

# Vendler on “Know” and “Believe”

## Problems for Contemporary Epistemology

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### Zeno Vendler and Traditional Epistemology

#### The Traditional View

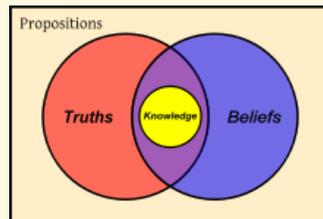
- ❖ Knowledge traditionally analyzed in terms of belief that is true and justified.

- $p$  is true.
- $S$  believes that  $p$ .
- $S$  is justified in believing that  $p$ .

- ❖ “Propositions” typically taken as objects of knowledge.

- Sally *believes* it is raining.
- Sally *knows* it is raining.

Proposition under analysis: “it is raining.”



#### Vendler’s View

- ❖ Knowledge and belief are mutually exclusive.

*Know* and *believe* connect the subject to different objects, so we can never *believe* what we *know*.

- ❖ Facts vs. Propositions.

Facts—correspond to object states of affairs, can be known.

Propositions—linguistic entities that describe the state of affairs, can be believed.

### Difficulties for the Traditional View

- ❖ What we *know*, we should also be able to *believe*.

Linguistic evidence contradicts this.

*Know* and *believe* seem to connote objective and subjective readings respectively.

- ❖ *Know*, particularly, seems to pair better with “objective” nouns like **facts**.

- I *know* the facts.
- \*I *believe* the facts.

- ❖ *Wh*-clauses.

Seem to pair almost exclusively with *know* as opposed to *believe*.

- I know *where* the concert is.
- \*I believe *where* the concert is.

- ❖ Special case: *what*-clauses.

*What*-clauses pair equally well with *believe* and *know*, and may distinguish between **facts** and **propositions**.

- I believe *what* she said.
  - I know *what* she said.
- Sentence (7) states that I am in a position to assert the truth of what she said, while (8) states that I can answer the question “what did she say?”

*What*-clause refers to same statement, “she said,” but may designate different entities.

### Difficulties for Vendler’s View

- ❖ Insufficient evidence to think there are two different kinds of *that*-clauses.

*That*-clauses designate same propositions in cases of *believe* and *know*.

- I *know* that I **lost your book**.

- You *believe* that I **lost your book**.

Both sentences designate proposition “I lost your book.”

When asked what I know and you believe, we’ll answer with the same proposition.

- ❖ Quantification in symbolic logic.

Traditional view upholds that “Everything one knows, one believes.”

This is typically rendered as:  $(p)(K(x, p) \rightarrow B(x, p))$ . Read as: “for every proposition  $p$ , if person  $x$  knows  $p$  then person  $x$  believes  $p$ .”

Provides simple representation in symbolic logic, and frustrates Vendler’s thesis that *know* and *believe* take different objects.

- ❖ Ambiguity over the word *belief*.

Vendler may not be acknowledging two different conceptions of *belief*—one objective, one subjective.

- The *belief* that the Earth revolves around the sun is widely held.
- His *belief* that there is life on Mars was unshakable.

Sentence (11) designates objective conception, (12) a subjective conception.

- ❖ In (11) *belief* refers to what one believes, while (12) it refers to someone’s belief in  $p$ , namely that there is life on Mars.

### Conclusion and Remaining Questions

#### Conflicting Data

- ❖ Option 1: Vendler’s Theory and Implications.

*Know* and *believe* take very different objects; prohibits us from analyzing knowledge in terms of justified, true belief as has traditionally been the case in epistemology.

- ❖ Option 2: Traditional Theory and Implications.

Linguistic evidence points to difficulties in knowledge and belief reports, but may commit us to saying some awkward things about knowing and believing.

- ❖ Not many philosophers, or people in general, are willing to say they in fact know something, but do not believe it. This is just what Vendler proposes is the case.

#### Possibilities for Further Exploration

- ❖ Do factive contexts denote facts or knowledge reports?

- John regretted [the fact] that he failed the exam.
- \*John believes [the fact] that he will fail the exam.

- ❖ Quantification over factive and non-factive contexts, presupposition.

- She *knows* everything her mother regrets.
- \*She *believes* everything her mother regrets.