

## Notes on the “KK” Thesis

(Being a contribution by William LYCAN, Former Buckeye, to the GREAT DEBATE between himself and George SCHLESINGER, Notorious Tar Heel, held on the Eighth Day of November, Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Two, in THE SOUTHERN PART OF HEAVEN)

### Who Cares?

1. For what it’s worth, many great dead philosophers have held the “KK” thesis, including: Aristotle, St. Augustine, Averroës, Aquinas, Locke, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Cook Wilson, Prichard, Sartre, and J. L. Austin.
2. 20<sup>th</sup>-century motivation stems from Hintikka’s Knowledge and Belief: Unless the “KK” thesis is true, there is no interesting logic of knowing—at least, the logic of knowing must be significantly weaker than S4.
3. The “KK” thesis drives strongly toward skepticism, for we seldom know that we know.
4. The thesis is flatly incompatible with the most popular recent theories of knowing: “externalist” analyses such as all versions of Reliabilism, particularly as they apply to “basic” or noninferential knowledge.
5. The thesis has been defended as well as being held, by Hintikka and others. I list a few arguments for it:

### Pro

1. Anyone who both maintains a Cartesian doctrine of the mental transparency and regards knowing as a mental state pure and simple will find the thesis plausible; for *any* mental state M, if I am in M then I know that I am in M.
2. Anyone who thinks of knowing as a sort of limiting case of felt inner certainty, or certainty backed by reflection on one’s evidence, will tend to accept “KK,” for if I do not feel completely sure that I feel completely sure that P, how can I then be said to feel completely sure that P?
3. Knowing is at least completely justified true belief. If a belief of mine is completely justified for me, I must have a justification—paradigmatically, I must be able to provide a proof. But “provide a proof” cannot mean just “write down a list of sentences that does in fact constitute a valid derivation of my conclusion from such-and-such premises,” for a trained monkey

- might do that by accident. I have to *realize that* the list of sentences I produce constitutes a valid proof. And if I realize that I have produced a valid proof, isn't that as near as matters to knowing that I know?
4. Some theories of knowing entail that a knower and a non-knower can differ *only* in that the knower's belief is true while the non-knower's parallel and equally well justified belief is false. Some philosophers have found this consequence counterintuitive. Suppose (cf. Rich Feldman) Smith is a detective who has excellent and exactly parallel evidence that Black is innocent and that White is innocent. But in fact White is guilty. Someone reliably tells Smith that one of her two beliefs is that true and the other is false, but neglects to say which is which. Does Smith now know that Black is innocent? It seems not, and it seems the reason is that she does not know that she knows it.
  5. "...all those circumstances which would justify one in saying 'I know' will also justify one in saying 'I know that I know.' ...it may also be said that just because an 'I know that'-statement is *in general* open to criticisms which admit that what you claim to know does hold but deny that you *knew* it, just for this reason such criticisms are necessarily empty in the *particular* case of 'knowing that you know'; here the only relevant criticism is that you do not know" (Hintikka, pp. 111-112).
  6. Knowing requires "complete" or "conclusive" evidence in the sense of being a "discussion-stopper," i.e., of actually terminating the inquiry regarding the fact that is known. If Jones has complete evidence in this sense, then (a) he need seek no additional information in order to state with full assurance that he believes that P, and (b) he need seek no additional information in order to endure that the evidence is indeed complete. But this is tantamount to knowing that he knows. (Cf. Hilpinen, p. 113, and Hintikka (1970), pp. 145-146.)

## Con

Note: The following arguments are directed against the thesis that, in whatever sense of human knowledge epistemologists typically spend their time trying to characterize, knowing entails knowing that one knows. Various authors, including Hilpinen and Ginet, have versions which make use of a conspicuously idealized sense of "know" that does not coincide with the ordinary epistemological sense. Hintikka himself scorns ordinary usage as a court of appeal, and also regards his concept "K" as a serious idealization, but takes it very seriously, suggesting in spots (if I read him correctly) that "K" is a more important concept

than either the one enshrined in ordinary language or the one(s) probed by mainstream epistemologists.

Two further observations: (i) The dispute really should focus on noninferential or “basic” knowledge, since inferential knowledge requires noninferential knowledge. This proviso knocks out any pro-“KK” argument that talks of proofs or chains of reasoning, such as 3. (ii) The “KK” defender bears the burden of proof, I think. An entailment thesis amounts to a negative existential (that there is no possible world in which I know but fail to know that I know), and we always wonder how the proponent of a negative existential can be so sure that it’s true. On pain of regress, some entailments must be taken as self-evident, but the “KK” thesis is far too controversial to count as self-evident.

Nevertheless:

1. Counterexample: creatures who lack epistemic concepts. As Casey Swank has observed in a recent note, “In general, I can ----- something without knowing what it is to ----- something” (own something, be afflicted by something, be jealous of something,...), and similarly you’d think that I can ----- something without knowing that I ----- something. Why not, then, fill the blank with “know” itself? And in particular:
  - a) An animal or small child might know things without even having the concept of *belief*; it could know that food was nearby without being able in any sense at all to think that *it believed* there to be food nearby.
  - b) Most people have only a confused concept at best of epistemic justification (“conclusive reason,” “completely adequate evidence,” etc.). It seems one would have to be a pretty formidable epistemologist to *know that* one was *epistemically justified*. Do only formidable epistemologists know things at all, then?
2. Counterexample: creatures with a lack of *self*-concept (Hector Castañeda’s “Externus”).
3. Counterexample: someone who is wrong about what his or her grounds are (cf. Wiggins). Suppose I read in a railway timetable that the Indian Pacific leaves at 2:00 p.m., and I check this by asking a reliable informant such as the station-master. At some later point I forget about having checked with the station-master, and remember only reading the timetable, even though the station-master’s report continues to in fact be a sustaining cause of my belief. Then it turns out that my timetable was obsolete (even though it happened to be right about the Indian Pacific). I know, in virtue of my

- belief's being based on the station-master's report (despite my having forgotten this), but I don't know that I know, because I think falsely that my sole reason is my memory of the unreliable timetable.
4. Counterexample: someone who has a bit of trouble dredging up an answer (df. Lemmon). Suppose you ask me for the fifth digit in the decimal expansion of  $\pi$ . I say "I don't know...oh, yes I do: it's 9." If we try to say that I *didn't know* that the fifth digit was 9 prior to my utterance of "oh, yes I do," we must suppose that I *came* to know it, i.e., I learned it. But by what mode of education? It seems plausible to describe the situation as being one in which I did know but thought I didn't until I realized that I did.
  5. Counterexample: Suppose I am a chicken-sexer in training, and I find after a while that I have developed powerful intuitions regarding the genders of individual chickens. My hit rate has been steadily improving also, but at this point I have no idea whether I am developing a genuine reliable ability to detect chicken genders or whether I have just (a) been lucky or (b) been guided by subtle unintentional cues provided by my teachers in an insufficiently controlled testing simulation. I remain agnostic about my own ability. However, a team of psychobiologists has been studying me from a distance and has determined that I really do have as of this moment a completely reliable chicken-sexing mechanism in my perceptual analyzer (the psychobiologists can even trace the cues and signals all the way through perceptual and cognitive processing to my speech center). Here it seems I know the genders of the next few chickens I examine, but I don't know that I know them.
  6. "S knows that P" is a factive construction grammatically speaking, and I think knowing is a factive activity ontologically speaking also. To say that S knows that snow is white is to say that S knows the fact that snow is white, which is to say that the fact of snow's being white is known to S. Now consider the fact of S's knowing that snow is white. This is surely a *different fact* from that of snow's being white (though it properly includes it, we might say). It is a "distinct existence," as Hume would put it, or at least a partially distinct one. This very strongly suggests that knowing the one is *logically* distinct from knowing the other. I can't think why anyone looking at the matter this way would go on to aver that knowing the one fact *logically entailed* knowing the other.
  7. If knowing is indeed a relation between a human being and a fact in the world, it is a complex state of affairs, consisting of the fact itself, some inner state of the subject, and a connection (presumably in nature) between

- the two. Now if the subject knows the fact that P, then he knows the fact that P (not much controversy there), and let us even grant that if he knows that P he knows that the relevant state of his head obtains (since he can introspect it), but what about the connection between the two? He may still know nothing of that, and if he doesn't, then is he ignorant of one ineliminable constituent of the fact of his knowing that P, and so does not know that he knows that P.
8. As noted above, the "KK" thesis conflicts with all currently fashionable "externalist" theories of knowing, and (more to the point) these theories are *plausible*, at least for some cases of knowing. So much the worse for "KK."
  9. "KK"'s contrapositive leads to facile skepticism, since I have noted above that we rarely *know* that we know.
  10. By the same token, "KK"'s contrapositive makes *philosophical skepticism* self-verifying. The second I really doubt on philosophical grounds that I know, I cease to know.
  11. The regress that "KK" instantly generates *may* not be vicious (Hilpinen argues that no actual "infinite process" is induced here), but it sure is silly.
  12. If knowing is a kind of believing and if believing is representing, it seems hard to motivate saying that one can't represent anything without also representing oneself and in particular representing oneself (to oneself) as doing some representing—though Kant might approve. Also, a regress of representings *is* vicious.
  13. If knowing is something that takes place in nature (if it is indeed a matter of a subject's somehow being connected to the fact that is known), parallel complaints may apply: a regress of facts is vicious.

### Bibliography

Hintikka, K. J. J., *Knowledge and Belief*, Cornell U.P., 1962.

Chisholm, R. C., "The Logic of Knowing," *JP* LX(1963).

Pailthorp. C., "Hintikka and Knowing That One Knows," *JP* LXIV (1967).

Stroll, A. (ed.), *Epistemology* (Harper and Row, 1967) contains papers on the "KK" thesis by Arthur Danto, E. J. Lemmon, and David Rynin.

*Synthese*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (June, 1970) is a symposium issue on “KK,” containing articles by Risto Hilpinen, Keith Lehrer, Hintikka, Carl Ginet, and Hector Castañeda.

Armstrong, D. M., *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge*, Cambridge U.P., 1973, Ch. 15, sec. I.

Feldman, R., “Fallibilism and Knowing That One Knows,” *PR XC* (1981).

Grassl, W., “Knowing That One Knows and the Causal Theory of Knowledge,” *International Studies in Philosophy XIII* (1981).

Lenzen, W., *Recent Work in Epistemic Logic* (Acta Philosophica Fennica, Vol. 30, No. 1, North-Holland Publishing Co.), Ch. 4.

David Wiggins’ contribution to Saarinen et al. (eds.), *Essays in Honor of Jaakko Hintikka*, D. Reidel, 1979.