Phil. 450: Discussion 3
The Causal Theory of Knowledge

Assigned Readings: Goldman [1967] and [Ichikawa and Steup, 2017, Sections 3, 4, and 6]

1 Reading Comprehension

1. Review your answers to the required questions from reading assignments.

2. The KK principle is the thesis that "If one knows that p, then one knows that one knows that p." Do you think Goldman would endorse the KK principle? Explain. Hint: it might help to consider your answers to question seven and nine from the reading assignment.

3. Does Goldman argue it is possible to have knowledge of the future? Explain.

2 Be creative!

The following questions are not straightforwardly answered in the assigned articles; several questions are open-ended in the sense that I do not expect you to give a specific answer. Answering the questions, therefore, requires creativity. Either you must interpret the text creatively or generate new ideas of your own.

Question 1: Ichikawa and Steup argue that the "fake barn" case is a counterexample to Goldman's causal theory of knowledge. Develop your own example that is analogous to the fake barn case, and briefly explain why Ichikawa and Steup would argue your case is a counterexample to the causal theory. Try to make your example more realistic than the fake barn case, and ideally, try to develop an example that might have real-world importance.

Question 2: Goldman claims that his theory of knowledge does not help one address skeptical arguments. The purpose of this question is to show

that Goldman is partly right and partly wrong: his theory can be used to address some forms of skepticism but in ways that, in my experience, many students find unsatisfying.

To help you use Goldman's theory to respond to skeptical arguments, however, it will be helpful to clarify one way in which philosophical discussions of skepticism might differ from what you imagined before coming to this class. In philosophical debates, skeptics often grant their opponents the *truth* of a claim while denying that the claim can be known. For instance, a moral skeptic might argue, "Even if abortion is immoral, you cannot know so" and an external world skeptic might say, "Even if there is, in fact, an external world, we cannot know so." Many philosophical responses to skepticism, therefore, aim to defend claims of the form, "If P is true, then we know that P."

A. Suppose there are in fact tables and chairs in the room around you. Explain why you know so according to Goldman's theory.

B. Consider the following skeptical argument:

>Premise 1: I don't know that an external world exists.
>
>Premise 2: If I don't know an external world exists, then I don't know there are tables and chairs in a room around me.
>
>Conclusion: I don't know there are tables and chairs in a room around me.

In Part A of the question, you argued that the conclusion of that argument is false if Goldman's theory is true and there are, in fact, tables and chairs in the room around you. Thus, assuming the argument is valid, at least one of the premises must also be false under those same assumptions. Which premises are false, and why? You will need to use Goldman's theory.

C. Do you find the response to the skeptical argument that you have sketched in Parts A and B of this question satisfying? Explain.

D. Could the above response to external world skepticism be used to respond to other "everyday" forms of skepticism (e.g., about the existence of climate change)? Explain.

Question 3: Linda Zagzebski has argued that many theories of knowledge – including variants of the causal theory – are susceptible to what epistemologists call the *value problem*. Roughly, the value problem involves explaining what value knowledge has above and beyond true belief.

In greater detail, we often think that knowledge is valuable, and that is a central reason that we are interested in the question, "What is knowledge?" But many theories of knowledge make it unclear what additional value knowledge has above true belief (TB), let alone justified true belief (JTB). Thus, it is unclear why we would be interested in finding the additional conditions – beyond JTB– that are necessary for knowledge. For example, even if I know that our bus will arrive at the university at 8:15AM whereas you merely have a (coincidentally) true belief (e.g., because you looked at an outdated schedule that happened to be right), I do not arrive at the university any faster than you do.

Can Goldman's causal theory help shed any light on the additional value of knowledge? In other words, is there any reason that the existence of a causal connection between one's belief and the truth of a proposition would confer additional value on one's belief? Explain by considering different types of examples.

Question 4: Goldman accepts the "traditional view" of knowledge for mathematical and logical (i.e., purportedly non-empirical) truths. Some philosophers would object that Goldman proposes radically different theories of knowledge for different types of propositions. Do your best to elaborate that objection: why exactly would it be a problem for one to endorse the "traditional view" of non-empirical knowledge and the causal theory for empirical knowledge? After you elaborate the objection, discuss how Goldman might respond.

References

Alvin I. Goldman. A Causal Theory of Knowing. *The Journal of Philosophy*, pages 357–372, 1967. URL http://www.jstor.org/stable/2024268.

Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa and Matthias Steup. The Analysis of Knowledge, 2017. URL https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/knowledge-analysis/.