

Phil. 450: Discussion 56

Reliabilism and Roush's Theory of Knowledge

Readings: Goldman and Beddor [2016] and [Roush, 2005, Chapter 2]

1 Reading Comprehension

1.1 Reliabilism

1. According to the simplest reliabilist theory of justification, a belief is justified if and only if it is formed via a *reliable process*. Wishful thinking is a paradigmatic *unreliable* process according to Goldman and Beddor. What examples of “reliable processes” do Beddor and Goldman contrast wishful thinking with?
2. Do the protagonists in Gettier’s two examples have justified beliefs according to reliabilism? Defend your answer.
3. What two “senses” of reliability does Goldman discuss?
4. Review question eight from the reading assignment (about the generality problem).

1.2 Roush

1. Summarize Roush’s theory of knowledge. That is, under what conditions does a person S know some proposition P according to Roush?
2. Imagine that you’re holding a blue pen in your hand, and suppose you believe that you’re holding a blue pen. Explain why your belief would count as knowledge according to Roush’s theory.
3. Pick one of Gettier’s original examples and explain why the protagonist in the example fails to know the relevant proposition according to Roush’s theory.
4. Review your answer to question twelve from the reading assignment. Recall, that question asked the following. Imagine you leave a glass

of ice water on your apartment balcony at noon on a 80-degree day. You forget about the glass when your friend calls, and you leave your apartment at 1PM. Around 3PM, you realize P , “Those ice cubes must be melted now!” Explain why some might claim that, according to Nozick’s theory, you don’t know P at 3PM. Does Roush’s theory entail that you know P at 3PM? Explain.

5. Consider the Jesse James case discussed near the end of chapter two of Roush [2005]. Summarize the story. Then explain why
 - (a) According to Nozick’s original theory, Betsy does not know “The robber is Jesse James.”
 - (b) According to Nozick’s modified theory (involving methods), Betsy does know “The robber is Jesse James.”
 - (c) According to Roush’s theory, Betsy knows “The robber is Jesse James.”
 - (d) According to Roush, her theory better explains why Betsy knows “The robber is Jesse James” than does Nozick’s modified theory involving methods.
6. This question has several parts. Ultimately, the goal is to explore how Roush “responds” to skepticism.
 - (a) Does Roush think that your belief that you are not BIVs is justified? Why or why not?
 - (b) Does Roush think that you know you’re not a BIV? Why or why not?
 - (c) Does Roush think you know that there are chairs in the classroom right now? Why or why not?
 - (d) According to Roush, in what ways are propositions like “There’s a table in front of me” different from “I am not a BIV”? According to Roush, why does that difference provide evidence for her theory?

2 Be Creative!

1. Consider the ice cubes example discussed above. According to Nozick’s modified theory (involving methods), do you know “Those ice cubes have *probably* melted”? Explain.

- If you answer “yes”, is there any sense in which Roush’s theory addresses the example better than Nozick’s?

2. Roush distinguishes between “subjective” and “objective” interpretations of probability.
 - A. Make a guess about what the distinction between subjective and objective interpretations might be. Then consult the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) entry on “Interpretations of Probability” and determine what a “subjective” interpretation of probability is.
 - B. Two common “objective” interpretations of probability are also discussed in the SEP entry on “Interpretations of Probability”, namely, the frequency and propensity interpretations. Give some examples of sentences in which the word “probable” is best interpreted in a frequency or propensity sense.
 - C. According to Roush’s theory, which type of interpretation of probability is relevant to understanding whether a person knows a proposition?
3. Read about the “reference class problem” in the SEP entry on “Interpretations of Probability.” In what ways is the problem similar to or different from the generality problem?
4. Roush criticizes Nozick’s modified theory of knowledge (which invokes the notion of a “method”) as being susceptible the generality problem for reliabilism. In your view, does Roush’s theory of knowledge face objections similar to the generality problem for reliabilism? Explain.

References

Alvin Goldman and Bob Beddor. Reliabilist Epistemology. In Edward N. Zalta, editor, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, winter 2016 edition, 2016. URL <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/reliabilism/>.

Sherrilyn Roush. *Tracking truth: Knowledge, evidence, and science*. Clarendon Press Oxford, 2005.