

## Causal theory of Knowledge

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## The Causal Theory of Knowledge

**Question:** Fill in the following blank: According to the causal theory of knowledge, one knows an empirical proposition  $P$  if and only if [blank].

**Answer:** There “is a causal connection between the fact that makes  $p$  true [or simply: the fact that  $p$ ] and [one’s] belief of  $p$ ”.

[?]

**Question:** According to Goldman, what types of causal processes produce knowledge?

**Answer:**

- Perception,
- Memory,
- Testimony, and
- Inference (?)

**Question:** Does the fact that  $P$  is true need to cause my belief in  $P$ ? Explain.

**Answer:** No. Causal connections include **common causes**.

**Example:** As I arrived at school one day last quarter, I smelled balsamic vinegar, which is the salad dressing I prepared for my lunch and was carrying in my backpack. I knew immediately that the shirt in my backpack had been stained.

My knowledge that my shirt was stained was not caused by seeing my stained shirt. The staining of my shirt, and the odor of balsamic vinegar shared a **common cause**, namely, the spilling of my salad dressing.

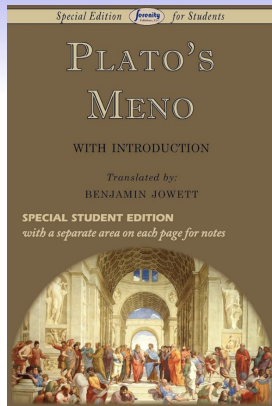
## Naturalism

- The word **naturalism** denotes many different theses in epistemology.
- But there are a wide range of philosophers who aim to aim to analyze normative concepts in terms of “natural” (often measurable) ones.
- **Example:** In ethics, hedonic utilitarians argue that an act is right if maximizes (some balance of) pleasure and pain.
- We will study broadly naturalistic epistemological theories aim to analyze “knowledge”, “justification”, and “evidence” in terms of
  - Causation,
  - Logical entailment,
  - Probability (in the frequency or propensity sense), and
  - Counterfactual/Modal relations.

**Question:** Some philosophers argue that naturalistic analyses of epistemological terms are impossible (e.g., Jaegwon Kim). Why am I, as an instructor, restricting our focus?

**Answer:** Mostly for considerations of time. But also, naturalistic theories often provide (some limited) guidance about how to obtain/acquire knowledge, evidence, justification, etc.

## The Value Problem



**The Value Problem:** Is knowledge more valuable than true belief? Than justified true belief? If so, why?

- The first puzzle – about the value of knowledge over true belief – is often attribute to Plato.

**Background:** The value problem attracted renewed interest in the early 2000s in response to 30+ years of “Gettierology”, in which increasingly complex theories of knowledge in response to increasingly esoteric thought experiments about knowledge.



**Gettier:** Knowledge  $\neq$  Justified, True Belief



**Gettierology:** (1) Theory of knowledge proposed, (2) Arcane counterexample presented, (3) More complex theory proposed, (4) Repeat.

To see how ridiculous the theories/definitions of “knowledge” get in this debate, consider a young Brian Skryms’ theory of knowledge

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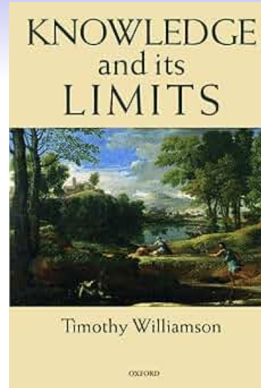
[?]

**X has derivative knowledge that  $p$  iff there is a statement  $e$  such that:**

- ① X knows that  $e$ ,
- ② X knows that  $e$  entails  $p$ , and
- ③ X believes that  $p$  on the basis of the knowledge referred to in the last two clauses.

X has **non-derivative knowledge** that  $p$  if and only if there is a statement  $e$  such that:

- ① X knows that  $e$
- ② X knows that  $e$  is good evidence for  $p$ ,
- ③ X believes that  $p$  on the basis of the knowledge referred to in the last two clauses,
- ④  $p$  is true, and
- ⑤ There is no statement  $q$  (other than  $p$ ) such that:
  - ① X knows that  $e$  is good evidence of  $q$ ,
  - ② X knows that  $q$  entails  $p$ , and
  - ③ X believes that  $p$  on the basis of the knowledge referred to in (5.1)



The importance of knowledge “would be hard to understand if the concept *knows* were the more or less ad hoc sprawl that analyses have had to become; why should we care so much about **that?**” ’

[?, p. 31]. See [?] for criticisms of this style of argument.

**Writing Exercise:** Pick on of the following three questions from the “Be Creative” section of the discussion questions: 1, 2C, or 3.

Just start writing.