

**Biola University: An Ontology of Knowledge Course**  
**Points discussed 5/27/97**

1. Formal requirements of the course.

Prepared class participation.

3 short (17 to 18 hundred words) papers (assigned on Thurs, due on Mondays)

Take home final.

2. Texts to be purchased:

Susan Haack, Evidence and Inquiry

J.-F. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge

Hilary Putnam, Reason, Truth and History

3. Topic of the Course: The Ontology of Knowledge

What are the constituents (parts, their properties and interrelations and relations to other things) of knowledge, as act (event) and as condition (disposition)? How is knowledge and its constituents positioned in reality as a whole?

4. Preliminary characterization of knowledge as condition: A has knowledge of B provided that A has the ability to represent B as B is, on an appropriate basis of thought and experience.

5. General discussion of the profound significance of knowledge and the possession of knowledge for human life. Is the Christian tradition a knowledge tradition? The power and influence of those who can credibly claim to know. Who gets to determine what does and does not count as knowledge? The meaning of secularism: Knowledge defined without God.

6. How the effort to understand what knowledge is has been, historically, hijacked and frustrated by

a. Efforts to determine what we (can) know.

And whether we can know certain things---scepticism.

b. And arising from those efforts Empiricism (Sensationism).

What we know (and what is real) is limited by the range of possible sensations.

An unmitigated disaster! Knowledge itself is not something of which we have sensations. The same is true of almost everything of human significance.

7. The result: forced and unsustainable accounts of knowledge:

a. Resulting in the contemporary agreement that knowledge of things as they are 'apart' from consciousness (language) is impossible.

b. Because of the continued failure of accounts of knowledge (act especially, but disposition too) to satisfy the basic ontological requirement of all wholes that they be ontologically determinate.--"Every entity, including events (and acts) is bounded and internally structured and externally related in specific ways, with no 'gaps' or 'leaps' creating an ontological 'blur'". Illustrations of 'blurs' in accounts of knowledge by Locke, Hume, Kant, Kripke.

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**Points discussed 5/28/97**

1. Assign for Thursday. LOK Ch. 5, pp. 215ff and paper "Knowledge." Begin Haack book for Friday.
2. Comparison of Chisholm's view in The Problem of the Criterion to what was said last time about getting at the essence of knowledge instead of losing oneself in what we (can) know questions. Disagree with Chisholm that any choice between scepticism, methodism and particularism must be question begging. He is a nominalist and therefore cannot do much with essence or with the recognition of things as cases before the analysis of essence.
3. Asked class to reflect on handout "Stemming the Drift" with reference to the question of what counts as knowledge and who is in charge of deciding.
4. Discussion of Sellar's attempt to deal with knowledge in terms of verification of sentences (LOK handout, pp. 208-215. Explanation and criticism of the coex relation or 'confrontation' that is supposed to 'tie' the sentence to the object.
5. Examination of the three objective presumptions about cognitive experiences: transcendence, lawfulness and community (LOK 2ff) over against the obviously subjective aspects of experience.
6. The two key points about the structure of acts of consciousness in Husserl's early research:
  - a. Necessary connections between parts of acts--sensa and other components (representations and judgments). See pp. 12-14
  - b. Necessary connections between acts and other acts that serve to "fulfill" them. See p. 14-17.Lengthy discussion of fulfilment and the corresponding 'empty' intentions.
7. 'Intentions' are concepts. Lengthy discussion of concepts. See LOK pp. 23-25 (handout). The "few <five> nonpartisan truths about concepts." To every entity (including concepts) there corresponds a concept. That is only to say that every entity is (potentially) thinkable, can be thought of. Roughly, the quality of a mental act which consists in its being of or about its object is the concept 'employed' in that particular act. The basic element in the intentional nexus act/object (linguistic act or other wise) is the natural correlation between the concept under which the object "falls" and the properties which the object must possess to fall under that concept. The concept is a property of the respective act and the correlative properties are properties of the respective object. Act and 'its' object come together in the intentional nexus through the natural correlation between the concept and the object's properties, e.g. whiteness and the concept white.

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**Points discussed 5/29/97**

Assigned for next meeting. Finish paper "Knowledge" and begin reading Haack, Evidence and Inquiry

First brief paper: "The significance of treating (or failing to treat the act of knowing... as an ontologically clarified whole."

1. Discussion of the "Stemming the Drift" piece. Will just standing on the authority of scripture help, or must one do something about the condition of "knowledge." Surely the latter.

Particularly, how is it now determined what counts as knowledge and who is "good at it"?

2. Discussion of the Brentano and Sartre handouts in connection with the discussion of "concepts" from the previous day.

3. Further discussion on the nature of "fulfillment," and especially the idea that in a high or complete degree of fulfillment the "object itself" is brought into actual relationship with the conscious act, in a manner that can be "viewed" as it (that relationship) is in itself. See especially LOK ch. V, pp. 216-217, top 227, mid 229, top 230.

4. The distinction between intentional and immanent. (220-221)

"In" as part, as property and as `object'--the three "ins" carefully distinguished.

5. "Transcendence," the third element in the objective side of cognition, LOK pp. 241-245. How transcendence of the object is compatible with the immanence of fulfillment.

6. A brief comparison of Sellars' verification with Husserl's fulfillment. (pp. 231-232) For Sellars, just a blank `together', no ground laid for the meshing of mind and object in knowledge.

7. Much of class given to discussion of questions and objections--as should be at this point.

**Biola University: An Ontology of Knowledge Course**  
**Points discussed 5/30/97**

1. Walk through the paper "Knowledge," by D. Willard,  
Review of various points in the view of the act of knowledge as an ontological structure (whole) already laid out.  
"How a piece of knowledge is made."
2. Emphasis laid upon how the object is 'in' the act without transforming it. pp. 155-156  
"Constructing" is what one does to the act, not the object of the act, though the object comes before consciousness through the construction of the act.  
The peculiar "transcendence" (and immanence) involved. pp. 157f.  
The fulfillment of names as well as of judgments/beliefs/sentences.
3. The four main points in the reconciliation of subjectivity and objectivity in knowledge.  
pp. 161-162.
4. How one knows acts and other aspects of consciousness. Just like one knows anything else, by attending to them.  
They turn up before consciousness in various way, can be overlooked or ignored, come to our attention.  
The illusion that in sensation there is more to how know, created by the sense organs and technical devices.  
The basic action of attending is the same in all cases.
5. Could one be wrong, e.g. in thinking (intuiting) that a thought (belief, representation) is fulfilled when it is not?  
In general, yes. Failure to understand or attended carefully comes in here as elsewhere.  
But could one know in some cases that one is not wrong in thinking that a thought is fulfilled?  
Yes, in certain simple cases at least: e.g. in one's finding of 5 to be greater than 3, or that I just thought of Bill Clinton.
6. With reference to specific cases of (seeming) fulfillment of what we thought to be the case, the question: Why should I accept this as a case of genuine fulfillment? has no priority over the question: Why should I think this is not a case of genuine fulfillment? I am at least as warranted in excepting this as a case of genuine fulfillment when there is no reason to do otherwise as I am in rejecting it as a case of genuine fulfillment without a reason to do so--other than "Why not?"

**Biola University: Ontology of Knowledge Course**  
**Points discussed 6/3/97**

1. No minutes of the last meeting today.

Assign: Now read the last chapter of Haack and if possible return to read chapter 5 and following.

2. Haack attempts to undermine foundationalism by showing that there are no justified beliefs that do not depend on other beliefs for their justification. The strategy is to take "the last best hope of foundationalism"--judgments about our consciousness of how things appear--and show that they are not 'certain'. Haack's attempt is on pp. 39-41. Her basic point is that people are sometimes uncertain about how things look to them (whether lines look thicker or not--see diagram on p. 40). This she uses to dismiss the entire class of judgments about our mental states as conceivably wrong, and hence not 'certain' and hence not basic.

But it isn't clear in the Ophthalmologist case that the client is reporting uncertainty about their lookings as opposed to what they are looking at (the thickness of the lines).

And the mental states chosen for discussion are very special cases, involving how and not what we are conscious of. So it may no means follow that no judgments about mental states are 'certain' in the sense required by the Foundationalist. (See Husserl, Logical Investigations, p. 412, English ed.) Haack (and others) have a long way to go before Foundationalism is undermined on this strategy. And it is possible that some judgments about the fulfillment structures earlier discussed are 'certain' and thus allow us to be 'certain' about many things other than mental states. (See paper, "Knowledge")

3. We began the discussion of Haack's account of how justified a person is in believing something. It is a matter of why he believes it. (p. 75) But the "why" must take in both causes and reasons (belief as a state and belief as (?!#?) a content). She focusses on the phrase "The causal nexus, at t, of A's S-belief that p." This, she says, "will refer to those states of A which are operative at t, whether sustaining or inhibiting, in the vector of forces resulting in A's believing that p." (p. 76) Those 'states' are either other beliefs ("S-reasons") or 'experiential states' which she calls "experiential S-evidence." These are perceptions (external or introspective) and memories derived therefrom. Thus "'A's S-evidence for believing that p' <will refer> to A's S-reasons and experiential S-evidence for believing that p." (mid-p. 77) In English, what this all means is that we come to believe things because of other beliefs and the perceptions and memories we have. These, considered only as causes, constitute what she calls our "S-evidence" for believing that p. Of course as such (as causes) it is not clear that they are in any sense evidence for the truth of p.

4. Haack tries to make the causes of S-belief that p relevant to the truth of p--"a bridge is needed from S- to C-evidence" (bot p. 79)--by including the propositions which describe "the states constituting A's experiential S-evidence for believing that p" (top 80) in the propositions which may (or may not) logically support the truth of the C-belief. Thus: "'A's C-evidence for believing that p' will refer to A's C-reasons <other C-beliefs> for believing that p and A's experiential C-evidence for believing that p." (top 80)

5. We ended in the middle of discussion of the three factors that determine how good A's C-evidence with respect to p is:

How favorable?

How secure?

How comprehensive?

The degree to which one is justified in believing that p will depend on how favorable, secure and comprehensive their C-evidence is with respect to p.

Note the summary statement at bottom p. 87: "A is more justified in believing that p the more supportive his direct C-evidence with respect to p is, the more...independently secure his direct C-reasons for...believing that p are, and the more comprehensive his C-evidence with respect to p is'."

We must continue in this discussion of the three factors, and also pick up the discussion of the minimal conditions for being justified in any degree on p. 88, and the discussion of completely and COMPLETELY justified on pp. 88-89.

## Biola University : An Ontology of Knowledge Course

### Major points made 6/5 & 6/97

Haack's theory of justification takes "experiential anchoring" and "explanatory integration" to be "central...to the criteria by which we judge the justification of empirical beliefs." (p. 137) The long paragraph running from bottom 111-bottom 112 gives the clearest statement in her book of how it all works. But, as is clear from the way she goes about the project (ch. 10) of ratifying her criteria of justification--i.e. showing that being justified by them in a belief is truth indicative--and from her discussion (ch. 5) of the role of sense perception in the justification of belief, both experiential anchoring and explanatory integration involve, on her account, serious incoherences that point to failures of determinacy or ontological blurs.

In the case of the experiential anchoring, the implicit structure is one of:

1. Objects in reality
2. causally giving rise to
3. A's sensory S-evidence for believing that p,
4. descriptions of which S-evidence constitute
5. A's experiential C-evidence for believing that p,
6. which together with A's C-reasons constitute
7. A's C-evidence for believing that p. (top 80)

The major blur with reference to experiential anchoring occurs in 1-3. She wants a theory that "makes perception <out to be> of things and events around one..." (p. 110). "In my account the realist face of the commonsense picture is represented in the suggested characterizations of sensory C-evidence, which presuppose that normal perception is of things and events around one..." (p. 111). Sensory C-evidence does describe sensory S-evidence as containing perceptual states which are of, for example, a dog. But that's the blur. What is it for a sensory state to be of a dog and not something else? She has no account of this, and in fact seems to think that causation can pull the necessary weight. But it cannot. It cannot provide the necessary selectivity or specific intentionality or meaning that, must, of course, be mentioned in any description of a perceptual awareness--of a dog or whatever.

The failure to provide for an actual grasp of the object by the sensory state is what leaves her with the astonishingly lame argument for the "truth indicativeness" of her criteria of justification in the final chapter. The object is never actually present to us, for all her realist desires, and hence one cannot simply check beliefs justified on her criteria with what they are about to see if what they are about is as the belief holds it to be. Her position is, I take it, that "we cannot literally `confront a belief with <the object> experience(d)', or `get outside our skins'." (p. 69)

What is essentially the same blur shows up between 3 and 4 also: the transition through `description' from my sensory state of seeing the dog (sensory S-evidence) to the corresponding C-evidence, which is the proposition that I now see a dog. Is the relationship here also a merely causal one, or also a semantic one--of meaning, intentionality. Does 3 provide evidence for 4, which then in turn allows 3 to provide evidence (through explanatory integration) for the belief that p? The ontological structure of the 3/4 relation is unclarified at best, and is probably incoherent in virtue of its attempt to combine causality and a transfer of "evidence" in some sense relevant to logic and evaluation.

With regard to explanatory integration the major blur has to do with the final state belief that p which is (more or less) justified on Haack's account. Pretty clearly this final belief-state is an S state, the state of a person A. It will have causes, but must (surely) also have reasons. How it can have reasons is the final blur. What is it for a belief state to be supported by reasons. Because, as with consciousness (awareness, intentionality), Haack really offers no analysis of belief itself, and especially no account of how propositions, truth and logical relations enter into a belief state, the logical support of A's justified belief that p remains ontologically indeterminate. The feeling or sense of "explanatory integration"--inference to the best explanation?--which is, she makes clear, not a matter of deductive connections (pp. 101, 109, 217, etc), is perhaps all we have to go on. Hardly an advance over the "induction" which she scorns. ("...What replaces 'inductive argument' in my explication is 'supportive evidence'..." and so "the argument just given is what replaces 'the justification of induction' in my ratification'." <217>)

With these blurs, then, it is hardly to be wondered at that she is by her own admission unable "to give a precise explication of the notions of supportiveness and explanatory integration" ...and then "to make this part of the ratificatory argument more rigorous." The obscurity resulting from all this is perhaps what allows her to return at the end of the book and help herself to claims about what she knows (p. 221), even though she has only given a theory of more-or-less-justified belief and explicitly disowned the project of analyzing knowledge. (p. 7)

It is to be noted that she also retracts her understanding of the "empirical" as the "factual" (p. 15) when that understanding becomes threatening to her (unargued) "naturalism." (p. 214) Blind commitments such as this are left free play when the requisite ontological structure for spelling out what experience is (and hence "empirical") is not faced up to.

Since consciousness, experience, awareness, intentionality (aboutness, ofness), meaning all involve what we may loosely call the spiritual nature of the human being, there is no prospect whatsoever for an ontology of knowledge so long as naturalism in its present form is regarded as ultimate truth.

Write 5 or more pages on each of the following questions:

1. Explain why Putnam holds that "'Objects' do not exist independently of conceptual schemes" (p. 52 etc.) and that we therefore could not be brains in a vat (pp. 12-13, 51). (You will have to explain what reference is for him, and how it is "not in the head." (27 etc.) How does he think his theory of "what makes a statement or a whole system of statements--a theory or conceptual scheme--rationally acceptable" (54-55, 123) save him from utter subjectivism and relativism. (123-124, 137-138, 169-173, 202-205, 211-216). On this question, explanation is all that is called for, and you should focus your explanations on the pages indicated. If you wish to add criticism, that's fine, of course.

2. Explain the very idea of an Ontology of Knowledge and its significance for (1). how epistemology or the theory of knowledge has developed to now and (2) the prospects of an account of consciousness which allows us to know things as they are "in themselves," avoiding the "Midas touch" view of consciousness (or references) that generates Sartre's "mental spider." What relation does a `spiritual' view of consciousness have to the possibility of a realist theory of knowledge? On this question please present your views with your reasons.

Mail your results to me at:  
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postmarked no later than June 19, 1997.

Be sure to keep a copy, and place your phone number on the one you send so I can talk to you if need be.

Dallas Willard