Knowledge as Justified True Belief (Plato)

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Overview

Setting

Learning
- Puzzle
- Theory of recollection
- Example

Knowledge
- True belief
- Justified true belief
Epistemology = theory of knowledge.

1 What is knowledge?
   - Plato: Knowledge is justified true belief
   - Gettier: Knowledge is NOT justified true belief

2 Can we know anything?
   - Descartes: skeptical arguments: sense deception, dreams, demon
   - Putnam: Brains in a vat

3 What is scientific knowledge?
   - Aristotle: demonstrated, necessary, universal
   - Hume: problems with demonstration and universality
   - Hempel: some more problems with demonstration and universality
The Setting

- Conversation between Socrates and Meno.
- Place is unknown; somewhere in Athens.
- Socrates is an old man; the only dialogue where Plato might have been present.
- The main question of the dialogue: Can goodness be taught, or must it be acquired by practice? Or is it inborn? (Debate: nomos — physis)
- What is goodness?
- What is teaching/learning?
- What is knowledge?
The Puzzle of Learning

The puzzle:

- If we do not know something, we cannot look for it, for then we would not know that we found it.
- But if we do know it already, then there is also no point to look for it!
- However, if this is true, then there can be no learning.
Solution: Theory of Recollection

- Our soul is immortal; our present life is only one episode in its history.
- Thus, the soul has learned everything long ago.
- Learning in this life: just remembering what we used to know (= ἀνάμνησις).
- The theory of recollection does not mean that we already have the knowledge at hand; learning is a long process (but it is recollection).
- The recollection usually starts with sense-experience.
- The recollection process:
  1. First, we do not know, but think we know.
  2. Second, we still do not know, but we realize that we do not know (⇒ motivation to learn).
  3. Finally, we do know.
Solution: Theory of Recollection

Illustration: Meno’s servant boy learning (remembering) geometry

- first he does not even know that he does not know
- realizes that he does not know
- recollects (“learns”) the answer
- since he never studied geometry, he must have known it before
- Thus, everyone has true opinions, which become knowledge by questioning.
The example of the man who has true opinion about how to get to Larissa, but does not have knowledge:

- His opinion is just as true as if he had knowledge
- Could find his way to Larissa
- Could give the right directions to Larissa just as well as one who has knowledge
- So why is true opinion less than knowledge?
The Statues of Daedalus

“Daidalos, if one is to place credence in the Kretan marvel, had the power to construct statues endowed with motion and to compel gold to feel human sensations.” (Callistratus, *Descriptions* 8)
The Statues of Daedalus

The statues:
- are aesthetically pleasing
- just as nice as the normal ones
- But, they run away, never stay for long

Belief without knowledge:
- can be true/correct
- can be just as useful as knowledge is
- But, it does not stay (it is merely a result of luck)
So, what else do we need for knowledge, apart from true belief?

True opinion and knowledge (Meno, 98a)

True opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man’s mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by giving an account of the reason why. And that, Meno, my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed. After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down.
Knowledge as Justified True Belief

The JTB Account of Knowledge

´S knows that p´ is true if and only if:

1. p is true (false propositions cannot be known)
2. S believes that p (if S doesn’t even believe that p, then obviously S cannot know that p)
3. S’s belief in p is justified (it is not merely a result of luck)

Questions:

- What is required for a belief to be justified? Internal or external factors?
- Is this really a necessary condition?
- Is it sufficient?