

Definitions

- Philosophers try to give *definitions* of concepts they are interested in.

The thought is that by having a definition we gain a deeper understanding of the concept we're interested in.

- Some examples of famous attempts at definitions in other parts of philosophy:

These are not generally regarded as being successful.

- * You acted freely when you came to class just in case you could have done otherwise.
- * Person X is the same as person Y just in case they share some of the same memories.

- A definition of being X gives necessary and sufficient conditions for being X:

- * A definition is successful if it classifies exactly the right things as knowledge/justified beliefs. (i.e. all and only those things.)
- * A definition is seen to be unsuccessful if we can come with counterexamples.

- But definition must also be *non-circular*: the terms we use to state the definition should not *themselves* be defined in terms of the thing we are defining.

- * Example: The 2007 Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a hill and a mountain this way:

hill: a usually rounded natural elevation of land *lower than a mountain*.

mountain: a landmass that projects conspicuously above its surroundings and is *higher than a hill*.

Another way to put it: definitions should be stated in more *basic* terms, *independent* terms.

- A definition in this sense is very different from a dictionary definition. (As we just saw.)

It's also not necessary to have a definition in order to have some prior understanding of the concept.

(If that were so, we would probably not know what anything is!)

A definition of knowledge

- For a long time, philosophers thought this was the right definition of knowledge:
 - (1) S knows p just in case S believes p , S's belief in p is justified and p is true.
- Each part of the analysis certainly looks *necessary*:
 - * If you know it's raining, then you must believe it.
 - * If you know it's raining, then you must be justified in believing it.
 - * If you know it's raining, then it must be true.
- The definition is also non-circular: each of the terms looks like they should be more basic than knowledge.
- Philosophers thought these conditions were *sufficient* because they get lots of the basic examples right.

Gettier Cases

- Pretty much everyone now agrees that Gettier gave successful counterexamples to the analysis:
 - * **Coins.** Alice saw Bob count the coins in his pocket ten minutes ago: there were ten. Alice also thinks Bob will get the promotion they are both competing for; their boss just told her so. So Alice believes:
 - (2) The person who will get the job has ten coins in their pocket.

But the boss lied: Alice is going to get the job! Moreover, Alice *also* has ten coins in her pocket.
 - * **Cars.** Alice thinks Bob owns a Porsche. (She saw him waxing one last week.) She knows her logic so she randomly infers:
 - (3) Either Bob owns a Porsche or Carol is currently in London.

Alice has no idea of Carol's actual whereabouts; they haven't spoken in a year.

It turns out Bob was actually waxing a rental car; he doesn't own a Porsche. And, by complete coincidence, Carol *is* in London.
- In both cases, the conditions are satisfied; but the person does not know.
 - * Come up with your own examples of a Gettier case.

- * Why intuitively do they not know?
- There are basically two strategies available here: either *deny* that the agents in Gettier cases really are justified; or add a fourth condition on knowledge.
 - * You could say that maybe Smith isn't justified after all because you can't be completely *certain* that what his boss told him is true.

However, if this is what it took to have a justified belief, then almost none of our beliefs would *ever* count as justified.
- Come up with your own extra condition on knowledge!

The Relevance of Gettier Cases

- In the excerpt we read for today, Pollock claims, probably rightly, that for a long time philosophers didn't worry about the definition of knowledge because they wrongly thought it was easy.
- Pollock thinks Gettier cases show that knowledge should be fundamentally *uninteresting* for epistemologists. Here's what he says:

What the Gettier problem really shows is what a perverse concept knowledge is. One can do everything with complete epistemic propriety, and be right, and yet lack knowledge because of some accident about the way the world is. Why do we employ such a concept?

The obvious implication is that maybe we shouldn't.

- As it stands, this begs the question in at least two places:
 - * If I think knowledge is important maybe I should not just agree that in Gettier cases you've done everything with "complete epistemic propriety".

After all, you don't know!
 - * If I think knowledge is important, then maybe I should just deny that if you have done everything with complete epistemic propriety, then that's all that matters, epistemologically speaking.
- Task for you: try to come up with an *argument* for each claim.

No False Lemmas

- Notice that in both cases, the person reasons from something *false*.

One of the most famous suggestions about what is wrong in Gettier cases puts the blame on this fact:
- Harman suggested that we add this as a fourth condition to our definition of knowledge:

No False Lemmas. S knows that p only if S's belief that p is not justified on the basis of a false belief.

- This principle certainly does look like a *necessary* feature.
And it perhaps goes some way to understanding in what sense people in Gettier cases get lucky.
- As we will see next time though, this condition fails too.