be fair to conceal from you, there is a drawback to the bottle; for if a man die before he sells it, he must burn in hell for ever."

"To be sure, that is a drawback and no mistake," cried Keawe. "I would not meddle with the thing. I can do without a house, thank God; but there is one thing I could not be doing with one particle, and that is to be damned."

"Dear me, you must not run away with things," returned the man. "All you have to do is to use the power of the imp in moderation, and then sell it to someone else, as I do to you, and finish your life in comfort."

"Well, I observe two things," said Keawe. "All the time you keep sighing like a maid in love, that is one; and, for the other, you sell this bottle very cheap."

"I have told you already why I sigh," said the man. "It is because I fear my health is breaking up; and, as you said yourself, to die and go to the devil is a pity for anyone. As for why I sell so cheap, I must explain to you there is a peculiarity about the bottle. Long ago, when the devil brought it first upon earth, it was extremely expensive, and was sold first of all to Prester John for many millions of dollars; but it cannot be sold at all, unless sold at a loss. If you sell it for as much as you paid for it, back it comes to you again like a homing pigeon. It follows that the price has kept falling in these centuries, and the bottle is now remarkably cheap. I bought it myself from one of my great neighbours on this hill, and the price I paid was only ninety dollars. I could sell it for as high as eighty-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents, but not a penny dearer, or back the thing must come to me. Now, about this there are two bothers. First, when you offer a bottle so singular for eighty odd dollars, people suppose you to be jesting. And second – but there is no hurry about that – and I need not go into it. Only remember it must be coined money that you sell it for."

"How am I to know that this is all true?" asked Keawe.

"Some of it you can try at once," replied the man. "Give me your fifty dollars, take the bottle, and wish your fifty dollars back into your pocket. If that does not happen, I pledge you my honour I will cry off the bargain and restore your money."

"You are not deceiving me?" said Keawe.

The man bound himself with a great oath.

"Well, I will risk that much," said Keawe, "for that can do no harm." And he paid over his money to the man, and the man handed him the bottle.

"Imp of the bottle," said Keawe, "I want my fifty dollars back." And sure enough he had scarce said the word before his pocket was as heavy as ever.

"To be sure this is a wonderful bottle," said Keawe.

"And now, good morning to you, my fine fellow, and the devil go with you for me!" said the man.

"Hold on," said Keawe, "I don't want any more of this fun. Here, take your bottle back."

"You have bought it for less than I paid for it," replied the man, rubbing his hands. "It is yours now; and, for my part, I am only concerned to see the back of you." And with that he rang for his Chinese servant, and had Keawe shown out of the house.

Now, when Keawe was in the street, with the bottle under his arm, he began to think. "If all is true about this bottle, I may have made a losing bargain," thinks he. "But perhaps the man was

only fooling me." The first thing he did was to count his money; the sum was exact – forty-nine dollars American money, and one Chili piece. "That looks like the truth," said Keawe. "Now I will try another part."

The streets in that part of the city were as clean as a ship's decks, and though it was noon, there were no passengers. Keawe set the bottle in the gutter and walked away. Twice he looked back, and there was the milky, round-bellied bottle where he left it. A third time he looked back, and turned a corner; but he had scarce done so, when something knocked upon his elbow, and behold! it was the long neck sticking up; and as for the round belly, it was jammed into the pocket of his pilot-coat.

"And that looks like the truth," said Keawe.

The next thing he did was to buy a cork-screw in a shop, and go apart into a secret place in the fields. And there he tried to draw the cork, but as often as he put the screw in, out it came again, and the cork as whole as ever.

"This is some new sort of cork," said Keawe, and all at once he began to shake and sweat, for he was afraid of that bottle.

On his way back to the port-side, he saw a shop where a man sold shells and clubs from the wild islands, old heathen deities, old coined money, pictures from China and Japan, and all manner of things that sailors bring in their sea-chests. And here he had an idea. So he went in and offered the bottle for a hundred dollars. The man of the shop laughed at him at the first, and offered him five; but indeed, it was a curious bottle – such glass was never blown in any human glass-works, so prettily the colours shown under the milky white, and so strangely the shadow hovered in the midst; so, after he had disputed awhile after the manner of his kind, the shopman gave Keawe sixty silver dollars for the thing, and set it on a shelf in the midst of his window.

"Now," said Keawe, "I have sold that for sixty which I bought for fifty – so, to say truth, a little less, because one of my dollars was from Chili. Now I shall know the truth upon another point."

So he went back on board his ship, and, when he opened his chest, there was the bottle, and had come more quickly than himself. Now Keawe had a mate on board whose name was Lopaka.

"What ails you?" said Lopaka, "that you stare in your chest?"

They were alone in the ship's fore-castle, and Keawe bound him to secrecy, and told all.

"This is a very strange affair," said Lopaka; "and I fear you will be in trouble about this bottle. But there is one point very clear – that you are sure of the trouble, and you had better have the profit in the bargain. Make up your mind what you want with it; give the order, and if it is done

as you desire, I will buy the bottle myself; for I have an idea of my own to get a schooner, and go trading through the islands."

"That is not my idea," said Keawe; "but to have a beautiful house and garden on the Kona Coast, where I was born, the sun shining in at the door, flowers in the garden, glass in the windows, pictures on the walls, and toys and fine carpets on the tables, for all the world like the house I was in this day – only a storey higher, and with balconies all about like the king's palace; and to live there without care and make merry with my friends and relatives."

"Well," said Lopaka, "let us carry it back with us to Hawaii, and if all comes true, as you suppose, I will buy the bottle, as I said, and ask a schooner."

Upon that they were agreed, and it was not long before the ship returned to Honolulu, carrying Keawe and Lopaka, and the bottle. They were scarce come ashore when they met a friend upon the beach, who began at once to condole with Keawe.

"I do not know what I am to be condoled about," said Keawe.

"Is it possible you have not heard," said the friend, "your uncle – that good old man – is dead, and your cousin – that beautiful boy – was drowned at sea?"

Keawe was filled with sorrow, and, beginning to weep and to lament he forgot about the bottle. But Lopaka was thinking to himself, and presently, when Keawe's grief was a little abated, "I have been thinking," said Lopaka. "Had not your uncle lands in Hawaii, in the district of Kau?"

"No," said Keawe, "not in Kau; they are on the mountain-side – a little way south of Hookena."

"These lands will now be yours?" asked Lopaka.

"And so they will," says Keawe, and began again to lament for his relatives.

"No," said Lopaka, "do not lament at present. I have a thought in my mind. How if this should be the doing of the bottle? For here is the place ready for your house."

"If this be so," cried Keawe, "it is a very ill way to serve me by killing my relatives. But it may be, indeed; for it was in just such a station that I saw the house with my mind's eye."

"The house, however, is not yet built," said Lopaka.

"No, nor like to be!" said Keawe, "for though my uncle has some coffee and ava and bananas, it will not be more than will keep me in comfort; and the rest of that land is the black lava."

"Let us go to the lawyer," said Lopaka; "I have still this idea in my mind."

Now, when they came to the lawyer's, it appeared Keawe's uncle had grown monstrous rich in the last days, and there was a fund of money.

"And here is the money for the house!" cried Lopaka.

"If you are thinking of a new house," said the lawyer, "here is the card of a new architect, of whom they tell me great things."

"Better and better!" cried Lopaka. "Here is all made plain for us. Let us continue to obey orders."

So they went to the architect, and he had drawings of houses on his table.

"You want something out of the way," said the architect. "How do you like this?" and he handed a drawing to Keawe.

Now, when Keawe set eyes on the drawing, he cried out aloud, for it was the picture of his thought exactly drawn.

"I am for this house," thought he. "Little as I like the way it comes to me, I am in for it now, and I may as well take the good along with the evil."

So he told the architect all that he wished, and how he would have that house furnished, and about the pictures on the wall and the knick-knacks on the tables; and he asked the man plainly for how much he would undertake the whole affair.

The architect put many questions, and took his pen and made a computation; and when he had done he named the very sum that Keawe had inherited.

Lopaka and Keawe looked at one another and nodded.

"It is quite clear," thought Keawe, "that I am to have this house, whether or no. It comes from the devil, and I fear I will get little good by that; and of one thing I am sure, I will make no more wishes as long as I have this bottle. But with the house I am saddled, and I may as well take the good along with the evil."

So he made his terms with the architect, and they signed a paper; and Keawe and Lopaka took ship again and sailed to Australia; for it was concluded between them they should not interfere at all, but leave the architect and the bottle imp to build and to adorn that house at their own pleasure.

LITERATURE TEXT 2*Luck* by Mark Twain (1891)

This is a story of Lieutenant-General Scoresby who achieved great success in life not because he knew much, but because of incredible luck. The story is told by a clergyman who was Scoresby's instructor in the military academy and knew the truth about Scoresby.

Discussion Questions

- (1) Scoresby achieved top marks in his exams with "purely superficial cram" and drilling. Do you think he "knows" about Caesar's history and Mathematics?
- (2) Do you think Scoresby's knowledge is a case of epistemic luck?

[NOTE. – This is not a fancy sketch. I got it from a clergyman who was an instructor at Woolwich forty years ago, and who vouched for its truth. — M. T.]

It was at a banquet in London in honour of one of the two or three conspicuously illustrious English military names of this generation. For reasons which will presently appear, I will withhold his real name and titles, and call him Lieutenant-General Lord Arthur Scoresby, V. C., K. C. B., etc., etc., etc. What a fascination there is in a renowned name! There say the man, in actual flesh, whom I had heard of so many thousands of times since that day, thirty years before, when his name shot suddenly to the zenith from a Crimean battle-field, to remain for ever celebrated. It was food and drink to me to look, and look, and look at that demigod; scanning, searching, noting: the quietness, the reserve, the noble gravity of his countenance; the simple honesty that expressed itself all over him; the sweet unconsciousness of his greatness – unconsciousness of the hundreds of admiring eyes fastened upon him, unconsciousness of the deep, loving, sincere worship welling out of the breasts of those people and flowing toward him.

The clergyman at my left was an old acquaintance of mine – clergyman now, but had spent the first half of his life in the camp and field, and as an instructor in the military school at Woolwich. Just at the moment I have been talking about, a veiled and singular light glimmered in his eyes, and he leaned down and muttered confidentially to me – indicating the hero of the banquet with a gesture, – "Privately – his glory is an accident – just a product of incredible luck."

This verdict was a great surprise to me. If its subject had been Napoleon, or Socrates, or Solomon, my astonishment could not have been greater.

Some days later came the explanation of this strange remark, and this is what the Reverend told me.

About forty years ago I was an instructor in the military academy at Woolwich. I was present in one of the sections when young Scoresby underwent his preliminary examination. I was touched to the quick with pity; for the rest of the class answered up brightly and handsomely, while he – why, dear me, he didn't know anything, so to speak. He was evidently good, and sweet, and lovable, and guileless; and so it was exceedingly painful to see him stand there, as serene as a graven image, and deliver himself of answers which were veritably miraculous for stupidity and ignorance. All the compassion in me was aroused in his behalf. I said to myself, when he comes to be examined again, he will be flung over, of course; so it will be simple a harmless act of charity to ease his fall as much as I can.

I took him aside, and found that he knew a little of Caesar's history; and as he didn't know anything else, I went to work and drilled him like a galley-slave on a certain line of stock questions concerning Caesar which I knew would be used. If you'll believe me, he went through with flying colours on examination day! He went through on that purely superficial "cram", and got compliments, too, while others, who knew a thousand times more than he, got plucked. By some strangely lucky accident – an accident not likely to happen twice in a century – he was asked no question outside of the narrow limits of his drill.

It was stupefying. Well, although through his course I stood by him, with something of the sentiment which a mother feels for a crippled child; and he always saved himself – just by miracle, apparently.

Now of course the thing that would expose him and kill him at last was mathematics. I resolved to make his death as easy as I could; so I drilled him and crammed him, and crammed him and drilled him, just on the line of questions which the examiner would be most likely to use, and then launched him on his fate. Well, sir, try to conceive of the result: to my consternation, he took the first prize! And with it he got a perfect ovation in the way of compliments.

Sleep! There was no more sleep for me for a week. My conscience tortured me day and night. What I had done I had done purely through charity, and only to ease the poor youth's fall – I never had dreamed of any such preposterous result as the thing that had happened. I felt as guilty and miserable as the creator of Frankenstein. Here was a wooden-head whom I had put in the way of glittering promotions and prodigious responsibilities, and but one thing could happen: he and his responsibilities would all go to ruin together at the first opportunity.

The Crimean war had just broken out. Of course there had to be a war, I said to myself: we couldn't have peace and give this donkey a chance to die before he is found out. I waited for the earthquake. It came. And it made me reel when it did come. He was actually gazetted to a captaincy in a marching regiment! Better men grow old and gray in the service before they climb

to a sublimity like that. And who could ever have foreseen that they would go and put such a load of responsibility on such green and inadequate shoulders? I could just barely have stood it if they had made him a cornet; but a captain – think of it! I thought my hair would turn white.

Consider what I did – I who so loved repose and inaction. I said to myself, I am responsible to the country for this, and I must go along with him and protect the country against him as far as I can. So I took my poor little capital that I had saved up through years of work and grinding economy, and went with a sigh and bought a cornetcy in his regiment, and away we went to the field.

And there – oh dear, it was awful. Blunders? why, he never did anything but blunder. But, you see, nobody was in the fellow's secret – everybody had him focused wrong, and necessarily misinterpreted his performance every time – consequently they took his idiotic blunders for inspirations of genius; they did honestly! His mildest blunders were enough to make a man in his right mind cry; and they did make me cry – and rage and rave too, privately. And the thing that kept me always in a sweat of apprehension was the fact that every fresh blunder he made increased the lustre of his reputation! I kept saying to myself, he'll get so high that when discovery does finally come it will be like the sun falling out of the sky.

He went right along up, from grade to grade, over the dead bodies of his superiors, until at last, in the hottest moment of the battle of. ... down went our colonel, and my heart jumped into my mouth, for Scoresby was next in rank! Now for it, said I; we'll all land in Sheol in ten minutes, sure.

The battle was awfully hot; the allies were steadily giving way all over the field. Our regiment occupied a position that was vital; a blunder now must be destruction. At this critical moment, what does this immortal fool do but detach the regiment from its place and order a charge over a neighbouring hill where there wasn't a suggestion of an enemy! "There you go!" I said to myself; "this is the end at last."

And away we did go, and were over the shoulder of the hill before the insane movement could be discovered and stopped. And what did we find? An entire and unsuspected Russian army in reserve! And what happened? We were eaten up? That is necessarily what would have happened in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. But no; those Russians argued that no single regiment would come browsing around there at such a time. It must be the entire English army, and that the sly Russian game was detected and blocked; so they turned tail, and away they went, pell-mell, over the hill and down into the field, in wild confusion, and we after them; they themselves broke the solid Russia centre in the field, and tore through, and in no time there was the most tremendous rout you ever saw, and the defeat of the allies was turned into a sweeping and splendid victory! Marshal Canrobert looked on, dizzy with astonishment, admiration, and delight; and sent right off for Scoresby, and hugged him, and decorated him on the field in presence of all the armies!

And what was Scoresby's blunder that time? Merely the mistaking his right hand for his left – that was all. An order had come to him to fall back and support our right; and instead he fell forward and went over the hill to the left. But the name he won that day as a marvellous military genius filled the world with his glory, and that glory will never fade while history books last.

He is just as good and sweet and lovable and unpretending as a man can be, but he doesn't know enough to come in when it rains. He has been pursued, day by day and year by year, by a most phenomenal and astonishing luckiness. He has been a shining soldier in all our wars for half a generation; he has littered his military life with blunders, and yet has never committed one that didn't make him a knight or a baronet or a lord or something. Look at his breast; why, he is just clothed in domestic and foreign decorations. Well, sir, every one of them is a record of some shouting stupidity or other; and, taken together, they are proof that the very best thing in all this world that can befall a man is to be born lucky.

SUMMARY

- (1) There are three main types of knowledge:
 - Competence
 - Acquaintance
 - Information – the focus for epistemology (propositional knowledge)
- (2) Knowledge is traditionally understood as Justified True Belief

S knows that p if and only if

 - (1) it is true that p
 - (2) S believes that p
 - (3) S is justified in believing that p
- (3) There are three main theories of truth:
 - Correspondence theory
 - Coherence theory
 - Pragmatic theory

- (4) The three conditions of knowledge (Justified True Belief) have been criticised as insufficient. Despite their disagreements on the fourth condition, philosophers generally agree that knowledge requires true belief plus something.

ESSENTIAL READING

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