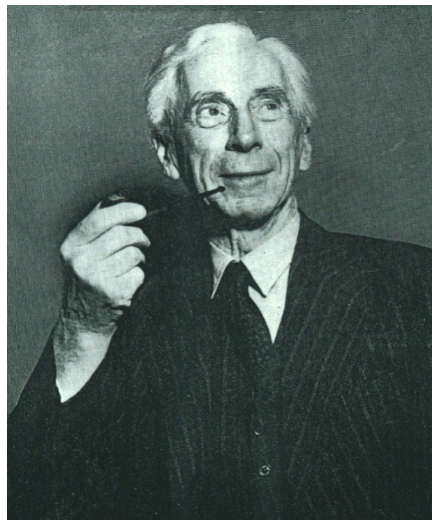


**Reading: Russell's *Problems of Philosophy***

The following is an excerpt from chapter 13 of Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*. Here, he discusses some of the problems with defining knowledge as "true belief." How does this compare with what we have learnt about the conditions in Justified True Belief?

Originally published by Oxford University Press, the fulltext of Russell's book was put into hypertext by Andrew Chrucky in 1998 and is now public domain, available over the internet at <http://www.ditext.com/russell/russell.html>

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*Russell*

.... There can be no doubt that some of our beliefs are erroneous; thus we are led to inquire what certainty we can ever have that such and such a belief is not erroneous. In other words, can we ever know anything at all, or do we merely sometimes by good luck believe what is true? Before we can attack this question, we must, however, first decide what we mean by 'knowing', and this question is not so easy as might be supposed.

At first sight we might imagine that knowledge could be defined as 'true belief'. When what we believe is true, it might be supposed that we had achieved a knowledge of what we believe. But this would not accord with the way in which the word is commonly used. To take a very trivial instance: If a man believes that the late Prime Minister's last name began with a B, he believes what is true, since the late Prime Minister was Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman. But if he believes that Mr. Balfour was the late Prime Minister, he will still believe that the late Prime Minister's last name began with a B, yet this belief, though true, would not be thought to constitute knowledge. If a newspaper, by an intelligent anticipation, announces the result of a battle before any telegram giving the result has been received, it may by good fortune announce what afterwards turns out to be the right result, and it may produce

15 belief in some of its less experienced readers. But in spite of the truth of their belief, they cannot be said to have knowledge. Thus it is clear that a true belief is not knowledge when it is deduced from a false belief.

In like manner, a true belief cannot be called knowledge when it is deduced by a fallacious process of reasoning, even if the premisses from which it is deduced are true. If I know that all Greeks  
20 are men and that Socrates was a man, and I infer that Socrates was a Greek, I cannot be said to know that Socrates was a Greek, because, although my premisses and my conclusion are true, the conclusion does not follow from the premisses.

But are we to say that nothing is knowledge except what is validly deduced from true premisses? Obviously we cannot say this. Such a definition is at once too wide and too narrow. In the  
25 first place, it is too wide, because it is not enough that our premisses should be true, they must also be known. The man who believes that Mr. Balfour was the late Prime Minister may proceed to draw valid deductions from the true premiss that the late Prime Minister's name began with a B, but he cannot be said to know the conclusions reached by these deductions. Thus we shall have to amend our definition by saying that knowledge is what is validly deduced from known premisses. This, however, is a  
30 circular definition: it assumes that we already know what is meant by 'known premisses'. It can, therefore, at best define one sort of knowledge, the sort we call derivative, as opposed to intuitive knowledge. We may say: 'Derivative knowledge is what is validly deduced from premisses known intuitively'. In this statement there is no formal defect, but it leaves the definition of intuitive knowledge still to seek.

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[Source: <http://www.ditext.com/russell/rus13.html>]