

Metaphysics & Epistemology

Metaphysics

- Metaphysics: the study of the fundamental features of the world
 - 'metaphysics' means (in Greek) what is beyond physics
- Metaphysics and Epistemology are the most fundamental, and most general subject matters in philosophy.
- All philosophical subjects depend on, or make assumptions about, epistemology and metaphysics
- What kinds of things are real?
- What are the fundamental things that constitute our world?
- Ordinary common-sense view: the world around us is the collection of medium-sized things (chairs, tables, and classrooms) and all the things that constitute them(atomic particles, etc)

Metaphysics

- What is space?
- What is time?
- What is an action?
- What are numbers?
- What are properties?
- What are things?

Epistemology

- Epistemology: the study of knowledge
 - 'episteme' means (in Greek) knowledge
- Epistemology: the subject concerned with the possibility and nature of knowledge
- Central questions:
 - What is knowledge?
 - What kinds of knowledge are there?
 - Do we have any knowledge?
- Three basic concepts in epistemology: belief, opinion, knowledge

Belief

- Beliefs are mental representations of the world
- They are evaluable as true or false
 - A belief is true if it represents the world correctly
 - A belief is false if it represents the world incorrectly
- Examples
 - Jody believes that the Earth is flat; false because it incorrectly represents the world
 - Jody believes that gravity exist; true because there is gravity

What Is Knowledge?

- Knowledge requires belief
 - I know that I'm in Gainesville requires that I also believe that I'm in Gainesville
- Knowledge requires truth
 - I know that I'm in Gainesville requires that I'm in fact in Gainesville
 - We would never say that I know that I'm in Gainesville' but I am not in Gainesville or I'm not sure it is true that I'm in Gainesville

Opinion

- Example 1: Suppose I was asked who are the most financially prosperous graduates? I said, “Engineers”, since I have no evidence that this is true, I am merely stating an opinion – a statement of what I think is true on the basis of an unreliable hunch
- Example 2: I believe that there is extra-terrestrial life in the universe
- Opinions are still either true or false
- Opinions are given out all the time (e.g. Gallup polls, opinion talk shows). But, what is the value of hearing or giving an opinion if it is not based on evidence. Is an opinion of any use to anyone? What we really want, and what is really valuable are beliefs based on evidence, because evidence gives us a reason to think they are true. This is closer to our conception of knowledge

What is Knowledge?

- S knows that p =df
 - S believes that p
 - p is true
 - S is justified (has evidence, or reason) in believing that p
- I know that I live in Gainesville
 - I believe that I live in Gainesville
 - It's true that I live in Gainesville
 - I have evidence that I live in Gainesville
 - E.g. I have a drivers' licences with an address in Gainesville
 - E.g. I have seen myself driving into Gainesville
- Two kinds of justification:
 - A posteriori (Empirical): derived from sense experience (requires looking into the world)
 - A priori (Non-empirical): derived from pure reflection (no looking into the world required)

Which of our beliefs are justified by Evidence?

- Simple everyday belief:
 - I know I am talking right now
- Beliefs about the past:
 - I know I had coffee yesterday
 - I know Ghenghis Khan slaughtered millions
- Religious Belief:
 - I know God exists
 - I know Presbyterians got it right.
- Scientific Claims
 - $F = m \times a$

Ship Captain

- The ship-owner knows that his ship might need to be overhauled. Before the ship leaves port, however, he talks himself out of his doubts. He reminds himself that the ship has sailed safely many times before. He reminds himself that he believes in Providence. And he persuades himself not to distrust the shipbuilders and contractors who have worked on the boat in the past.
- The ship sinks in mid-ocean. All aboard die.

Clifford

- If the belief was gotten illegitimately -- if it came about without relying on good evidence -- then the person who holds the belief is open to **moral criticism** - has failed in his or her duty.
 - Whether or not they act on it
 - Whether or not the outcome is positive or not
- “To sum up: it is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.”
- “It is wrong in all cases to believe on insufficient evidence; and where it is presumption to doubt and to investigate, there it is worse than presumption to believe.”