

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE

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When can we say that we know something? This question has been traditionally answered in terms of an analysis of knowledge which stated that S knows that p if and only if (1) p is true, (2) S believes that p and (3) S is justified in believing that p. These three conditions, known as the truth-condition, the belief-condition and the justification-condition were generally considered to be individually necessary and jointly sufficient, thus constituting an adequate account of knowledge, until Edmund Gettier¹ generated some counter examples which seemed to show that these three conditions, while individually necessary, were not jointly sufficient since there can be cases of justified true belief which cannot, in any meaningful sense, be considered as cases of knowledge. This apparent challenge to the traditional analysis evoked a variety of responses from philosophers, ranging from attempts to question the validity of the counter examples, through efforts to circumvent them by offering slightly modified versions of the traditional analysis, which in turn gave rise to the construction of yet other, even more effective counter examples. This process has been going on, and will presumably continue to do so, at least in some quarters, until change of philosophical fashion or sheer fatigue puts an end to it. However, one salutary effect of all this has been a renewal of rigorous interest in questions relating to the meaning of knowledge.

The present paper is set against this backdrop. However here I shall attempt neither a defence of the traditional analysis of knowledge nor a construction of Gettier type examples purporting to expose the inadequacy of the traditional analysis. My intention in this paper is to draw attention to certain

aspects common to most analyses of knowledge, a consideration of whom, I think, will open the possibility of a more balanced perspective on the problem of defining the nature of knowing.

Let me begin with a brief look at the notion of analysis itself as it is practised in contexts such as the one we are now concerned with. In these contexts analysis is usually performed on and with the help of concepts whose sense is extracted in either of the two ways: through recourse to ordinary usage or through idealized definition. The success, or at any rate the relevance, of the analysis depends on the validity of these two methods of extracting the meaning of the operative concepts, and that, in my view, cannot be ensured without taking two important points into account.

The first point concerns the possible limits of precision. Concepts such as belief and justification, not to speak of the concept of knowledge itself, are inherently imprecise and function with a context-dependent flexibility. They are, therefore, unamenable to logical analysis in their original form. On the other hand, when it is attempted to impose a certain degree of precision on them by rigorously delineating the boundaries of these concepts, their behaviour begins to obey a kind of uncertainty-principle. That is, the more precisely we try to define the boundaries of a concept, the fuzzier its relations with other concepts become. Conversely, the more rigorously we try to define the relation of two concepts, the more we find a corresponding loss of precision in the concepts themselves. As a result, we end up with an analysis which is logically rigorous but philosophically irrelevant or at least uninteresting. This in fact seems to me to be the chief drawback of most discussions regarding the analysis of knowledge. It is hard to see what epistemological objective they are intended to serve. Any discussion on the analysis of knowledge, if it is to be worthwhile, should focus itself such that it increases our understanding of knowledge and related epistemic concepts in their application to the practical contexts of acquiring and evaluating knowledge.

The second point concerns the intuitive grounding of epistemic concepts. In most cases a logically related network of concepts is treated as a closed autonomous system, an exploration of whose structure does not require reference to anything outside it. But such an approach, even if it is valid in

some cases, is far from meaningful in the case of epistemic concepts. Insofar as these concepts are concerned with the range of relations between consciousness and reality, unless guided by attention to their grounding in the intentional activity of consciousness, an exploration of them is constantly in the danger of going astray. In saying this I am not suggesting that philosophical analysis is circumscribed by psychological analysis. My point is that a logical analysis of epistemic concepts, unless regulated by a phenomenological analysis, becomes arbitrary and its results will be found to be mere logical curiosities devoid of philosophical relevance.

I shall be guided by these two considerations in my following discussion of the three conditions of knowledge. I must stress this fact because unless it is remembered, the discussion is likely to give the impression, at points, of confusing certain fairly obvious logical distinctions.

Let me begin with the truth-condition. Inasmuch as this condition is treated as stipulative, there is nothing to object in it. You cannot know what is not in the first place true, and that's all there is to it. However, if we wish the analysis to help provide a criterion which can be applied in problematic cases of knowing, we must look at the relation between truth and knowledge from a different angle. When we do so, we find that there is a lack of coherence in the claim that the truth of the belief is a condition of knowing. In order for this claim to be coherent, it is necessary that we be able to assert the truth of a belief without reference to knowledge. But this is obviously impossible, since someone has to know that a particular belief is true. This line of argument may seem to rest on a very elementary sort of misunderstanding as regards the nature of analysis. Keith Lehrer² has taken this approach and argued that we must not confuse the analysis of knowing, whose task is to specify the conditions of knowledge, with a receipt for ascertaining whether one knows. Lehrer is right in maintaining that the analysis is not such a recipe, but my point is that the analysis would be meaningful only if it can adjudicate among different recipes. It can do so only if it is not already biased in favour of a theory of knowledge, based on a particular hierarchisation of epistemic concepts. It can be argued that the inclusion of the truth-condition in the analysis shows its inherent bias towards an objectivist epistemology. In Michael Polanyi's personalist epistemology, for

instance, truth is derivative of the act of knowing.³ That is to say, while the relation of truth to knowledge remains stipulative, in this type of epistemology it is reversed such that knowledge is a condition of truth. That is, *p* is true if and only if *S* knows that *P*. Again, in the epistemological theory implied in the Kuhnian concept of paradigm-relativity of science, the notion of truth is almost redundant.⁴ Kuhn's approach can be interpreted as holding that the network of knowledge claims subsists in a paradigm which itself is not subject to truth since the latter is a function of the activity of the paradigm. The example of these frameworks shows that the concept of truth does not enjoy undisputed primacy as is implied in the inclusion of the truth-condition in the analysis of knowing. It means that such an analysis must at least be complemented by an analysis of truth in which knowledge is a condition. Such an attempt is more than likely to show the mutual dependence of truth and knowledge to be capable of much greater symmetry than is implied by the hierarchisation of this relationship in the traditional analysis.

Let us now turn to the belief condition. Traditional analysis assumes that believing is a prerequisite to knowing. Even those philosophers who have questioned the adequacy of this analysis have accepted this assumption. But it is not at all evident that this assumption is tenable. There are two senses in which believing might be said to be prerequisite to knowing, belief as antecedent to knowledge and belief as a logical condition of knowledge. We can set aside belief as antecedent because analysis is not concerned with the various stages in the epistemic journey towards knowledge. Further, even in those cases where belief precedes knowledge, when knowledge is achieved, belief is left behind. The relevant question for us, therefore, is whether belief is a part of knowledge. To examine this, let us take some statements in which belief and knowledge are juxtaposed and see if the assumed relation between them is obtained.

- (1) I know that *p* and I believe that *p*
- (2) I know that *p*, moreover I believe that *p*
- (3) I know that *p*, therefore I believe that *p* (or)
- (4) I believe that *p* because I know that *p*

For one thing, none of these statements ring natural when taken by

themselves. They sound natural only when they are made in response to rhetorical questions expressing doubt or incredulity with regard to our knowledge claims. To take statement (1), to say, 'I know that p' has a finality about it so that adding 'I believe that p' becomes quite superfluous. If one makes that statement at all, it would be to invent one's knowledge claim with some vague sort of rhetorical force with a view to carrying extra conviction, or sometimes in a formal context (with a suitable solemnity of tone), performing some kind of what Austin calls an epistemic ritual (Austin maintains that the statement 'I know that p' constitutes such an epistemic ritual, but I think Austin is mistaken and I shall come to this point later), as in formally certifying something or making a declaration under oath and so on. In such contexts, the rhetorical point of the statement consists in explicitly and emphatically committing oneself to one's knowledge-claim. The same can be said about statement (2), except perhaps that on some occasion one can imagine its sounding rather comical, as in someone saying, 'I know that the lady in question is my wife, moreover I believe that she is my wife (!)', (Which only confirms what we have said above).

Statements (3) and (4) are somewhat different. They also involve rhetorical emphasis, but they point to the important fact that often knowledge and belief are curiously juxtaposed on account of their arising from different viewpoints or perspectives. That is, they are obtained when two people adopting mutually exclusive standpoints with regard to a possible fact are trying to communicate with each other. Imagine a person asking another- most likely with an air of rationalistic condescension - 'Do you really believe that faith-healing works?' or 'How can you believe that faith-healing work?' The other person may retort by saying, 'I know that faith-healing works, therefore I believe it.' Or 'I believe that faith-healing works because I know that it works'. Here the speaker is at pains to assert the rationality of his belief. Or more accurately, he is speaking from two standpoints - his own and that of his interlocutor. He is saying in effect, 'As far as I am concerned, I know that faith-healing works, but since it appears to you to be a matter of mere (irrational) belief, you may take it that I believe it'.

At all events, the assumed relation between knowing and believing is not obtained. If someone were to seriously ask you, 'I quite understand that you know that you wrote this paper, but do you believe it?', you would be at a

loss to understand what the point of the query is, and rather conclude that the person asking the question either does not know or is pretending not to know what knowing means. At all events, your most natural answer would be, 'Look, I know that I wrote this paper, so the question of believing or not believing just does not arise'. The fact of the matter is that philosophers have drawn too heavily on the fact that it is absurd to say, 'I know that p, but I do not believe that p.' But all it proves is that knowing and disbelieving are incompatible. It does not prove that there is any kind of overlap between knowing and believing. In this connection, Lehrer ⁶ has maintained that, to say 'I do not believe it, I know it.' is analogous to saying 'It is not a house, it is a mansion.' and suggested that just as being a mansion entails being a house, knowing entails believing. I think here Lehrer is oversimplifying things. While it is perfectly true that the apparent inconsistency between knowledge and belief in that statement is rhetorical and not logical, it does not follow that knowledge entails belief. For this to obtain, there has to be a stronger relation between the two, such as a part-whole relation or membership - class relation which is not the case here. However, Lehrer's analogy is very interesting in another respect. It is suggestive of the prejudices that form the background of assumptions with regard to the relation between knowledge and belief. The statement 'It is not a house, it is a mansion' when divested of its rhetorical apparel can be seen to derive its consistency from the fact that a mansion is not only a sort of house but a superior sort of house. Its analogy with the statement 'I do not believe it, I know it.' derives its plausibility from the common, unexamined assumption that knowing is a superior sort of believing. The origin of this assumption lies in the fact that in most matters we regard knowing as superior to believing. But there is considerable difference between knowing being *superior to* believing, and knowing being a *superior kind of* believing. The former implies that knowing and believing are two distinct members of a species (insofar as the two can be compared as to their relative status as cognitive concepts against some common yardstick) whereas the latter implies that knowing is a member of the species called believing. The latter involves entailment while the former does not.

Austin recognized this point in his 'Other Minds'. But using this point of departure, he develops a view, which in my view rests on a confusion between

'knowing' and 'claiming to know'. He suggests that the locution 'I know' does not describe some epistemic attitude stronger than belief, but is a performative like 'I promise'. When I say that I know something, I am performing a kind of epistemic ritual through which I give my word that something is so; I give others my authority for saying that something is so. Here, I think, Austin confuses the epistemic act of knowing with the at least partly social act of laying claim to knowledge. The latter may very well be a performative utterance, but I do not think it makes sense to deny that prior to this performative, there is room for a locution describing the act of knowing. After all, it is perfectly possible for someone to ask himself, 'Do I know this' or do I merely believe it?', and answering I know this. Here obviously one is not giving oneself the authority to believe what one is thinking. So, even this view that knowledge is some sort of warranty for belief does not appear convincing, except in the sense that if we believe that someone knows something, then it is only rational to believe that something. This, however, has little to do with the question as to what constitutes knowledge, and whether knowledge implies belief.

Lehrer gives what he believes to be a conclusive proof that knowledge implies belief in his book *Knowledge*, which deserves attention.⁸ His approach consists of first showing that if S does not believe that p, then he does not know that p, and on this basis inferring that equivalently, If S knows that p then he believes that p. But I think there is a problem here which needs examination. First, I do not think there is sufficient evidence for assuming that there is a symmetry between "knowing-believing" and "not believing-not knowing, which is required for equivalence. In the case of 'not believing' it has the sense of 'not entertaining the possibility', whereas in the case of believing in the latter statement, 'believing' has the sense of 'being convinced of the truth'. In this sense, S's believing that p may very well be the consequence of his knowing that p. This still does not show that believing is a part of or a condition of knowing. However, this argument of Lehrer illustrates the observation I made at the beginning regarding analysis. By narrowing the scope of a concept or by exploiting its connotations in different contexts, it would certainly be possible to show that a concept implies another. But such an analysis would amount to an arbitrary adjustment of concepts without intuitive grounding and consequently of no intrinsic philosophical interest. It is therefore necessary, as I suggested earlier,

to insist on the conceptual analysis being guided by a phenomenological analysis so that the concepts we employ are delineated in the light of their grounding in our phenomenological intuitions. I do not propose to engage in such an analysis here, but I shall indicate briefly how such an analysis can provide a corrective for a purely logical analysis.

Phenomenologically, knowing and believing are both relations between consciousness and its objects. If we pay attention to the intentional mode of each, we become aware that they are distinct and that there is no overlap between belief-consciousness and knowledge-consciousness. In the case of knowing there is a consciousness of direct access to the object. There is a sense of presence without mediation. In the case of inferential knowledge the whole chain leading to the object similarly becomes accessible. This directness gives a sense of certitude, of self-justification. In contrast, in the case of belief-consciousness there is a sense of lack of direct access to the object of belief, as if there is a wall between the consciousness and the object. There is a further sense of absence, a sense of unilaterally coming to a conclusion about the object without the complicity of that object. In other words, in belief-consciousness, the object of belief is absent, but in such a way that its absence is framed by the presence of those (intentional) objects which support it, which qualify it for consideration, which render it plausible and credible. Belief, in this sense, is always circumstantial.

This kind of attempt to capture the distinction between belief and knowledge no doubt sounds very hazy and lacking in the reassuring perspicuity characteristic of the defined concepts with which philosophers of the Analytical tradition prefer to operate. But I am not suggesting that this kind of description can or ought to replace traditional conceptual analysis. My point is that those rounded concepts are ultimately grounded in these intuitions, and to that extent, the validation of concepts must involve the testimony of the phenomenological experience. In this case, phenomenological intuition offers grounds for questioning the claim that belief is a part or condition of knowledge.

Let us now turn to the justification condition. It is this condition which has proved the most vulnerable, and it would be fair to say that the whole debate regarding the analysis of knowing and in particular the Gettier-type attacks on

the traditional analysis are centred on the inadequacy of the justification condition, and motivated by the feeling that this condition needs to be fortified, either through modification or through supplementation. The thrust of my discussion, however, is that we must look at this condition in terms of our broader epistemic concerns in order to prevent the analysis from becoming a sterile exercise.

Let us take an example : S holds a proposition p which says that x (whom S has never met or known) has three children. There are two persons A and B, who are intrigued by this, and after enquiry find that x indeed has three children. They ask S how he 'knew' that p . S shows them a crystal ball and says that if he thinks of a person while gazing into it, he can see how many children that person has. Now suppose A believes in crystal gazing and B is a hard-nosed sceptic. A maintains that he knows that S knows p , while B maintain that he knows that S does not know p . Let us concentrate on the knowledge-claims of A and B. It is obvious that we can not decide between them without making a judgement regarding S's knowledge-claim. That is, we must judge whether either of them is justified in accepting that particular criterion of justification for qualifying belief as knowledge. In other words, we need to distinguish between the subjective feeling of justification and the objective right to justification. Or more accurately, between believing oneself to be justified in believing something and actually being justified in believing some thing, I feel that most discussion on the analysis of knowledge suffers from an insufficient appreciation of this distinction. The importance of this distinction lies in the fact that justification of beliefs always refers to, or is grounded in, an already accepted theory of belief-justification as an integral part of an entire epistemology. It also draws attention to the fact that the question of justification is related to the issue of our theories of possible methods of arriving at truths - logical and factual, as well as to the fact that validation of knowledge is essentially conducted in an intersubjective context. Let us take a brief look at this distinction. Take the case of the subjective belief in one's justification : A person believes that he is justified in believing something. How does his belief about, his being justified get justified? There seems to be a regress here. Or suppose we say, a person knows that he is justified in believing something. Here, insofar as we are asserting that he knows, we are maintaining

that he is justified. But we cannot maintain it without reference to some criteria which in turn refer to the correctness of the belief in question, or which appeal to the fact that a similar procedure of arriving at a belief has been found from past experience to be effective. In either event, there is an indirect reference to knowledge. If we try to avoid all reference to knowledge of the truth of the belief, we would be left in a position where we would have to explain whether there can be justified false beliefs and if they can, what would 'justified' in such a context mean. Any explanation of this would depend on realizing that 'justified' in such contexts exploits the ambiguity due to the two senses of the term, viz. 'justified by the truth of the belief' and 'justified by available evidence'. (In fact several of the Gettier-type counter examples do depend in part on this ambiguity). Only the latter avoids circularity but it makes sense only against a backdrop of intersubjective epistemic consensus involving the question of what constitutes adequate or justifying evidence in a given context. My point here is that knowing involves the criteriological question of justification which in turn involves the notion of truth as well. Hence, in the phrase 'justified true belief' the term 'justified' splits into two senses, one of them dependent or parasitic upon the next 'term' true, and the other which appeals to other criteria for its meaning; but this latter sense too becomes part of the circle of these concepts because the criteria to which it appeals in their turn invoke the notion of knowing as a 'given'. And the entire circle of these concepts derive their related meanings together from their being a part of an intersubjective practice of acquiring and accrediting knowledge.

Let me conclude with two points: one regarding the analysis of knowledge and another regarding analysis in general. The first point is that the concept of knowledge cannot be reductively analysed in terms of belief, truth and justification since all such epistemic concepts constitute a network and it is impossible to define or even understand any one of them in isolation from the other concepts. In this respect, the traditional analysis as well as the Gettier type of attacks which accept the essential rightness of that mode of analysis and only doubt its adequacy are equally misdirected.

The other point, relating to analysis in general arises from the first point, and in a sense, is a generalisation of it. All our concepts constitute a structure, an interrelated system. The notion of atomicity of concepts is dangerously

misleading. No concept is an autonomous unit which can be analysed in terms of its putative constituents, without reference to other concepts. When we dismantle a concept to expose its internal structure, we find that what we take to be its external relations to other concepts are inscribed within that internal structure. Therefore, an analysis which isolates a concept, and engages in a linear, reductive practice can never be helpful in enhancing our understanding. What is required is a structural, systemic mode of analysis which takes not an artificially isolated concept but the total structure of concepts as a unit and proceeds to illuminate the mutual interdependence of the conceptual elements. If we wish to avoid sterility in philosophical practice, we have no choice but to strive for such a mode of analysis.

NOTES

1. Gettier, Edmund. 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis*, 23 : 121-123, 1963.
2. Lehrer, Keith. *Knowledge*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, p. 48.
3. Polanyi, M. *Personal Knowledge*, Chicago, 1953.
4. Kuhn, T.S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1970.
5. Here two points deserve mention. The first is with regard to the distinction between 'believing' and 'believing in'.

We believe a proposition. Even when we say that we believe a person, we essentially mean that we believe what he says, the proposition that he utters. On the other hand, we 'believe in' phenomena - the possible existence of phenomena or their putative efficacy. When we say that we believe in a person, we usually mean it in the sense of believing him to be a phenomenon extraordinary enough in some respect for some one else to be sceptical about it. In the light of this distinction, we have to concede that in this context the more exact statement should be 'I believe in faith-healing'. However, important as this distinction is, I don't think it makes much difference to the question of the relation between belief and knowledge: the same relation obtains between 'I believe that faith-healing is efficacious' and 'I know that faith-healing is efficacious'.

The second point is that when belief is juxtaposed to knowledge as a polar opposite as in this context, it is given the connotation of there being something unusual about that particular act of believing - this unusualness may range from 'as yet nothing is known', through 'it is something ultimately unknowable' to 'it is downright crazy to believe it'. This point becomes even more clear if we look at contrasting instances such as 'knowable' versus 'believable' and 'unknowable' versus 'unbelievable'. So, the 'belief' which is given the role of a constituent of knowledge is not identical with the 'belief' that is contrasted with knowledge.

6. Lehrer, Keith. *Op. Cit.*, p. 50.
7. Austin, J.L. 'Other Minds : *Aristotelian Society Supplementary*, Vol. XX, 1946, *Reprinted in Classics of Analytic Philosophy*, Ed. Robert R. Ammerman, Tata McGraw Hill, Bombay, 1965.
8. Lehrer, Keith. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 58-59.
9. Post-structuralist philosophers such as Derrida have engaged in a radical critique of the fundamental assumptions of the phenomenological project. To wrench an intricate argument from its original discursive context and drastically simplify it, Derrida argues that the notion of 'presence' is a metaphysical illusion. Hence, from his point of view the 'presence' in knowledge-consciousness and the apodicticity that it bestows are the effects of the necessarily metaphysical structurality of all thought. However, this antifoundationalist problematisation of the notions of truth and knowledge does not at any point posit such hierarchisation in which knowledge is the superior pole in the duet of belief-knowledge. On the contrary, dismantling such hierarchies and exposing their conceptual illegitimacy is a crucial part of the post-structuralist programme. Moreover, specifically with regard to the question of belief and knowledge, this theory comes closer to reducing the category of knowledge to the status of belief than to treating belief as a part of or an inferior version of knowledge.