

EPISTEMOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

**LECTURE THREE
PHILOSOPHY IN A WEEKEND**

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Epistemology is the theory of knowledge

We are doing epistemology when we ask:

- **what is the nature of knowledge?**
- **can we have knowledge?**





What is knowledge?

This is a very traditional philosopher's question

**We want the conditions individually *necessary*
and jointly *sufficient* for knowledge**

This is a question about *propositional* knowledge

Not:

- **Knowledge *where***
- **Knowledge *how***
- **Knowledge *who***
- **Knowledge *of***

Rather:

- **Knowledge *that***

**We can ask the question in a semantic vein:
what does it *mean* to say James *knows that P*?**

**We can ask the question in a metaphysical vein:
what *is it* for James to *know that P***

**So what *does* it mean to say James
knows that P?**

The Tripartite theory (or the Justified True Belief Theory)

For James to know P it must be the case that:

- James *believes* P
- James can *justify* the belief that P
- the belief that P is *true*



It is false that Tom Stoppard wrote King Lear

So no-one can *know* that Tom Stoppard wrote King Lear

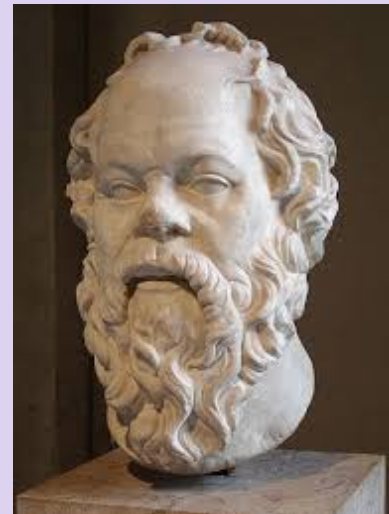




Of course someone can *falsely believe* they know that Tom Stoppard wrote King Lear

Just as the whole human race once falsely believed it knew the Earth to be flat

Socrates argues in Plato's *Theaetetus* (369 BC) that if a lawyer convinces a jury to believe P, and P happens to be true, this doesn't mean that the jury *knows* P because their belief is not justified



Someone who says they *know* the ball will land on red next time is kidding themselves even if the ball *does* land on red



**The ‘truth’ condition tells us that
knowledge is *factive***

Some verbs are such that their use presupposes that the proposition they are used with is true:

- **James regrets that he didn't work hard enough for his degree**
- **Janet saw that there was a car swerving into her path**

Such verbs are called 'factive'

***Knowledge* is one such verb**

Each of the conditions for knowledge mentioned in the JTB theory seems to be individually necessary for knowledge.

But are they jointly sufficient?

Edmund Gettier 1963

(*Analysis*, Vol. 23):

No they are not!



**In “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”
Gettier offers two counterexamples to the JTB
theory of knowledge**

**Problems of the sort he identifies have become
known as *Gettier Problems***

With apologies to Gettier:

- **Alan believes I own a Toyota Yaris**
- **Alan is justified in believing I own a Toyota Yaris because he has seen me driving around in one**
- **I DO own a Toyota Yaris**



So Alan has a *justified true belief* that I own a Toyota Yaris

But the Toyota Yaris Alan has seen me driving around in is not MY Toyota Yaris, it belongs to my neighbor

So Alan does not *know* I own a TY

The conditions that *justify* Alan's belief that I own a TY come apart from the conditions that make it *true*

Gettier's counterexamples show us that even *justified* true beliefs might count as lucky, and not, therefore, as knowledge

Gettier problems show that...

... as all the conditions of the JTB Theory of knowledge can be satisfied by Alan...

...and yet Alan *doesn't* have knowledge

... the JTB Theory, at best, offers us conditions *necessary* for knowledge...

... not conditions *sufficient* for knowledge

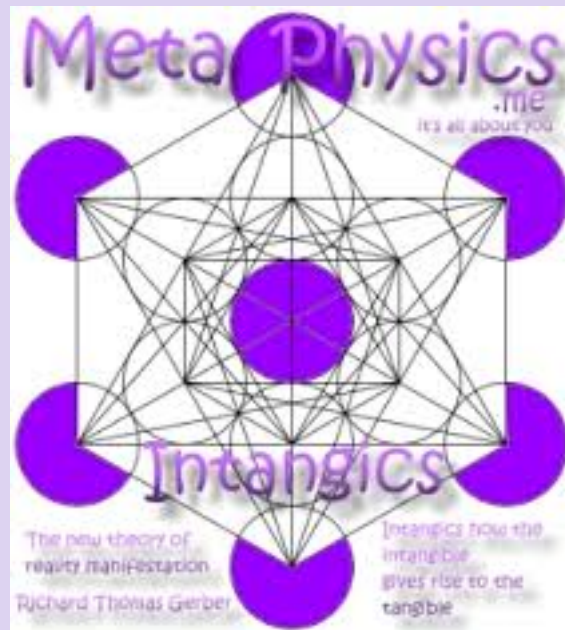
**We need a theory of knowledge that can't be
'Gettiered'!**

Question: Can we strengthen the JTB theory by:

- **strengthening the justification requirement?**
- **adding a fourth condition?**

Or do we need an entirely *new* theory of knowledge?

Now let's do some metaphysics



Metaphysics is the study of:

- *what there is*

and of

- *what its nature is*

**Let's see how a problem is
metaphysics might arise**

Marianne could have been wearing yellow

It might have been Wednesday today

**If Germany had won the war
we would be speaking German**



**Marianne might not have been the DoS in P at
OUDCE**

Such sayings are common

We think of them as true (or false)

But what *makes them* true or false?

It is not something observable (we cannot see that Marianne *could* have been wearing yellow)

Consider ‘grass is green’ or ‘that music is loud’ what makes *these* statements true is something we can see or hear



It is not a matter of how we use language (there is nothing about ‘today’ or ‘Wednesday’ that makes it true that today might have been Wednesday)

Consider ‘bachelors are unmarried’ – what makes this true is the very meaning of ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried’



**Indeed it doesn't seem to be anything at all
*actual***

**Germany *didn't* win the war, so what informs us
of the truth of what would have been the case if
it did?**

There are two types of modality:

- **Modality de dicto: ways in which statements can be true**
- **Modality de re: ways in which objects can have properties**

We must distinguish modality *de dicto* and *de re* because if we say:

**Stephen Hawking is thinking about the number two
The number two is necessarily even**

We can conclude:

The thing SH is thinking of is *necessarily* even (ie. Being even is a necessary property of the thing SH is thinking about)

But we cannot conclude:

***Necessarily* the thing SH is thinking of is even (i.e. it is necessarily the case that SH is thinking of something that is even)**

Modal thought and talk is an important part of everyday life

But let's ask again: what is it that makes such thought and talk true and/or false

In 1959 the logician and metaphysician Saul Kripke postulated a solution to this problem

**He put to use a notion introduced by the
Philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646 -1716)**

**This was the notion of
*a possible world***



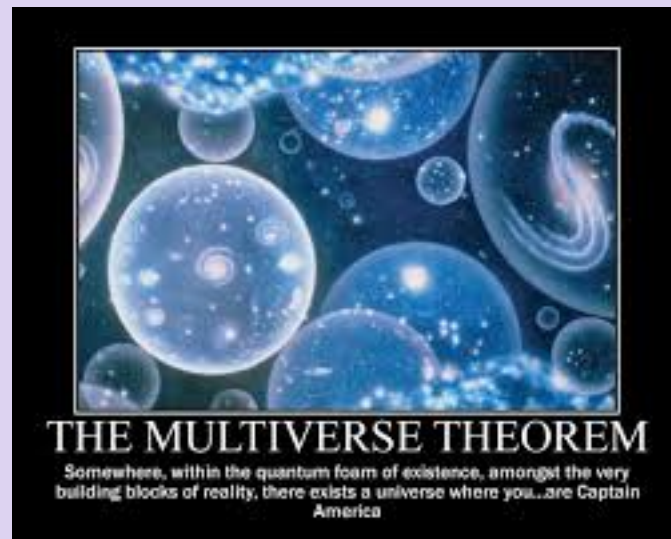
This solved most of the problems that logicians had about the truth values of modal beliefs and sentences because we could say:

- **‘Marianne could have been wearing yellow’ is true if there is at least one possible world in which Marianne is wearing yellow.**
- **‘If Germany had won the war we would be speaking German’ is true if in the nearest possible world in which Germany had won the war, we are speaking German**

**So we are admitting *possible worlds* into
our ontologies**



Distinguish the possible worlds theory of modal logic from multiverse theory of quantum physics



Our justification for admitting possible worlds is that it enables us to generate hugely useful and satisfying theories of modal logic

This is a widely used justification for postulating the existence of something

But if we are admitting possible worlds into our ontology our next question must be...

...what *are* possible worlds?

The Meinongian View:



Possible worlds are literally worlds that are possible, full of objects, properties and states of affairs that are *possible* but not *actual*

**So on the Meinongian
view possible worlds exist...**



**...as do unicorns, Pegasus and
Hamlet...**

...indeed even square circles exist...

Who is happy to allow the existence of unactualised possibles?

Major problem for the Meinongian View:

It contradicts itself – saying that something that doesn't exist exists

**Meinong's reply is to distinguish
between different types of existence:**

there is the sort of existence *we* have

and

**the sort of existence *possible worlds*
have**

Problems for the Meinongian View:

1. Occam's Razor

2. 'Gappiness'

3. Individuation conditions

An Alternative View



David Lewis argues that possible worlds are worlds just like ours

They are not unactualised possible worlds

There is only one sort of existence and possible worlds have it

Possible worlds are just as ‘concrete’ and real as our world

The word ‘actual’ according to Lewis is an indexical such as ‘I’

I don’t imply anything metaphysically special about me when I refer to myself as ‘I’

We also don’t imply anything metaphysically special when we refer to this world as the *actual* world.

Each possible world is complete in itself – there is no ‘gappiness’ in these possible worlds

The collection of possible worlds is also complete – each way the world could be is the way some world IS

Each world is isolated from every other causally and spatio-temporally

Problems for Lewis's Possible World Realism:

1. Transworld individuals
2. Occam's razor
3. Knowledge
4. The 'incredulous stare'



In this brief half hour we have looked at:

- **A phenomenon that requires explanation (modal thought and talk)**
- **A theory postulated to explain it (Possible World Theory)**
- **The metaphysical problems posed by this theory (and two putative solutions)**

Resources:

Epistemology

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/> (The Stanford Encyclopaedia on the analysis of knowledge)

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/gettier/> (the Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy on Gettier Problems)

Metaphysics

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QlXasO7COh0&list=UU2PA-AKmVpU6NKCGtZq_rKQ (Philosophy Tube on Possible World Theory)

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/mod-meta/> (The Internet Encyclopaedia on Possible Worlds)