Methods in Philosophical and Critical Thinking

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07.EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Conceptual analysis

- Many philosophical arguments rely on some form of conceptual analysis.

- What is conceptual analysis?
    - Central method in philosophical argumentation.
    - A way to clarify our understanding of:
        - words
        - concepts (what are concepts?)
        - …

- What are the tasks and goals of conceptual analysis?

- What are the limits of conceptual analysis?

What are concepts?

- Parts of propositions

- Ideas? Empirical or rational?

- Defined words?

- Psychological mechanisms?

- Aids for understanding reality?

- Aids for doing things?

What is conceptual analysis?

☐ To make a poorly known or fuzzy concept clearer and better understood by using better understood concepts.

☐ Analyze complex concepts with primitive concepts

☐ E.g. "Knowledge", "moral responsibility"
☐ Eminently philosophical concepts:
    ☐ Intension
    ☐ Extension
    ☐ Distinctions:
        ☐ Logical-semantic: analytic – synthetic
        ☐ Epistemological: a priori – a posteriori
        ☐ Modal-metaphysical: necessary – contingent

How does conceptual analysis work?

- Sufficient conditions

- Necessary conditions

- Biconditional (necessary and sufficient conditions)

How does conceptual analysis work? (continued)

❏ Structure of argumentation:

   ❏ Analysis (necessary, sufficient, or necessary and sufficient conditions)

   ❏ Counter-example

   ❏ Answers to counter-examples:

   ❏ Rejection of the analysis

   ❏ Amending the analysis

   ❏ Rejecting the counter-example ("Biting the bullet")

Conceptual analysis

- What is the goal?

    - Conceptual analysis

    - Explicating the concept

    - Revisionist analysis

Criteria for success

- Criteria for success:
- Two general criteria for a successful conceptual analysis:
  - Simplicity of the analysis: conjunction of necessary and sufficient conditions
  - No counter-examples for the analysis
- Carnap's criteria for explication:
  - Similarity with the explicated
  - Exactness
  - Fruitfulness
  - Simplicity
- Criteria for revisionist analysis:
  - The concept has a role in the most explanatory empirical theory
  - The concept has a role in the best non-empirical theory

Background assumptions of philosophical analysis

- Classical view of concepts:
    - Philosophically important concepts can be given precise, non-circular and informative analyses or explications
    - A sentence expressing the analysis is an analytical truth
    - Analysis is done through a priori reflection

- Assumptions underlying the classic view of concepts:
    - We have non-explicit knowledge (tacit knowledge) of concepts and their essences or essential features, theory
    - The essence of an abstract concept is small collection of sufficient and necessary conditions
    - We can reveal this background knowledge by studying our intuitive categorical evaluations

An example: Gettier's problem

- What is knowledge?
- According to Gettier, the predominant philosophical view on knowledge is that knowledge is justified, true belief (JTB account of knowledge).
- The meaning of "Smith knows that it rained today" can be given with the following set of necessary and sufficient conditions:
  - It rained today
  - Smith believes that it rained today
  - Smith is justified in believing that it rained today
- Generalizing:
  - A subject S knows that a proposition P is true if and only if:
    - P is true, and
    - S believes that P is true, and
    - S is justified in believing that P is true

Is the JTB account a good conceptual analysis of the concept of knowledge?

☐ Suppose the following:

    ☐ Smith and Jones have applied for a the same job. And, Smith has very good evidence that: (a) Jones is the man who will get the job, and (b) Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

    ☐ Smith's evidence for (a) is that the hiring committee told him that Jones would be selected, and his evidence for (b) is that he counted the coins in Jones's pocket ten minutes ago. Propositions (a) and (b) entail: (c) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

    ☐ If Smith knows logic, and sees the entailment from (a) and (b) to (c), and has strong evidence for accepting both (a) and (b), then Smith seems justified in believing that (c) is true.

Is the JTB account a good conceptual analysis of the concept of knowledge?

❑ But suppose further:

  ❑ Unbeknownst to Smith, he himself, and not Jones, will get the job.
  ❑ Also unbeknownst to Smith, he himself has ten coins in his pocket.

  ❑ Then proposition (c) is true, though proposition (a), from which Smith inferred (c), is false.
  ❑ Further, in the example, all of the following are true: (i) (c) is true, (ii) Smith believes that (c) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in believing that (c) is true. But Smith does not KNOW that (c) is true because (e) is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in his pocket, and bases his belief in (c) on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job.

Gettier's conclusion

- Gettier concludes that JTB is not a good account of knowledge.

- Because:
    - JTB would imply that "Smith knows that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket"
    - But Smith clearly does not know that "the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket".

- Are Gettier's assumptions correct?

- Why doesn't Smith know that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket?

Post Gettier & Gettier cases

- Let's assume we share Gettier's assumptions

- Knowledge cannot be justified true belief.

- Perhaps knowledge is STB, where 'S' is the "subjunctive condition" (Dretske & Nozick's truth-tracking condition)

- According to STB, P is knowledge iff:
    - p is true
    - S believes that p
    - if p were true, S would believe that p
    - if p weren't true, S wouldn't believe that p

- According to the STB Smith would not know that P, in accordance with our intuitions.

Saul Kripke on Gettier cases

- Kripke argues that Nozick's revised account of knowledge is no better than JBT.
- Imagine the following:
  - Smith is driving through Fake Barn Country
  - In Fake Barn Country people erect fake barn-facades to please the tourists.
  - But there is one real barn (looking just alike any other fake barn) in Fake Barn Country, belonging to the caretaker of the fake barns. The soil over which the real barn is erected cannot support a fake barn, so if there wasn't a real barn there, there would be nothing.
  - Smith looks to the side of the road and sees the only real barn in Fake Barn Country, he forms the belief "There is a barn there."
- Does Smith know that "there is a barn there"?

Saul Kripke on Gettier cases

❑ The four conditions in the Fake Barn case are satisfied:
1. p is true (there is a barn there)
2. S believes that p (Smith believes there is a barn there)
3. if p were true, S would believe that p (if there was a barn there, Smith would believe there is a barn there, e.g. Smith can see clearly, etc.)
4. if p weren't true, S wouldn't believe that p (if there wasn't a barn there, there wouldn't be a fake barn, and Smith would see nothing there).

❑ But it seems like Smith doesn't really *know* that there is barn there, he's just lucky to have found the only barn that's not just a fake barn. Imagine there was a fake barn instead of a barn, condition 4 would not hold, so the STB account would likely detect the lack of knowledge in that example.

Alvin Goldman on Gettier cases

- So STB cannot be an account of what knowledge is, there is a counterexample of something that STB detects as knowledge that is not in fact knowledge.
- Perhaps knowledge is JBT+C (Goldman)
- The C condition tells you that someone's belief is justified only if it was the truth of the belief that caused the subject to possess that belief in the first place; and for a JTB to count as knowledge, the subject must be able to "correctly reconstruct" (mentally) the causal chain that led from the state of affairs to the belief.

Gettier "epistemology"

- Suppose the account XYZ of knowledge is true.
- Situation P is one in which the subject's belief confirms to XYZ but the subject has no knowledge
- Hence, XYZ is an inadequate account of knowledge.

- Remedy: suppose KXYZ ….
- Situation Q is one in which the subject's belief conform to KXYZ but the subject has no knowledge
- Hence, KXYZ is an inadequate account of knowledge.

- *… repeat to exhaustion*

what went wrong?

Philosophical intuitions

❑ Gettier concludes that JTB is not a good account of knowledge.

❑ Because:
  ❑ JTB would imply that "Smith knows that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket"
  ❑ But Smith clearly does not know that "the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket".

❑ Are Gettier's assumptions correct?

❑ Why doesn't Smith know that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket?

Philosophical intuitions

☐ How good are intuitions?

☐ How good are philosophical intuitions?

☐ "Philosophers often make appeals to people's ordinary intuitions, but through- out the twentieth century, they rarely subjected their claims about these intuitions to empirical scrutiny. The usual approach was just to describe a case and then boldly to assert something along the lines of: "In this case, surely we would say . . ." " Knobe, p. 81

☐ "one naturally wonders: in standard philosophical practice, whose intuitions are to be relied upon as evidence?" Knobe, p. 57

☐ Three views: solipsism, elitism and populism.

Philosophical intuitions

☐ Intuition solipsism: when a philosopher relies on her intuitions as evidence, she is relying only on her own personal intuitions.

☐ Intuition elitism: when a philosopher relies on her intuitions as evidence, she is relying only on intuitions that she takes to be representative of those belong to the class of trained professional philosophers.

☐ Intuition populism: when a philosopher relies on her intuitions as evidence, she is relying only on intuitions that she takes to be representative of a broader class of people that includes non-philosophers.

Philosophical intuitions

▢ Are philosophers' institutions "more worthy"? (Knobe "Analytic epistemology and experimental philosophy")

▢ "Philosophers' intuitions are privileged on account of the technical nature of philosophical claims under investigation in standard philosophical practice." PROBLEM: philosophers don't see to be interested in understanding concepts in some technical sense, but of, e.g. *knowledge,* as ordinary people use the term.

▢ "Philosopher's intuitions are privileged on account of the special competency or expertise of philosophers to attend to the relevant features of though-experiments and to the truth or falsity of philosophical claims." PROBLEMS: can philosophers account for such superiority? And, can we measure this kind of "epistemic success"?

Response: experimental philosophy

- Experimental philosophy claims that we need to "test" our intuitions, or at least to find out whether the intuitions that we use in common philosophical arguments are shared across cultures, genders, populations, etc.
- Main views: (Knobe, Analytic epistemology and experimental philosophy)
  - *Proper foundation view*: we should use experimental philosophy to properly ground our intuitions, which can later be used in standard philosophical arguments.
  - *Restrictionist view*: the results of experimental philosophy should prompt us to restrict the use of intuitions as evidence in philosophy.
- Is X-Phi (Experimental Philosophy) a challenge to traditional philosophical argumentation, or is it in its support.