

Phil 2: Puzzles and Paradoxes

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Three paradoxes of understanding:

- Paradox of Analysis
- [Problem of the Criterion](#)
- Hermeneutic Circle

Problem of the Criterion

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- **Sextus Empiricus (160-210 AD)**. Physician and philosopher who lived in Egypt, Italy and Greece.
- **Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831)**. German philosopher of the late Enlightenment. Hugely influential.
- **Roderick Chisholm (1916 – 1999)**. American philosopher known for his work on epistemology, metaphysics, free will, value theory, and the philosophy of perception. He taught at Brown University.



Theory of Knowledge

Two questions in the theory of knowledge (epistemology):

- A. What do we know? What is the extent of our knowledge? Can we know anything at all?
 - B. What is knowledge? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions (or criteria) of knowledge? What does the term 'knowledge' mean?
- Knowledge has traditionally been defined as **justified true belief**. But this analysis of the concept of knowledge has come under attack. There are competing analyses of the concept of knowledge.

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Problem of the Criterion

Question A: What do we know? What is the extent of our knowledge?

Question B: What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge? What are the criteria of knowledge?

- 1) You cannot answer question A until you have answered question B.
- 2) You cannot answer question B until you have answered question A.
- C) Therefore, you cannot answer either question.

- **Problem:** We cannot answer question A without knowing the answer to B. You can only identify instances of knowledge if you already know what the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge are.
- And we cannot answer question B without knowing the answer to A? You can only know what the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge are if you are already able to identify instances of knowledge.

Solutions to Problem of the Criterion

- **Methodists** assume they have an answer to B on the basis of which they figure out their answer to A.
- Methodists assumes they already know what the criteria for knowledge are, and proceed on this basis the issue of whether or not we have any knowledge.

- **Particularist** assume they have an answer to A and on the basis of it they work out their answer to B.
- Rather than assuming that one can identify the criteria for knowledge independently of examining any particular instances of knowledge, particularists claim that one should instead assume that one can correctly identify particular instances of knowledge and proceed on this basis to determine what the criteria of knowledge are.

- **Skeptics** claim that neither question can be answered in a non-circular way.

Pros and Cons

- **Pro methodism:** methodism leaves it open whether skepticism is true (whether there is anything that meets the criteria of knowledge)
- **Con methodism:** It is a mystery how we can get a grip on the criteria for knowledge without appealing to particular instances of knowledge.

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- **Pro particularism:** It seems more plausible to suppose that we can correctly identify particular cases of knowledge independently of a definition of knowledge than to suppose that we can identify what the criteria for knowledge are without prior appeal to cases of knowledge.
- **Con particularism:** it assumes the falsity of skepticism.

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