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ANALYTIC EPISTEMOLOGY
AND THE NATURE OF EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION

Abstract

A clear understanding of the nature of epistemic justification is of paramount importance for a theory of knowledge. Analytic epistemologists have become interested in the topic at least since the beginning of the sixties. In this article, I provide a critical survey of what I consider to be the most significant findings resulting from these three decades of studies.

After a brief description of what analytic epistemology is, I concentrate on three main issues: (i) the metatheoretic distinction between the definition and the criteria of justification, (ii) the contrast between subjective vs. objective justification and (iii) the interpretation of justification either as a possible feature of the justification-bearers, or as a relation between *justificans* and *justificandum*. Several further clarifications are then introduced under each of these main headings, including a brief characterization of four contemporary theories of justification (reliabilism, deontology, foundationalism and coherentism). In the last section of the essay, I widen the epistemological framework within which the role and the logic of the justifying-procedures should be placed. To this purpose, I combine the notion of justification to that of explanation and discuss both of them from the point of view of the tasks of a theory of knowledge. The central thesis is that only from this more ample perspective can the relation between knowledge and scepticism be properly evaluated. I conclude by suggesting two possible directions that analytic epistemology may take in order to deal with the self-referential problem of the justification of a theory of knowledge.