

## Supplement to “Into the Mainstream of Philosophy” (p. 210)

PRECOGNITION (AND OTHER “PARANORMAL” ways of knowing) are not a frequent concern of philosophy, and it’s difficult to find useful philosophical articles dealing with such subjects. (*Thinking Critically about New Age Ideas*, referenced on p. 206, is a useful exception.) When you’re thinking about these subjects, you might concentrate on these two philosophical ways in which they might be considered and criticized.

(1) “Paranormal” techniques occasionally come up with beliefs that are true. But mere true belief is not necessarily knowledge; if it were, then any lucky guess that turned out true could be called knowledge. What else is necessary for a true belief to be knowledge? Philosophers generally agree that someone who believes something to be true must in addition be *justified* in believing it in order for that person to be said to *know* it. (A lucky guess, then, isn’t knowledge.) But this raises a deep question that bears thought: what counts, in general, as justification? Is it relevant what *method* the person used to come to the belief? If so, what counts as a justification-producing method? Why, for example, is guessing not a method productive of justification? If you think that you have a grasp on what sort of tests a method must pass to count as justificatory, apply these tests to precognition, ESP, and the like. Do they pass or fail?

(2) Precognition and time travel, as we’ve seen, are sometimes thought to be impossible because of the paradoxes that result from them. I’ve suggested an argument to the conclusion that these don’t show that such things can’t happen—they just show that there must be certain ways they can’t happen. Do you find this argument convincing? I’ve agreed, for example, that one can’t change the past, but that doesn’t make travel there, or interaction with the past, impossible. It just means that whatever you happened to make true while travelling back there must now already be true. And that if you travel into the future, and find out what will happen, you can’t prevent that from happening once you get back into the present; but this merely means that for any belief about the future to be knowledge of the future, it must, at least, be true; so if you prevent some future event, you don’t know it will happen, and it turns out not to be the real future you travelled into. Are these considerations unsatisfying to you?