Section 99: Theories of Knowledge and Epistemology

Gettier Vindicated Against All His Blemishes

Priyedarshi Jetli, India

Abstract

First, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge' is imprecise but Gettier is explicit that 'know' is analysed as the *definiendum* is 'S knows that P'. Second, Gettier does not misrepresent (a) as Plato's definition as the expressions used are 'Plato considers' and 'seems to accept'. Third, Gettier is not mistaken to apply Plato's definition to propositions since propositional knowledge is a species of Plato's definition. Fourth, for Plato true belief temporally precedes an account. 'Jones owns a Ford' is never a true opinion, hence no account for it can be given. The counterexample is reconstructed with temporality built into it. Fifth, Gettier does not fail to establish the equivalence of 'believe', 'accepts' and 'sure' in the three versions as this is implicitly established in the shifts made in the paper. Sixth, 'entails' logically is used only when the entailing proposition is true, but in the counterexamples a false proposition is taken to imply a true one. 'Entail' is to be taken in the ordinary sense of implies. Seventh, in Case I, the implication is preserved with the proper representation: $(Gj \& Tj) \rightarrow (y)[Gy \leftrightarrow (y=j)]$, which implies $(\exists x)\{(Gx \& Tx) \rightarrow (y)[Gy \leftrightarrow (y=x)]\}$'. Eighth, The counterexample is reworked to avoid the objection that justification for *p* and justification for *q* may not be sufficient justification for '*p* & *q*'.

Key Words: Gettier, knowledge, 'S knows that p', belief, justified in believing, entails, implies, counterexample.

Gettier Vindicated Against All His Blemishes[1]

Priyedarshi Jetli
Department of Philosophy, University of Mumbai, India
pjetli@gmaill.com

In this paper I vindicate Gettier against seven blemishes in his famous paper of 1963.

First, the title seems imprecise. Following Frege's context principle 'S knows that p' is analysed instead of 'knowledge'. In the responses the noun 'knowledge' instead of the verb 'know' is used in their titles by Clark (1963)[2], Sosa (1964)[3], Saunders and Champawat (1964)[4], Lehrer (1965)[5], and Pailthorp (1969)[6]. Gettier nonetheless was explicit that the verb 'knowing' and not the noun 'knowledge' is to be analysed from the beginning: 'Various attempts have been made in recent years to state necessary and sufficient conditions for someone's knowing a given proposition', and Gettier provides three definitions in all of which the *definiendum* is stated as 'S knows that P'.[7] Others have thereby inserted with the verb 'know' or 'knowing' in the title: Odegard (1965)[8], Goldman (1967)[9], and Skyrms (1967)[10]. Skyrms's title, 'The Explication of "X knows that p"', is instructive because it does not capitalize 'k' in 'knows' nor 't' in 'that' nor 'p' but capitalizes 'X'. This indicates that we are to read the title as the explication of a proposition, namely the proposition that 'X knows that p', which in turn is the *definiendum* of the definition that Gettier considered. Hence, 'knowledge' in Gettier's title is an abbreviation for 'X knows that p' rather than a blemish. A more precise title would have been 'Do "S believes that p", "p is true", and "S is justified in believing that p" Provide Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for "S knows that p"?'

Second, Gettier offers Plato's definition as:

(a) S knows that P   IFF   (i) P is true,

                                        (ii) S believes that P, and

                                        (iii) S is justified in believing that P.[11]

The definition considered in the *Theaetetus* is 'true belief with the addition of an account' (201 c-d)[12]. This is today adapted as 'true, belief with justification'. Has Gettier misrepresented Plato's definition? Gettier states in a footnote: 'Plato seems to be considering some such definition [...]'[13] The word 'considering' is not only cautious but accurate as the definition is not provided by Socrates but by Theaetetus and that to with the qualification that Theaetetus has heard some such definition and Socrates responds that he has also heard something similar. The course of the dialogue to follow that finds an objection to this definition indicates that Socrates does not wholly accept this definition of knowledge. Is it then not a mistake to call it a 'Platonic definition'? Gettier does not use this label. In the same footnote Gettier states that Plato is 'perhaps accepting' such a definition in the *Meno*.[14] Again, he is cautious with 'perhaps accepting'. The *Meno* is earlier than *Theaetetus*. Isn't it backwards then to think that Plato accepted this definition earlier and rejects it later? L. S. Carrier (1971) states: 'Sappho said that knowledge is "continent true belief." Her philosophical descendents offer this analysis: [...]'[15] and what follows is a restatement of Gettier's definition (a). I conjecture that the Sapphonic definition was the accepted definition of knowledge, and perhaps Plato also accepted it in the *Meno* but then rejected it later in the *Theaetetus*.

     Third, Plato scholars debate whether the definition offered in the *Meno* and *Theaetetus* is the definition of propositional knowledge. Is Gettier then not mistaken to attribute the propositional form of the definition as found in Plato? Even if Plato is not specifying propositional knowledge, surely knowledge of propositions would be a

species of such a definition; hence, Gettier gives an accurate representation of the definition considered by Plato.

Fourth, Gettier fails to capture the temporal order of Plato's definition. In *Meno*, knowledge is true opinion that is tethered down [16] (98a). In *Meno* and *Theaetetus* true opinion comes first and tethering or account comes later. In Case II the proposition that 'Jones owns a Ford' is never a true opinion and hence there is no question of providing an account for it, hence the counterexample is blocked. A Gettier type counterexample can nonetheless be constructed: Suppose that Jones has always owned a Ford and just given Smith a ride in a new Ford. Except this time, unknown to Smith Jones has rented the car in which he has given Smith a ride right now. However, by sheer coincidence, unknown to Smith, Jones has just won a Ford car in a raffle.[17] Hence, 'Jones owns a Ford' is true, so that Smith has a true opinion that Jones owns a Ford. Smith now proceeds to give a satisfactory account of the proposition on the basis of the Fords Jones has owned in the past and his having given a ride to Smith in a Ford just now. The proposition from which the troublesome proposition 'Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona' is implied is itself a true belief with an account, but we would not say that Smith knows that 'Jones owns a Ford' nor that he knows that 'Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona'.

Fifth, Gettier fails to state that the substitution of 'accept' in (b) and 'sure' in (c) for 'believe' in (a) is required for the counterexamples to go through. However, the substitution of 'right to be sure that P is true' for 'justified in believing that P', which Gettier does state, allows us to substitute 'sure that p is true' for 'believes that p'. Further, in the second presupposition Gettier shifts at the end to: 'and accepts Q as

a result of this deduction'. Since Gettier is only providing the argument against (a) this shift to the language of (b) indicates that 'accepts' and 'belief' are synonyms.

Sixth, 'entails' logically means that when a proposition is true then it implies another true proposition. But in the counterexamples a false proposition is taken to imply a true one. Gettier is not using 'entail' in this strict logical sense. We should nonetheless avoid misunderstanding and use 'implies' instead of 'entails'.

Seventh, in Case I, treated in sentential logic, the first proposition is a conjunction 'p & q'. The second is an atomic proposition 'r'. 'p & q' does not logically imply 'r'. However, if it is true that 'Jones will get the job and Jones has ten coins in his pocket' then it must be true that 'the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket'. This is implication. Only one man will get the job. Hence, 'Jones will get the job and Jones has ten coins in his pocket' is captured by: $(Gj \& Tj) \rightarrow (y)[Gy \leftrightarrow (y=j)]$. This implies $(\exists x)\{(Gx \& Tx) \rightarrow (y)[Gy \leftrightarrow (y=x)]\}$, 'the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket'.

Eighth, in Case I, even though 'p', 'q' logically imply 'p & q', justification for p and justification for q may not be sufficient justification for 'p & q'.[18] Suppose Smith takes 90 per cent probability to be adequate justification and that for Smith the probability of p being true is 90 per cent and the probability of q being true is also 90 per cent. Smith is hence justified in believing each of p and q, yet the probability that 'p & q' is true is .9 x .9 = .81, which is not sufficient for Smith to be justified in believing 'p & q'. This defect is averted by reworking the counterexample: Let the probability of each of p and q be .95. Now, the probability of 'p & q' will be .9025, just sufficient for justification for Smith. Furthermore, in Case II, where the inference is from 'p' to 'p or q', the probability of the inferred disjunctive proposition will be at least as much as the proposition from which the disjunction is inferred.

Gettier is thereby vindicated against the eight blemishes; and, in each case, sustaining the profundity, precision and perspicuity of his paper.

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[1] The title is inspired by the title of Giovanni Girolamo Saccheri 's book *Euclides Vindicatus* (1733).

[2] Michael Clark, 'Knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier's Paper', p. 46.

[3] Ernest Sosa, 'The Analysis of "Knowledge That P"', p. 1.

[4] John Turk Saunders and Narayan Champawat, 'Mr. Clark's Definition of Knowledge', p. 8.

[5] Keith Lehrer, 'Knowledge, Truth and Evidence', p. 168; and Keith Lehrer and John Paxson, 'Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief', p. 225.

[6] Charles Pailthorp, 'Knowledge as Justified True Belief', p. 25.

[7] Gettier, p. 121.

[8] Douglas Odegard, 'On Defining "S Knows That P"', p. 353.

[9] Alvin Goldman, 'A Causal Theory of Knowing', p. 357.

[10] Bryan Skyrms, 'The Explication of "X knows that p"', p. 373.

[11] Gettier, p. 121.

[12] Plato, *Theaetetus*, p. 908.

[13] Gettier, p. 121, footnote 1.

[14] Ibid.

[15] L. S. Carrier, 'An Analysis of Empirical Knowledge', p. 3.

[16] Plato, *Meno*, p. 381.

[17] This revised example is given by Saunders and Champawat, p. 9.

[18] I. Thalberg, 'In Defense of Justified True Belief', p. 798.

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