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EPISTEME AND SUBJECTIVITY: THE CONTEXT DOES NOT SOLVE THE "GETTIER PROBLEM"

Abstract

Objective: In this essay, I will try to track some historical and modern stages of the discussion on the Gettier problem, and point out the interrelations of the questions that this problem raises for epistemologists, with sceptical arguments, and a so-called problem of relevance.

Methods: historical analysis, induction, generalization, deduction, discourse, intuition

Results: Albeit the contextual theories of knowledge, the use of different definitions of knowledge, and the different ways of the uses of knowledge do not resolve all the issues that the sceptic can put forward, but they can be productive in giving clarity to a concept of knowledge for us. On the other hand, our knowledge will always have an element of intuition and subjectivity, however not equating to epistemic luck and probability.

Significance novelty: the approach to the context in general, not giving up being a Subject may give us a clarity about the sense of what it means to say – "I know".

Keywords: Gettier, episteme, context, Subject, knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

A classical definition of knowledge according to Plato is a justified, true belief [1]. Edmund Gettier argued however that knowledge *might be* something different from a justified, true belief (JTB) [2, 192–194]. The discussion has been going for a long time more than half a century, since Gettier published his three-page essay 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' in 1963. The problem regarding the Gettier examples, alongside the sceptical challenges, is among the central tasks of epistemology. Gettier provides two examples which aim to show that knowledge is something other than a justified true belief.

The majority of philosophers agree that there is no knowledge without justification, but this is the justification precisely, which plays a central role in sceptical arguments. The sceptics do not deny that we have true beliefs;

the sceptic denies that our convictions can be justified. This leads to the assertion that when the justification of knowledge is necessary, we have no knowledge.

We will further analyse the examples that depict the historical stages in the discussion about the Gettier problem as well as the challenges about the definition of knowledge and possible dissolution of the Gettier problem. These examples lead to the understanding of the problem.

1. Classical Gettier case and the steps to possible solutions

Let us begin with the original example that Gettier used in his 1963 essay [2, 192–194].

Smith and Jones apply for the same position. *Smith has good reason to believe that Jones will get the position.* Smith also knows that Jones has 10 coins in his pocket. From this, Smith concludes that the position will go to

the person with 10 coins in his pocket. The position really does go to the person with 10 coins in his pocket, but it was not Jones. It was Smith himself, who also, without knowing it, had 10 coins in his pocket.

Smith has a real and justified belief, but one would say no knowledge. One can argue that the defect in Smith's justification is practically obvious. Smith's reasoning for his belief that the person with 10 coins would get the position is not good reasoning. Why does Smith think so? *This is because Jones will get the position.* But this is not the case. This is why it can't be a good reason either. The reasons are given in the form of X because Y, and both parts – X and Y – have to be in correct and not wrong causation, and both the parts, X and Y, have to be true in order for the sentence 'X because Y' to be true too. In this case, Y is not true, and thus the sentence X because Y is also not true [3]. Consequently, the following was suggested by Gilbert Harman in 1973 ('Thought') [4] and Keith Lehrer in 1964 ('Knowledge, Truth and Evidence') [5]: Justification should not be built on false premises. However, this does not solve the problem. Let us look at the next example about fake barns introduced by Alvin Goldman [6].

An individual, Henry, drives through a landscape and sees a barn through the car window. He concludes from this that he drove past a barn. What Henry does not know is that there are many fake barns in this area. If Henry had known about these fake barns, he would not think that he'd seen a real barn. But Henry really did see a real barn, the only real one in the area. Henry has a real justified belief, and moreover his justification is not based on wrong premises. However, we will argue that Henry does not have knowledge in this situation despite a correct causation that led him to his belief. Henry's justification can be destroyed by additional information. As a result, a condition was added to the knowledge definition by Peter Klein [7].

S knows that P, given S's justified true belief that P is resistant to additional information. Henry's justification is, however, not so. It can be destroyed by additional information. This is why Henry has no knowledge.

But the above mentioned definition is too strong and overshoots the mark as it excludes too many cases of knowledge, and as a result, we cannot name this definition with all the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge. It is over sufficient and over enough. Let us look at the Grabit example introduced by Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson [5].

The librarian sees Tom Grabit stealing a book from the library, and this way has a real and justified belief that Tom stole the book. What the librarian doesn't know is that Tom has a mentally ill father in hospital. At the hospital, Tom's father fantasises that Tom has a twin brother. This twin brother does not really exist. Tom's father just doesn't want people to think that his only son is a thief. The librarian, however, knows nothing about this. What he knows is that Tom stole a book. But his justification is not immune to additional information. It is easy to sway the librarian away from this justification. Owing to this, the condition about *any* additional information is too strong as a condition. Justification should not be immune to *any*, but **to relevant** [8] additional information. The definitions [8]:

S knows that P, if S has a true justification for P, and S is justified in believing that P when his justification cannot be undone by **relevant** additional information.

Or: S knows that P, if S in his true belief that P is **personally and factually** justified.

Or: S knows that P, if S has a **well-**justified belief that P.

One has to be clear on the terms '**well-justified**', '**relevant additional information**', and '**factually justified**' [8] to bring a fundamental reality of perspectives to the knowledge analysis. This is because of the nature of the epistemic reasons. The fact that it looks as though Tom stole a book is a good reason for the person who knows nothing of the mentally confused father and his fantasies. For the person who only knows about the father's story, this is not a good reason. The same applies to the barn example. The fact that it looks as though one is driving past a barn is a good reason for the person who knows nothing of the fake barns or for the person who knows of the fake barns and also knows that there was not a fake barn on this spot but a real one. For the person who only knows of the fake barns, the fact that it looked real is not a good reason.

The Gettier examples lay certain perspectives to us from which we as Subjects judge the justification of the another subject. And we are unsure as to how we are to judge these examples because of the relativity of the justification and in the situation we forget we are the Subjects by ourselves, it means our own perspective becomes relative.

2. Alternative knowledge definitions

How to handle the Gettier problem? The sceptical challenges also deal with the relationship between knowledge and justification. There may be two approaches for a solution to the Gettier problem — a revisionist approach and a descriptivist approach. The revisionists

generally argue in the following manner: The discussion over the Gettier examples shows that ordinary language leads to the contradictions. This is why one has to let such ordinary language not to use for philosophy, and for the goals of philosophy, to view the terms ‘true belief’ and ‘justified belief’ separately. The descriptivists, however, claim that such a separation is just a simple change of subject and does not solve the problem. According to them, one has to stick to the **normal use of language**. One encounters philosophical problems when one removes everyday expressions out of their usual context and uses them in a strictly philosophical context. The use of language in the Gettier examples is pointless. The competent speaker is, however, able to use the language competently in the relevant contexts. The question is here however, who is a competent speaker. So, if there is no pointless language, there is no Gettier problem.

Also, one has to analyse this lack of overview of the use of language in the Gettier examples. To do this, one has to analyse the ordinary use of the word ‘knowledge’. When one does this, one can see that there are two completely different situations in which the word ‘knowledge’ is used [8].

On the one hand, when we already have the knowledge, and on the other hand, when we are unknowing and are looking for good information. In these situations, we have different interests. Different knowledge analyses also have to be applied to these situations — an analysis that is not perspective-reliant, an objective knowledge analysis, when we ourselves have knowledge, and another analysis of the knowledge has to contain a level of perspective-reliance when we are unknowing [8].

3. Solution to the Gettier problem in the contextual theories of knowledge.

Stewart Cohen [9; 13] and David Lewis [10], Michael Williams [16] defend contextualism which holds that knowledge is context sensitive and the truth of ‘S knows P’ depends contextually on where the strength of standards for knowledge ascriptions may be different. Cohen states:

Contextualism has been proposed as a way to resolve stubborn epistemological paradoxes. Where P is some common sense proposition about the external world (e.g., I see a zebra) and H is some sceptical hypothesis (e.g., I see a cleverly disguised mule), the paradox takes the following form:

1. I know P.
2. I do not know not-H.

3. I know P only if I know not-H.

These propositions constitute a paradox because each is very plausible independently, and yet they are inconsistent jointly. Because our intuitions about knowledge lead to paradox, scepticism threatens [9, 69].

There is no single unified answer to the question of which alternatives and in what contexts and situations the subject must deny, and which must confirm to aspiring for knowledge, and true justified beliefs. The core of the contextualism theories of knowledge is the fact that the definition of importance or unimportance of the alternative is context sensitive. In this respect, there are two factors of the context — the subject’s context or the one who chooses between the alternatives, and the context of another one to whom the knowledge is attributed, who knows or does not know, i. e. the context of the subject to judgement. The level of standards, which are established when the judgement about knowledge or lack of knowledge is made, might also be considered as the basis for explaining contextualism.

Thus, there are two bases of contextual theories of knowledge:

1–The subject who knows or does not know, and the subject of judgement, who says that S knows P, and they are in different contexts;

2–Different standards are applied to knowledge in different contexts: a) conversational context, b) especially demanding epistemological context, and c) sceptical context.

Many contextualists, including Cohen and Lewis, argue that to overcome the sceptical argument, one should adopt various epistemic standards. According to Lewis, the problems begin with the sceptic’s high demands. And the solution lies in the ability to ignore, with supporting reasons, these alternatives proposed by the sceptic. Which ones are the relevant alternatives? Lewis proposes some rules here pertaining to actuality, belief, resemblance, reliability, conservatism, and attention [10, 695–698].

First, there is the rule of actuality. The possibility that what is actually obtained could never be ignored. Thus, we get the subject-dependent factor that S knows that P is true. E. g. Lewis states:

Actuality is always a relevant alternative; nothing false may be properly presupposed. It follows that only what is true is known, wherefore we do not have to include truth in our definition of knowledge. The rule is ‘externalist’— the subject himself may not be able to tell what is properly ignored [10, 695].

Rule 2: Everything that the subject believes in to obtain must not be ignored.

A possibility that the subject believes to obtain is not properly ignored, whether or not he is right to believe so [10, 696].

There is the rule of resemblance. The alternatives that are very similar, i. e. the rule of resemblance, to the alternative that also cannot be ignored, e. g., the rule of actuality. The rule of resemblance is determining. The third rule is the rule that might solve the Gettier problem. In the Gettier problem, there is always an alternative that resembles actuality, which is not eliminated by the subject's evidence.

In the example of the barns, it is obvious that Henry cannot clear up his doubts concerning the alternative, which cannot be ignored. That is, it can resemble actuality when he drives through an environment full of barn facades that look exactly like barns. The rule of resemblance forbids ignoring these alternatives. But here the main problem appears with the rule of resemblance as we come to the conclusion that neither the subject of the Gettier case nor Henry, who is in the environment full of fake barns, has knowledge, and the rule of resemblance opens up to the sceptics. The sceptical hypothesis resembles actuality, and thus cannot be ignored according to Lewis' concept of resemblance.

And here Lewis proposes a radical solution — to ignore the sceptical arguments ad hoc. To call it a solution is very problematic as soon as the sceptic is simply ignored ad hoc without arguments.

One more important rule worth mentioning here is the rule of attention. The alternative that the subject paid attention to must not be ignored. As soon as the sceptic attracts our attention to the sceptical hypothesis, he cannot be ignored any more. But in everyday context, when the sceptic does not attract our attention to some alternative hypothesis, everything is all right in this situation and other conditions of the rules of actuality, belief and resemblance are taken into account.

By attracting our attention to the sceptical hypothesis in such a way, the sceptic excludes the knowledge 'S knows P', and Lewis's theory leads to the solution of the Gettier problem, but it does not solve the sceptical arguments, but mystifies them.

According to Cohen, Lewis theory can solve the Gettier problem, but the focus should be shifted from the subject of knowledge, to whom the knowledge is attributed, to the one who attributes the knowledge, that is to

the subject who judges, and in such a way to reformulate the rule of resemblance. It means that not all alternatives similar to actuality should be considered, *but only those, which are considered by the subject who judges*, that is those which resemble actuality only for the subject *who judges*. In this case, it is not necessary to ignore the sceptical alternatives ad hoc. But in this case again, we cannot solve the Gettier problem because here we need the subject-who-is-inside-the-Gettier-situation-dependent factors, but not the factors of the subject who judges.

Thus, the theory of contextualism is not so flawless. So, the problem of relevance is not solved. One can try to solve this problem in the manner presented in the works of Gerhard Ernst [8; 14], Hanfling Oswald [11], and David Clark [12] by means of analysing our interest in various situational contexts, where knowledge is an object of our interest. Here the context has two components: 1) the interest of the unknowing, and 2) the interest of the knowing [8; 14].

If we are in the situation of an unknowing person, we aspire towards a reliable subject who is a source of information for us and who could provide us with reliable information.

So, we can say about this subject, while we are in the unknowing position, that the subject S knows that P, when the conditions of JTB are executed; true justified belief — the classical terms. In this way, S can dispel our doubts that non-P. The relevant doubts in this case are those which are set up by the unknowing person.

So, what is the character of these doubts, which are set up by the subject of assumptions in his search for knowledge (by the unknowing person)? When important vital interests are affected, the level of doubt certainly increases. The second factor is the other information that the subject has, which is unknowing, and judging on that, if he/she as an unknowing subject is sufficiently convinced. That means that this unknowing person ascribes the knowledge to the subject S. He asserts that S knows that P.

The second very important context structure in the analysis of knowledge is the situation, where the person (J) who attributes the knowledge to the subject S, is the knowing one. For example, in a situation of an unfaithful spouse or in a situation of perjury that is given by the subject who ascribes the knowledge. In such a situation, the subject S who is attributed the knowledge — in the proposition S knows that P — is not compelled to eliminate the doubts. To be precise, his or her elimination of doubts for the attributing subject (let us name this subject J) does not make any sense.

According to general philosophical contexts, and particularly in the context of the Gettier-problem, people judge from one or another perspective, even when it comes to philosophical contexts. Without attracting the attention of the person judging, the contexts lead him to take a certain perspective. First version: The perspective of the unknowing, when the judging person is searching for a good subject-source to inform himself while judging from the perspective, if the informer-subject is able to eliminate his (the unknowing) doubts. And the second one: The judging person takes the place of the knowing person. The Gettier-problem is leading us to take the position of the unknowing person. Although these paradoxes specify the probability of a failure, we are beginning to willingly or not to arouse our doubts. The actor in the Gettier-case is not able to eliminate our doubts in the situation to which the Gettier-problem is leading us.

About the situation in which we want to find a reliable source of information: In a general context, we are able to take a certain perspective. In a philosophical context, it all depends on the example we are confronted with. To which perspective does this example leads us to? It is not decisive if we have any cause to doubt, because we almost always have causes for doubts. It is decisive if we do it by ourselves, as subjects who judge about knowledge, by paying attention to certain moments that allow us to doubt something.

CONCLUSION

The core of the Gettier problem is a case of deep philosophical problem. The sceptics' attacks are directed at the justification. These attacks take away knowledge from us, and make our position in the world insecure

and fluctuating. I find the approaches that concentrate purely on the philosophical contexts to solve the Gettier problems as not being real solutions. The problem has come about in the real, normal language. I find this to be a variant of sophism, which can be both destructive and enlightening. This is not destructive to the philosophy of philosophers. The philosophers are used to scepticism and most have good immunity, meaning that they can deal with scepticism in the right way.

Another situation is the space of normal language, and scepticism can have serious consequences specifically in this space, by making many unsure and weak-willed. Therefore, I find that the solution approaches which are within the parameters of normal language are productive. The approaches that only deal with purely philosophical contexts objectify the term 'knowledge' exclusively and lose an important part in which there is also knowledge, and which plays an important role in the sense of the expression of the will — subjectivity.

In my opinion, the approach that is inspired by ordinary language, the philosophy of ordinary language, could be more productive for the solutions to the so-called Gettier problems. The division of the knowledge analysis into two knowledge definitions, one perspective-reliant and one objective, independent of perspective, does not reduce that of philosophical context, which in my opinion is irreducible — subjectivity. The subjectivity of the expression of the will and the self-assessment as knowing and unknowing from the other side takes into account varying knowledge perspective-reliant and context-sensitive variants of knowledge, and both are important in my opinion.

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