Analyzing Knowledge

I. The basics

A. What kind of knowledge are we analyzing?

Propositional knowledge: knowledge that something is the case.

Contrast with:
- Procedural knowledge: knowing how to do something
- Knowledge by acquaintance: knowing a person, place, or thing

B. What is an analysis of knowledge?

Seeks to offer necessary and sufficient conditions for statements of the form “S knows that p,” where S is a person and p is a proposition (which can be expressed by a declarative sentence.)

Will be reductive in the sense that knowledge will be analyzed in terms that don’t make essential use of the concept of knowledge.

- Extreme failure of reduction: S knows that p if and only if S knows that p.
- Potential failure of reduction: S knows that p if and only if S has a true belief that p that is epistemically rational.

Should track fairly closely with everyday uses of the word “know,” but “cleans up” inconsistencies.

- Cleaning up involves plausible explanations for the inconsistencies.

II. The classical analysis (CA)

A. The analysis

(CA) S knows that p if and only if:

(i) S believes that p;
(ii) S’s belief that p is true; and
(iii) S’s belief that p is justified.

B. Two intuitions

The anti-luck intuition: when one has knowledge, one’s true belief could not easily have been wrong.

The ability intuition: knowledge is the product of a cognitive ability.

C. Gettier cases

The Gettier problem reveals that CA does not provide sufficient conditions for knowledge, because it fails to always capture the anti-luck condition.

C. Neo-classical (internalist) accounts

“Neo-classical” accounts tweak CA, typically by adding a fourth “anti-Gettier” condition to CA, e.g.

(iv) S’s belief that p is not justified by any false assumptions (“lemmas”).

This ends up being too restrictive, many instances of knowledge rests on false lemmas.

Because of the justification condition (iii) in CA, both classical and neo-classical accounts imply internalism about epistemic conditions: at least one condition that is necessary for converting true belief into knowledge must be accessible to the agent S through reflection alone.

- Reflection: introspection and a priori justification
  - A statement p is justified a priori if and only if p is not justified empirically.
    - Ex. Mathematics, logic, the meanings of words.

III. Externalist analyses

Externalism about epistemic conditions: no condition that is necessary for converting true belief into knowledge must be accessible to the agent S through reflection alone.

A. Example: process reliabilism

(PR) S knows that p if and only if:

(i) S believes that p;
(ii) S’s belief that p is true; and
(iii) S’s belief that p is the product of a reliable process, i.e. a process that tends to produce true beliefs.

One cannot know, by reflection alone, that one’s belief is produced reliably.