Is knowledge a justified true belief? If not, what is?

The goal of this paper is to explore and question the philosophical definition of knowledge as it has previously been defined and develop how should be defined. Defining knowledge will allow us to classify the knowledge in our minds and separate it from, facts, beliefs, hypotheses, assumptions, and guesses. More importantly it will allow us to be certain of facts considered to be knowledge.

Is knowledge a justified true belief? The justified true belief (JTB) definition of knowledge states that to know something, S, means person, P, must be justified in believing S, S must be true, and P must believe the S[1]. The last two points are tough to assail. It is difficult to imagine a scenario where P knows S that he/she does not believe. For example, if I do not believe that I am writing a paper now, I must believe I am doing something else. It is impossible to believe a negative without believing a positive in its place. Suppose P is listening to a new jazz song P has never heard before. In this case P does not believe Johann Sebastian Bach wrote it, but P cannot place who did write it. Therefore, P cannot say that P knows that Bach did not write it.

Can we have knowledge that is not true? It does not seem logical to know something, S, that is not true, unless P does not know S is false. If P knows S is false, P would know the opposite of S, not S. Suppose P thinks the President of the United States is Arnold Schwarzenegger. Does P know that Arnold is President? That is a difficult question. P could very strongly believe it. P could think P knows it. If P told other people this fact with enough conviction would they know it? It does not appear so, from someone not under the delusion. As soon as P understands Obama is President then P would know that Arnold is not. Believing S is a prerequisite to know S and S must be true, at least for P to know S. This is also a solid foundation. So knowledge needing justification is the only section in question.

Justification works in one of three ways. Justification is based on solid undeniable facts, is circular, or

[1] Baker, Anaya M., 2010. *Plato on Knowledge: Understanding Justified True Belief*. Available from: <http://anayambaker.hubpages.com/hub/Plato-on-Knowledge-Understanding-Justified-True-Belief> [24 March 2012]

trails on forever. The argument for circular justification is fairly weak because the structure supports itself, and thus is baseless[2]. If we could secure our knowledge on a stable base we could be certain of what we know. Justification resting on solid facts is promising, however people have been looking for such facts for a very long time. They are unusually refuted, more so now that science is dominant to religion. Justification could go on forever, is in infinitism. It could work if each level of justification further from fact in question, F, has less of an effect on F. It is similar to the law of diminishing returns. At some point more justification does not help. How much of an effect does the type of bread a car builder ate one morning have on whether or not P will arrive to work on time? Perhaps the man who made the car only likes wheat bread, but his wife gave him white one morning so he was slightly irritated when he went to work. He may or may not have performed worse than he usually does when building cars. Which may or may not affect if P's car will start on a cold day, thus P may arrive to work late that day. If P is late to work would P justify it with the type of toast a car builder ate, or any other similarly trivial arguments?

Justification, as reasoning behind knowledge, comes in the form of more pieces of information all with their own justification. Imagine you want to prove the sky is blue. You could measure the wavelength of light to prove its blueness. Then to be certain you would also have to justify the fact that the machine is working, the fact that is it accurate, and that the wavelength you read is in the blue part of the color spectrum, and so on. Each of these pieces of information appear to support the fact that the sky is blue in different ways and with varying levels of support.

Descartes's dreaming argument and the following brain in the vat argument seriously call into question the definition of knowledge as a JTB, and the closure of knowledge. The argument goes, I have hands, if I have hands then I know I am not a brain in a vat, therefore I am not a brain in a vat. However, we cannot know that we are not a BIV so we do not know we have hands[3]. If we cannot be sure of

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[2] Kvanvig, Jonathan, "Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Available from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/justep-coherence/>. [24 March 2012]

[3] Brueckner, Tony, "Skepticism and Content Externalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2012 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Available from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/skepticism-content-externalism/>. [20 March 2012]

anything around us, is the JTB definition of knowledge sound? It does not appear so.

The BIV argument opens the door for all sceptical arguments. If we cannot be sure of what we know, what can we know? Edmund Gettier devised situations where subjects had a JTB but it is suspect as to whether they had knowledge. The counterexamples rely on chance and circumstance[4].

Robert Nozick's truth tracking counters scepticism and Gettier. Truth tracking replaces the justification clause of knowledge with two sub clauses. They read, "if p weren't true, S wouldn't believe that p" and "If p were true, S would believe that p"[5]. Where p is the knowledge in question and S is the subject. This definition ensures that our knowledge is kept up to date as we learn more information. If S were not a BIV, S would not believe he/she was a BIV. If S were a BIV, S would believe it. Truth tracking replaces justification and the idea that knowledge is closed. Does knowledge need to be closed? It seems to be how we make predictions about the world. Knowledge closure may need a new definition, or not be needed, either way is not the focus of this paper.

Nozick is describing experience. It continually updates our knowledge. It seems obvious when stated, we would intuitively never continue to know something when we discover it is false; likewise we would only know things we are very sure of. Even if P has been deceived P will know the deception but if P ever understands what happend P will correct P's knowledge.

If all knowledge is *a posteriori*, then we could think of knowledge as the things we are most sure of, and things we guess are those with the least justification/experience. One prominent example of a priori knowledge is "all bachelors are unmarried". There are two problems with this example. One, *a priori* knowledge does not allow us to know more than we already do. If we already know the definition of a bachelor this fact is not useful. Second, how do we know the definition of bachelor? It would have to be experience[6]. If a child was nurtured it a square white room from the time it was born and asked if all

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[4] Gettier,Edmund L., 1997. *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?*. Available from: <http://www.ditext.com/gettier/gettier.html>. [20 March 2012]

[5] Nozick, Robert. 1981. *Philosophical Explanations*, Harvard University Press; Reprint edition, Cambridge.

[6] Russell, Bruce, "*A Priori* Justification and Knowledge", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Available from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/apriori/>. [20

bachelors are unmarried it would not know. In the example 5+2=7, experience with the function of addition and the nature of the numbers is needed to know this fact. A child has no more a priori knowledge about addition that an inexperienced adult. The exact example 5+2=7 may not have been experienced before. In this case *a priori* knowledge would be the ability to combine and manipulate already known facts to make further assumptions. Seeing as all knowledge stems from experience it would follow that what we know is what we have experienced the most and has proven to be reliable.

Jeff Hawkins, entrepreneur, engineer, and artificial intelligence researcher, proposes the concept that our memories are patterns. Knowing patterns allows us to predict the next element in the pattern, and to prepare for it.[7] In a random sequence P cannot know the next element. In a sequence is not random and follows predictable patterns, like the world, P could know with great certainty what the next element will be. P can see the edges and arrangement of lines that make up letters and know which letter is represented. P can drive on the road, knowing that cars have four wheels, windows, and people inside them and how the cars will act. Knowledge should instead be defined as a continuum. Things such as crystal ball predictions are at the guessing side, assuming how people will act or where are friends are at the moment in the middle, and things like gravity pulls objects toward the earth and the sun rises in the morning are at the knowledge side. The problem with trying to defining knowledge is that there is no clear distinction between things we consider our self knowing from the things we assume, guess, and hypothesise.

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[7] Hawkins, Jeff, Blakeslee, Sandra, 2004. *On Intelligence*. Times Books; Adapted edition. New York City.