

Epistemology: Living Philosophy in Contemporary Times

WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

WHAT MAKES FOR KNOWLEDGE?

8 December 2019 at Carindale Library Meeting Room

After making up our mind on whether the centre of the universe to worlds beyond is something good, or some other value to us, we have already made the second response of asking ourselves whether we do know such things, whether it is true, whether it ought to be believed, and why?

REFERENCES

(The works listed are not a complete coverage of the contemporary field but to provide the best known and most significant in contemporary discussions. Apologies if anything important has been missed)

The Key Texts

Tyler Burge. "Individualism and Self-Knowledge" (The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 85, No. 11, November 1988).

Tyler Burge discussed derives from the juxtaposition of a restricted Cartesian conception of knowledge of one's own thoughts and a nonindividualistic conception of the individuation of thoughts. Both conceptions are complex and controversial.

Edmund Gettier. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (Analysis, Vol. 23, No. 6, June 1963).

The Gettier problem, in the field of epistemology, is a landmark philosophical problem concerning our understanding of descriptive knowledge. Attributed to American philosopher Edmund Gettier, Gettier-type counterexamples (called "Gettier-cases") challenge the long-held justified true belief (JTB) account of knowledge. The JTB account holds that knowledge is equivalent to justified true belief; if all three conditions (justification, truth, and belief) are met of a given claim, then we have knowledge of that claim. In his 1963 three-page paper titled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", Gettier attempts to illustrate by means of two counterexamples that there are cases where individuals can have a justified, true belief regarding a claim but still fail to know it because the reasons for the belief, while justified, turn out to be false. Thus, Gettier claims to have shown that the JTB account is inadequate; that it does not account for all of the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge.

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Susan Haack. *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1993).

Susan Haack develops an original theory of empirical evidence or justification, and argues its appropriateness to the goals of inquiry. In so doing, Haack provides detailed critical case studies of Lewis's foundationalism; Davidson's and Bonjour's coherentism; Popper's 'epistemology without a knowing subject'; Quine's naturalism; Goldman's reliabilism; and Rorty's, Stich's, and the Churchlands' recent obituaries of epistemology.

Ingvar Johansson. *A Critique of Karl Popper's Methodology* (Esselte stadium, 1975).

A critical appraisal of Popper's epistemological thesis.

Ernest Sosa. *Knowledge in Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

A major collection of Ernest Sosa's work in contemporary epistemology: the nature of propositional knowledge; externalism versus internalism; foundationalism versus coherentism; and the problem of the criterion.

Ernest Sosa. *A Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

Ernest Sosa argues for two levels of knowledge, the animal and the reflective, each viewed as a distinctive human accomplishment.

And with important connections to other areas of philosophy:

Epistemology, Ontology, and Metaphysics

Thomas Nagel. *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

Human beings have the unique ability to view the world in a detached way: We can think about the world in terms that transcend our own experience or interest, and consider the world from a vantage point that is, in Nagel's words, "nowhere in particular". At the same time, each of us is a particular person in a particular place, each with his own "personal" view of the world, a view that we can recognize as just one aspect of the whole. How do we reconcile these two standpoints--intellectually, morally, and practically? To what extent are they irreconcilable and to what extent can they be integrated? Thomas Nagel's ambitious and lively book tackles this fundamental issue, arguing that our divided nature is the root of a whole range of philosophical problems, touching, as it does, every aspect of human life. He deals with its manifestations in such fields of philosophy as: the mind-body problem, personal identity, knowledge and skepticism, thought and reality, free will, ethics, the relation between moral and other values, the meaning of life, and death. Excessive objectification has been a malady of recent analytic philosophy, claims Nagel, it has led to implausible forms of reductionism in the philosophy of mind and elsewhere. The solution is not to inhibit the objectifying impulse, but to insist that it learn to live alongside the internal

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perspectives that cannot be either discarded or objectified. Reconciliation between the two standpoints, in the end, is not always possible.

Epistemology and Religion

Alvin Plantinga. *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

Alvin Plantinga wants first to show that it is rational to accept Christian belief. Plantinga also proposes, with what he calls "the Aquinas/Calvin Model", an "account of the way in which Christian belief is, in fact, justified, rational and warranted". This is the third volume in Alvin Plantinga's trilogy on the notion of warrant, which he defines as that which distinguishes knowledge from true belief. In this volume, Plantinga examines warrant's role in theistic belief, tackling the questions of whether it is rational, reasonable, justifiable, and warranted to accept Christian belief and whether there is something epistemically unacceptable in doing so. He contends that Christian beliefs are warranted to the extent that they are formed by properly functioning cognitive faculties, thus, insofar as they are warranted, Christian beliefs are knowledge if they are true.