

1 Epistemic Justification and Truth

- Module: Epistemology
- Lesson 5

2 Before We Begin, A Reminder: What is a Proposition?

- When used by philosophers and epistemologists, the term “proposition” refers to the content of declarative sentences or statements.
 - When being used this way, in the declarative statement “The shirt is brown,” the proposition is not the statement itself—either the act of speaking, or the words or verbal construction—but the content which the statement expresses (the brownness of the shirt).
 - Hence, a proposition can be expressed in different ways (e.g. using different words or even different languages), or simply held in the mind and not expressed at all.

3 Where We Are So Far: Knowledge is...

- Justified
- True
- Belief

4 How Are Our Beliefs Justified (epistemic justification): Two Views

- Foundationalism
- Coherentism
- Why is it helpful to be familiar with these categories?
 - It can help us to understand the way a person is reasoning, even if they themselves may be not be aware of what they are doing.
 - e. g. If we identify the category in which a person is operating, and we are aware that it is self-defeating, then we are in a better place to assist them in discovering how their view fails to lead them to truth.

5 1. Foundationalism

- Foundationalism has been the dominant theory of epistemic justification throughout most of the history of western thought.
- All knowledge rests on foundations.
- Strong and weak foundationalism:
 - Strong foundationalism is difficult to maintain.
 - Weak foundationalism seems to best fit with what we know.

- Coherence may play a role in weak foundationalism.

6 1. Foundationalism

7 Kinds Of Belief (in foundationalism)

- Basic Beliefs—a priori or axioms (immediate)
- Non-basic Beliefs—a posteriori (mediated)

8 What is a Properly Basic Belief?

- It is basic.
 - It is not believed on the basis of other beliefs.
 - It is not believed on the basis of external evidence or other propositions.
 - It is self-presenting.
 - It is self-evident.
 - “We all must start somewhere with things we take as self-evident, basic assumptions that are not proved on the basis of something else. They are often called axioms.” (Gooding and Lennox, Being Truly Human.)

9 What is a Properly Basic Belief?

- It is proper if, and only if, it is truly basic and...
 - It must have some “ground.” (Meets some condition that specifies why it is proper to take it as basic.)
 - That ground is its internal, immediate sense, the unavoidable inclination to believe it.
 - Either (two views):
 - The belief is incorrigible, infallible: It is impossible for the person to be wrong about the belief. (Strong Foundationalism)
 - or
 - Prima facie justified. No good reason to think there are sufficient defeaters of the belief. (Weak Foundationalism)

10 What is a Properly Basic Belief?

- Some examples of properly basic beliefs (Foundationalists differ on some of these.)
 - Sensory beliefs (I see a tree.)*
 - Logic and reason*
 - *Foundationalists generally agree on these first two.
 - Self-presenting properties (“I am being appeared to redly.”)

- Basic mathematics ($2 + 2 = 4$)
- Moral beliefs (e.g. mercy is good)
- Theological beliefs (e. g. that God exists)
 - "Eternity in their hearts" (Ecc. 3:11)
 - Calvin's sensus divinitatis

11 2. Coherentism

- The essence of coherentism is that there are no basic vs. non-basic beliefs. All beliefs are on a par with each other, and the justification of a belief lies in how well it "coheres" with the other beliefs in one's belief system.

12 Coherentism

- All beliefs are on a par with each other. (None are basic.)
- Beliefs must "cohere" with each other.
- Problems with strong coherentism.
 - It amounts to circular justification.
 - It leads to isolation (one's set of beliefs is detached from reality.)
 - Plurality problem: It makes possible more than one set of "coherent" beliefs that are, in fact, incompatible.
- Weak coherentism has some compatibility with weak foundationalism.

- Conclusion: Beliefs, then, are justified if they rest upon a sufficient foundation of other beliefs and properly basic beliefs.

13 Where We Are So Far: Knowledge is...

- Justified
- True
- Belief

14 Bible Assumes Truth's Objectivity and Knowability

- Gen. 42:16—"Test whether the truth is in you."
- Exo. 20:16—"You shall not bear false witness... ."
- Deut. 18:22—Prophets tested re: the truth.
- 1 Kgs. 8:26—Let your words come true.
- Isa. 49:19—"I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right."
- Rom. 1:18—"Who suppress the truth..." (what is real about God).

- 2 Tim. 2:25—“...repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.”

15 **Two Views Of Truth's Relationship to People**

- Absolutist: Truth is objective, outside the person, true for all people at all times.
- Relativist: Truth is subjective, it depends on the person, is different from person to person and time to time.

16 **Three Theories Of Truth**

- Correspondence
 - A proposition is true when it corresponds to reality (the way things really are).
 - Universally held until the 19th century.

17 **Three Theories Of Truth**

- Coherence
 - A proposition is true when it “coheres” well with a person’s other beliefs.
 - Related to, but distinct from the coherence view of epistemic justification.
 - Problems—
 - Lack of definition of coherence.
 - Derives from a coherence view of epistemic justification.
 - It is conducive to relativism.
 - It leads to denial of reality.

18 **Three Theories Of Truth**

- Pragmatism
 - A proposition is true when it “works” within one’s epistemic framework.
 - This view is self-defeating, because one has to go outside of pragmatism to define what “works.”
- Conclusion: A proposition is true if it corresponds to reality (the way things really are).

19 **In Summary...**

- Knowledge is...
 - A belief... (i.e. a thought, idea, or proposition we hold in our minds)
 - for which we have sufficient justification... (i.e. based on other justified true beliefs, which ultimately rest on a foundation of properly basic beliefs)
 - and which is true. (i.e. corresponds to the way things really are)

20 **Next Week**

- Skepticism and Postmodernism and the challenge to knowledge.
- How we know Christianity is true.