

The Value of the Concept of Knowledge

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1, The value of the concept KNOWLEDGE to us as philosophers, pt 1: beliefs

“Not so long ago, philosophy was widely understood to consist in an investigation of concepts. There were books with titles such as *The Concept of Mind*; *The Concept of a Person*; *The Concept of Law*; *The Concept of Evidence*; and *The Concept of Knowledge*. The idea that philosophy consists in, or, at a minimum, must begin with an understanding and investigation of our concepts is, I believe, both natural and very attractive. It is also, I believe, deeply mistaken. On my view, the subject matter of ethics is the right and the good, not our concepts of them. The subject of philosophy of mind is the mind itself, not our concept of it. And the subject of epistemology is knowledge itself, not our concept of knowledge.” (Kornblith2002, 1).

But naturalistic philosophers of mind *are* interested in the concept of mind: witness the *Theory of Mind* debate.

Two reasons why philosophers of mind *should* be interested in the concept BELIEF:

1. they're interested in it as a cognitively real structure, and they're interested in the structures within which the concept BELIEF is embedded
2. they're interested in the question as to whether the concept BELIEF refers to anything cognitively real.

Ditto the concept KNOWLEDGE.

The story so far about beliefs

1. The Theory Theory of folk psychology holds that we possess a dedicated Theory of Mind module, consisting in:
 - a database where psychological principles are represented
 - a mechanism that deploys the information from this database in processes of thinking about thoughts.
2. Cognitive science posits the existence of decoupled representations in our cognitive architecture.
3. The question about the reality of beliefs is over whether these decoupled representations are sufficiently similar to the folk notion of a belief to warrant saying that cognitive science endorses the reality of beliefs
 - Some (the non-naturalists) have denied that these things described in cognitive science are really *beliefs* because they lack key properties of belief.

Add to the story a *tracking account* of reference for the concept BELIEF:

4. If the concept BELIEF has *the function of tracking* decoupled representations, then they refer to these decoupled representations, and so **decoupled representations are beliefs**.

The a tracking account of the concept BELIEF presupposes the view of Folk Psychology as a science

Three ways one can ask is Folk Psychology a science:

1. The cognitive structure question
2. The developmental question
3. The science vs engineering question

2, The value of the concept KNOWLEDGE to us as philosophers, pt 2: knowledge

Is there an analogous story to the belief-story to be told about knowledge?

Hypothesis: we have a dedicated *folk epistemology module*, containing:

1. a database where principles about knowledge are represented
2. a mechanism that deploys the information from this database in processes of thinking about knowledge.

There is some evidence for this view of the cognition of thinking about knowledge.

Folk epistemology as science or as engineering

If folk epistemology is a **folk science**, then the story about the reference of the concept KNOWLEDGE is easy to tell:

- it refers to the kind it has the function of tracking; that kind might be:
 - some composite kind (Papineau)
 - a primitive kind (Kornblith)
 - a disjunctive kind (Williamson)
- there's still room for surprises (non-factivity)

If folk epistemology is **engineering**, the story is more complex:

- knowledge is an *artefact* of our practices, in which we:
 - shape our beliefs
 - guided by the concept KNOWLEDGE

The question of whether folk epistemology is science or engineering turns on the function (and in this sense the value) of the concept KNOWLEDGE

3, The value of the concept KNOWLEDGE to us as possessors of the concept

If folk epistemology is science:

1. Our concept KNOWLEDGE helps us to *track* a subclass of our beliefs:
 - those that are likely to be true
 - we have a *primary stock* of such beliefs, from:
 - perception
 - memory
 - basic (non-reflexive) reasoning
2. By tracking others' primary stock of likely-to-be-true beliefs, we can:
 - predict and understand behaviour better
 - exploit them as information sources (Craig)

If folk epistemology is engineering:

Our concept KNOWLEDGE is a *tool*, used by us in the business of forming, maintaining and revising our beliefs (*guiding belief*, for short).

Three kinds of way in the concept KNOWLEDGE can play a role in guiding belief:

1. socially
 - Seeking true beliefs through *others'* knowledge; two details:
 - Using another as a source of *information* (Craig; perhaps via testimony)
 - Using another as a source of a *reliable method* (Papineau)
2. individualistically
 - we classify *our own* beliefs using the concept KNOWLEDGE:
 - "I know this"; "I think this, but I don't know it"; "I don't know whether..."; etc.
 - our reasoning is shaped by these classifications
 - inquiry begins when we classify ourselves as not knowing
 - perhaps we operate with the following representation of a norm: DON'T USE NON-KNOWLEDGE AS PREMISES IN REASONING!

3. developmentally
 - Subjects who possess and deploy the concept KNOWLEDGE form part of each child's developmental environment.
 - an analogy: desire and the concept DESIRE in the folk psychology of one's parents
 - Being told that one does not know might play a role shaping the repertoire of methods the child retains for belief-formation.
4. evolutionarily
 - it's important to be understood:
 - shape one's mind to fit the interpretive scheme of one's peers
 - an analogy: the concept FEAR and the facial expression of fear.
 - if all one's peers classify your beliefs into two categories using the concept KNOWLEDGE, then a subject who's beliefs are partitioned in rough accord with the extension of knowledge might be better off.

If folk epistemology is engineering, what theory of reference applies to the concept KNOWLEDGE?

- not a tracking account
- not a descriptive account
- maybe it's the account of reference relevant to concepts of *artefacts*.

4, The value of knowledge itself

Knowledge is valuable because:

1. truth in our beliefs is valuable
2. knowledge is a source of true belief

other's knowledge is a source of true belief for me (through testimony / interpretation)

my (earlier self's) knowledge is a source of true belief for (the later) me (through inference, and so on).