

Question Set 3

Due October 2nd at 8pm. Submit your work in PDF or Word format, through Canvas.

Part A. Questions about the Reading

Typical answers should be about a paragraph per question. Be direct and to-the-point, and use simple words and short sentences.

Ayer and Gettier

1. Ayer argues that even when what you believe is true, and you are completely sure that it is true, it may still not be correct to say that you *know* it is true. Give an example of a situation in which someone is sure that something is the case but fails to know it.
2. Ayer argues that there is a third condition on knowledge, in addition to the truth condition and the condition of being sure. What is that third condition? Explain how the example from Question 1 motivates Ayer's analysis.
3. Gettier argues, against Ayer, that knowledge is not the same thing as justified true belief. Describe an example from his paper, and explain how that example shows that knowledge is different from justified true belief.
4. Now construct your own counterexample to the JTB analysis of knowledge. That is, describe a specific situation in which someone has a belief that is justified and true, but still fails to amount to knowledge.
5. These sorts of counterexamples to the JTB analysis are called *Gettier cases*, and they all have a common structure. Try to write down a general recipe for constructing a Gettier case.

Keith Lehrer

6. Keith Lehrer seeks to analyse knowledge as justified true belief that satisfies a certain further condition. On p. 170 he considers adding the condition (iv). Explain how the resulting analysis avoids Gettier-style counterexamples. Why is Lehrer still dissatisfied with this analysis?
7. He considers two more conditions (iv-a) and (iv-b), before finally settling on (iv-c). Explain Lehrer's reasons for preferring (iv-c) over (iv-a) and (iv-b).

8. Explain how Lehrer's final analysis, with condition (iv-c), avoids Gettier's counterexamples.

Lehrer's account is a version of the view that knowledge is *undefeated* justified true belief. That is, he claims knowledge is justified true belief without any defeaters. Different epistemologists have slightly different characterisations of what a *defeater* is, but the basic idea is that a defeater for a justified belief p is some truth that, if known, would undermine the believer's justification for believing p .

9. Provide an intuitive counterexample to the analysis of knowledge as undefeated justified true belief. You can do this by filling out the details of the following case: S knows that p , even though there is a *completely misleading* piece of evidence out there that, if known, would undermine S 's justification for p . In other words, the agent has knowledge in spite of the fact that there is a defeater, for the reason that this defeater is itself defeated by some further fact. Explain why the particular case you give is a counterexample to the view that knowledge is undefeated justified true belief. [Bonus points if you can show that your counterexample works against Lehrer's specific version of the analysis.]
10. Suggest an alternative analysis of knowledge that resists counterexamples like these. Do you think this modified analysis of knowledge is ultimately correct? Justify your answer.

Part B. Definitions

Define each of the following terms as accurately as you can. Write in full sentences, use your own words, and give examples where helpful.

11. Analysis
12. Necessary Condition
13. Sufficient Condition
14. Counterexample to a Deductive Argument
15. Counterexample to an Analysis
16. Testimony
17. Validity
18. Soundness

Part C. Four-Sentence Essay

Write a four-sentence essay about Colin Radford's "Knowledge by Example."

How to Write a Four-Sentence Essay

Borrowed from Jordan MacKenzie, who borrowed it from [Dennis Earl](#)

A four-sentence essay is a response to a reading that follows the following template:

1. [Name of person] says [summary of central claim of the paper].
2. I say [whatever it is you think about this claim] because [insert your reasons].
3. One might object that [insert a reason somebody might disagree with you].
4. I reply that [insert a response to the objection in 3].

Here is an example. Let's suppose that Virginia Tech is debating whether to institute a campus-wide smoking ban. Anyone caught smoking will face a \$50 fine. Now let's suppose that you're tasked with defending the freedom to smoke on campus (regardless of whether or not you actually believe this freedom is worth protecting). You now have the first two sentences of your essay:

1. *Proponents of the smoking ban say that we shouldn't be free to smoke on campus, because smoking is bad for your health.*
2. *I say that we should be free to smoke, because even though smoking is bad for you, it's still worse to restrict our freedom.*

The next step is to think about what someone who disagrees with you might say in response. You want their response to be 'on point'— this means that it should relate directly to the reason you've given in Sentence 2, rather than bringing in a new, completely distinct consideration. Here's one thing way you could continue:

3. *One might object that restricting our freedom is necessary in the name of public health.*

This is an on-point objection because it relates directly to the reason that you gave against the smoking ban in Sentence 2. You said that the ban was bad because it undermines freedom. The objector says— sure, freedom is important, but it's necessary to restrict it when doing so protects public health.

All you need to do now is wrap things up by responding to the objector. Again, you want this response to be on-point:

4. *I reply that freedom actually carries more weight than public health, for without freedom, public health would be meaningless.*

This response is on-point because it directly undermines the consideration brought up in Sentence 3. Sentence 3 suggests that freedom can be justifiably curtailed in the service of public health. Sentence 4 pushes against this, by arguing that public health ought to actually be sacrificed in the service of freedom. Why? Because public health, while valuable, ultimately derives its value from freedom. We could have all the public health in the world, but if we weren't free to enjoy it, we wouldn't have anything worthwhile. That's your four-sentence essay done.

Does a four-sentence essay need to reflect your honest opinion on the subject? Not at all! That's not the point of this exercise. The point is merely to get you in the habit of raising and responding to on-point objections. In fact, I'd encourage you to take up positions that you don't actually agree with some of the time—it will help you with not only this assignment, but also future assignments in this course.

Just because four-sentence essays are short and low-key, doesn't mean that they can't contain real philosophical argumentation. Here is a great example from Dennis Earl, which captures one line of argument from Descartes' First Meditation:

They say that sensation is a foundational source of knowledge. I say it's not, because the senses sometimes are in error—they sometimes misrepresent the external world. One might object that sensation is nevertheless reliable, for the senses do tell us the truth about the external world most of the time. I reply that we still can't tell with certainty exactly when the senses are being deceptive and when they're not, and a foundational source of knowledge has to give us certainty.