

# Arts: Philosophy essay - annotated example

Universities seek knowledge to provide a basis for society to make reasonable decisions about what to think and how to act. But what exactly is *knowledge*? What does it mean to *know* something? This essay will consider the traditional account of knowledge formulated by Plato as *justified true belief* and consider the challenges identified by Gettier (1963). It will then consider Nozick's (1981) *tracking account* as a response to the Gettier problem and argue that while Nozick's account has strengths, it is nonetheless subject to successful counterexamples, resulting in an unsatisfactory account of knowledge.

This is an example of a succinct introduction that directly addresses the essay question. It provides 1) a general context for the idea of knowledge, 2) identifies the issue, 3) outlines what will be considered, and 4) states its conclusion.

The traditional account of knowledge as *justified true belief* (JTB) is founded upon Plato's account of knowledge in *Theaetetus* (201d-210a). It is generally accepted that truth and belief are necessary conditions for knowledge (Hohwy, Chadha, Townsend & May 2013, p. 218) as it is difficult to consider an instance of knowledge where it is not true and/or where one does not believe it. For instance, I believe that there is a climate crisis but only because my parrot keeps saying "crisis, crisis, it's getting hotter". It is true that there is a climate crisis and I believe it, however my reason for having this is questionable, and hence my claim of knowledge is questionable. Plato recognised that a true belief (or opinion) was not sufficient for knowledge and suggested that it be accompanied by reason, that is, *justification*. Knowledge was thereby defined as JTB, and thus, the necessary and sufficient conditions for a subject (S) to know a proposition (p) are IFF:

It is great that the student clearly identifies the source of the information. However, in the Harvard referencing style, the in-text citation for three or more authors should use the term "et al." (a Latin term meaning "and others") after the first author's surname in all citations - (Hohwy et al. 2013, p. 218). All authors should be provided in the reference list.

Providing an example is a great way to demonstrate your understanding of a concept/theory.

For initialisms, such as IFF, the general rule is to spell out the phrase in full in the first instance, and then follow with the initialism in brackets. In the proceeding references, you can use the initialism only; e.g., *if and only if* (IFF)

## Legend

✓ Good practice

✍ Needs improvement

💡 Comment

P1)  $p$  is true

P2)  $S$  believes that  $p$

P3)  $S$  is justified in believing that  $p$

C)  $S$  knows that  $p$

The traditional account of knowledge was challenged by Gettier (1963) with counterexamples to illustrate that JTB is an insufficient understanding of knowledge. One counterexample (Gettier 1963, p. 122) provides a scenario where Smith and Jones have applied for a job. Smith has strong evidence that Jones will get the job (evidence such as the President of the company confirmed this) and that Jones has 10 coins in their pocket (evidence such as having counted Jones' coins ten minutes ago). Hence, Smith concludes, and is justified in believing that the person to receive the job has ten coins in their pocket. Gettier (1963) suggests however that Smith will get the job and that they also have ten coins in their pocket. So Smith's justified belief that the person to receive the job has ten coins in their pocket is in fact true, however they cannot claim to *know* this is true because they do not know that they have 10 coins in their pocket and they falsely believe that Jones will get the job. In other words, Gettier (1963) argues, JTB is insufficient for a claim of knowledge.

Good formatting of argument in standard form. It is appropriate to provide the premises given the conclusion is stated in the preceding sentence. ✓

This is a good example of a clear topic sentence which provides the main idea for this paragraph. ✓

Good summary of Gettier example with appropriate use of philosophical terms. ✓

Nozick (1981) responds to the Gettier problem by providing alternative necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, referred to as the *tracking account*. He claims that  $S$  knows that  $p$  *IFF*:

P1)  $p$  is true


P2)  $S$  believes that  $p$

P3) If  $p$  were not true,  $S$  would not believe  $p$

P4) If  $p$  were true,  $S$  would believe  $p$

C)  $S$  knows that  $p$

Nozick's account asserts that a definition of knowledge requires counterfactual conditions rather than justification, that is, the inclusion of premises 3 and 4 as a means of testing or tracking the truth of a proposition. He contends that P3 provides sensitivity to the falsity of a claim, as, if a claim were *not* true, then you would *not* believe it was true. Similarly, P4 as the adherence conditional says that if a claim *was* true, then you *would* believe it. Together these premises seek to track the truth or falsity of a claim to show that *S*'s belief (P2) would alter given the truth of *p* (P1). While this account appears plausible, and was refined by Nozick with respect to incorporating a reliable method as the basis for forming a belief, the account created some counterintuitive results.



Good and appropriate level of critical comment of Nozick's argument which clearly and concisely explains the different parts of the argument. The final sentence then clearly expresses your own critical evaluation and signposts a point of controversy with respect to Nozick, thus addressing the essay question.