



Is Knowledge a Justified Belief? ¹

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Abstract

Epistemologists have widely accepted that truth, justification, and belief are necessary conditions for knowledge. This article challenges the necessity of the two components, “belief” and “justification”, in the definition of knowledge. It argues that belief is distinct from knowledge; belief is an act of will, whereas knowledge is acquired automatically. One may possess knowledge without being actively willing to believe it, and conversely, one may will to believe something without actually knowing it. Additionally, justification should be seen as a method of validating knowledge, not a fundamental part of its definition. Therefore, knowledge without justification remains knowledge, even though its truth cannot be proven. Building on this perspective, the proposed definition of knowledge shifts to “awareness or recognition of facts.” According to this definition, the Gettier problem and the lottery paradox find alternative solutions.

Keywords

knowledge, justification, belief, truth, the Gettier problem.

Research Article



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Introduction

The prevailing view in contemporary epistemology is that knowledge must involve at least three elements: truth, belief, and justification. After the introduction of the Gettier Problem, some epistemologists have advocated a fourth element as a condition of knowledge, although there is disagreement regarding what this fourth element should be.

In this article, I analyze the second and third elements, arguing that neither of them constitutes a necessary condition for knowledge. Consequently, I will assert that knowledge should be defined as ‘awareness of facts.’¹

To arrive at this conclusion, I will first argue that knowledge can exist independently of belief. Belief is not inherently essential for knowledge, although knowledge often prompts belief. Belief is a form of acceptance achieved through will. However, since belief is volitional, ethical considerations should guide our beliefs.

Furthermore, I will explain that justification serves as a requirement for proving knowledge rather than being an integral part of its definition. Building on this premise, I will provide a distinct response to the Gettier problem and the Lottery paradox.

Knowledge without belief

While many philosophers argue that knowledge necessitates belief, such a requirement is unfounded. The following arguments can demonstrate this:

1) There are coherent examples wherein knowledge exists without belief. Consider an individual who has encountered numerous challenges in life. Philosophically, the existence of God has been proven to him. However, due to God not intervening to alleviate his troubles, he chooses to abandon his belief in God out of stubbornness. Now, he can assert, “I no longer believe there is a God, although I know, through philosophical arguments, that there is.”² This statement is meaningful and coherent, though it might be considered

1. This definition presupposes the metaphysics that facts actually exist as objective, real, and mind-independent entities. However, there are many differences in details that are not related to this article.

2. In contemporary philosophy, this discourse is referred to as Moore’s paradox (Moore, 1993), akin to the example above. According to the voluntarist perspective advocated in this article, there is no paradox between knowing something and not believing it, as knowledge and belief are distinct entities. Knowledge is acquired automatically and is non-volitional, whereas belief is a choice made by individuals after acquiring knowledge. Nevertheless, the ethics of belief dictate that a person should choose to believe in something they know.

irrational, as rationality requires beliefs to align with what we know to be true.

It is coherent to state that ‘one refuses to believe in God while knowing that He exists.’ However, it seems incoherent to state that “a person refuses to believe in God while believing that God exists”, since when one believes that God exists, it means there is belief in God, but knowledge of God does not necessarily require belief in God.

Consider another example: one might say, “I know that superstitions are not true, yet I believe some of them because they offer comfort in uncertain times, connect me to cultural traditions, and provide a sense of control over situations that feel unpredictable or beyond my influence.” These statements, demonstrating belief without knowledge, are also meaningful and coherent, though they might be considered irrational.

When confronted with such assertions, the question arises: ‘Why do some individuals possess knowledge of something but not believe it, or conversely, believe something they know is not true?’ These questions underscore the distinction between ‘knowledge’ and ‘belief’. Knowledge is inherently non-volitional; while individuals may actively seek information in certain domains, once acquired, knowledge manifests itself automatically in the human mind without conscious will. The subsequent stage introduces the element of belief. A just person aligns his beliefs with what he knows to be true. However, the unjust, despite possessing knowledge, may choose not to believe in those truths. This underscores the voluntary nature of belief. One has the choice to believe or not, but adherence to the ethics of belief dictates that one should believe in propositions supported by reliable arguments.

These examples illustrate that these concepts must not be confused: ‘Knowledge’, which denotes the recognition of facts and is not a voluntary act. ‘Belief’, which is the affirmation or acceptance of what we know, is a voluntary act, typically realized after acquiring knowledge. And ‘practical commitment’, a separate concept that may or may not follow belief.

In reality, there are instances of knowledge without belief, as seen in a person who possesses ample evidence for the existence of God but still does not believe in Him.

Conversely, there are situations where belief exists without knowledge, exemplified by someone who knows the falsehood of superstitions yet believes in them for other reasons, such as familial influence or pragmatic motives.

2) We can choose our beliefs, yet our knowledge is not within our control. To illustrate this, consider the prevalent concern across various religions,

emphasizing human well-being's dependence on possession and adherence to true beliefs. Humans are tasked with choosing between right and wrong beliefs. However, it is crucial to recognize that knowledge is not something that can be adopted in the same manner. This distinction underscores the fundamental difference between knowledge and belief.

Soren Kierkegaard rightly points this out, stating, "Belief is not a form of knowledge, but a free act, an expression of will" (Kierkegaard, 1962, p. 103). His statement is general, encompassing religious beliefs and other types of beliefs, and emphasizes that belief, as a mental affirmation, is an act of will, distinct from knowledge which is not connected to will.

3) We blame and praise people for their beliefs, whereas no one blames or praises others for mere knowing. This suggests a distinction between belief and knowledge. If someone believes in a superstition, we tend to blame him. Similarly, when someone holds true beliefs, we praise him. However, no one praises or blames another solely for possessing knowledge. That's because beliefs are choices that can be willed, imposing moral responsibility, whereas knowledge itself does not inherently require such responsibility.

However, we may praise someone for having various forms of knowledge, such as logic, chemistry, mechanics, etc. This praise is due to the fact that possessing knowledge is a human perfection, distinct from praising them as responsible individuals in the case of beliefs.

The responsibility associated with beliefs is elaborated upon in monotheistic religions. As explained, monotheistic religions assert that individuals will be held accountable for their beliefs on the Day of Judgment, and they will receive rewards or punishments based on these beliefs.¹ This highlights the logical possibility for someone to choose not to believe in something despite evidence in its favor or, conversely, to believe in something despite evidence against it. This concept of a "will to believe" is coherent and, as a result, entails moral responsibility.

One objection to this argument might be that responsibility, blaming, and praising do not necessarily result from control over belief. However, it is plausible to assert that we are responsible for our beliefs because we can influence them. The basic idea here is that while we cannot choose our beliefs

1. Anthony Robert Booth argues that in Islam, for instance, individuals are morally obligated to believe in certain Islamic propositions, such as the attestation of faith in Islam, which declares that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God. This indicates that belief is under our voluntary control, and people can be held accountable and judged for it, either positively or negatively (Booth, 2016, p. 8).

directly, we can choose to engage in actions that affect what we come to believe, even though we may not foresee exactly which beliefs will be shaped. Therefore, we can gather further evidence on a topic and work to cultivate intellectual virtues, but we do not have direct control over choosing our beliefs. Blaming or praising occurs for cultivating these virtues, rather than for directly choosing our beliefs (Peels, 2017, pp. 9-11).

This argument is inadequate, as someone may not cultivate intellectual virtues yet accept a belief for which they are praised, or conversely, someone may cultivate intellectual virtues yet accept a belief for which they are blamed. Thus, blame and praise are not only for the virtues that may influence our beliefs but also for the beliefs themselves.

4) The belief in false information highlights the distinction between knowledge and belief. Consider a person who is given false information and accepts it, assuming its truth. In reality, they possess no knowledge because they are not aware of a fact but only false information. However, they believe it. This distinction shows the difference between knowledge and belief.

5) Contradictory beliefs show the distinction between knowledge and belief. Many individuals may hold contradictory beliefs either without awareness or by deliberately ignoring their contradictions. Contradictions within beliefs are possible, and throughout history, many people have held contradictory beliefs. However, contradictions within knowledge are meaningless, as knowledge represents reality, and reality cannot be contradictory.

To further elaborate, consider two viewpoints in contemporary philosophy regarding the relationship between will and belief. Volitionalism¹ posits that

1. The view I am advocating in this article is “direct doxastic voluntarism,” which posits that individuals have immediate, voluntary influence over at least certain beliefs. In contrast, indirect doxastic voluntarism suggests that individuals can exert indirect voluntary control over their beliefs, such as through conducting research and assessing evidence. However, direct voluntarism is divided into two categories: the global version, which holds that all of our beliefs are volitional, and the local version, which holds that some human beliefs are volitional. The examples mentioned in this article explicitly demonstrate that at least some beliefs, such as religious beliefs, are volitional.

Matthias Steup outlines three elements of doxastic voluntarism: 1. Responsibility for our beliefs requires a level of control similar to that needed for responsibility for our actions. 2. The control we exert over our actions can extend to our beliefs. 3. Epistemic responsibility is grounded similarly to practical responsibility, involving a direct form of control (Steup, 2018, p. 1).

While I agree with doxastic voluntarism, I lean more towards a form of local doxastic voluntarism. I believe further investigation is necessary to clarify which beliefs are under our control and which are not.

belief is dependent on the will. On the other hand, non-volitionalism is a theory that regards belief as a spontaneous response to total evidence. Non-volitionalists have presented the following arguments:

1) Phenomenologically speaking, acquiring a belief is not something that the subject does or chooses; rather, it is an event in which the world automatically imposes itself upon the subject. We don't will our beliefs, but they occur spontaneously and involuntarily. For example, blushing is not under the control of our will. Similarly, when a person thinks that something is right, he believes it without willing it, and there is no room for decision and will. This fact is much clearer in abstract and logical beliefs. For instance, it is evident that humans don't choose to believe in the law of non-contradiction or that $2+2=4$. These kinds of beliefs are undeniably non-volitional.

2) It is incoherent to state that one can obtain or sustain a belief in full consciousness simply by a basic act of will, by purposefully disregarding the implications of the evidence. When one understands that "p" is not true, there is no epistemic reason for believing in "p" (Pojman, 2000, pp. 283-294; Williams, 1973, pp. 148-149).

Both arguments conflate belief and knowledge. Knowledge occurs involuntarily. When all evidence supports a theory, one knows that this theory is true, but in the next step, he can choose and will. If a person is just, he will naturally believe a fact that he knows to be true. However, if someone is unjust and does not adhere to the ethics of belief, he may not believe what he knows to be true due to internal or external factors.

There are various intuitive instances confirming this. Some individuals align their interests with a particular theory, prompting them to forsake the ethics of belief and shape their beliefs not based on truth but on their interests. Even in the case of logical and mathematical theorems, historical defenders of sophistry or epistemological relativism haven't necessarily arrived at the knowledge that these theories are true; non-cognitive factors have led some of them to believe what they know is false. Here, I'm not suggesting that some people pretend to believe in something they don't know, but rather that, at times, individuals choose to believe something that goes against their knowledge.

To illustrate this point, consider another example: Suppose someone asks where a certain book is. His friend replies that he believes it is in a particular library. He is not sure; he seems to remember seeing it there a long time ago, so he believes it is there. In this example, if the book is indeed in the library and he recognizes it, he has knowledge of it; otherwise, he has no knowledge.

However, in both cases, whether he has knowledge or not, he can choose to believe it based on a guess and conjecture. This example also highlights the distinction between knowledge and belief.

However, I acknowledge the possibility that, in some cases, belief may unintentionally follow knowledge. Nonetheless, beliefs, at least in some instances, are volitional. Therefore, belief should not be considered an inherent element of knowledge or constitutive of its definition. While knowledge is often associated with belief, they are fundamentally distinct.

Given that belief is not a defining component of knowledge, the question arises: what is the relationship between the two?

Based on the explanations provided, it can be asserted that neither is a prerequisite for the other. However, there is often a causal relationship between knowledge and belief, wherein knowledge frequently serves as the cause of belief. Nevertheless, this connection is not necessary. Therefore, a rational and reasonable person should believe in accordance with his knowledge. Paradoxically, some individuals opt for an irrational stance, believing in things contrary to their knowledge.

For example, some persist in believing superstitions despite recognizing their falseness, while others, despite acknowledging the truth of certain religious beliefs, choose not to believe in God due to personal motives or inclinations. Such instances affirm the absence of a necessary connection between knowledge and belief. However, for a rational person, knowledge can serve as a foundation and rationale for their beliefs.

The ethics of belief

Regarding the ethics of belief, a dispute arose between two renowned nineteenth-century philosophers, William James and W. K. Clifford. In his article, “The Ethics of Belief,” Clifford argues that “it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence.” Individuals who ground their beliefs on unreliable foundations, such as personal interests or wishful thinking, are considered immoral. Believing without sufficient reason is detrimental to both oneself and society, constituting a sin against humanity (Clifford, 2012, pp. 498–501).

In his article, “The Will to Believe,” William James opposed Clifford’s position, contending that there are cases in which it is permissible or even obligatory to hold a belief without sufficient evidence. He asserts that “wishful thinking” is acceptable under the following conditions:

- A) There must be no compelling evidence supporting either side.

B) Both options must be live hypotheses. A live hypothesis is one that can be sincerely chosen.

C) It must be “forced,” meaning that one of the options must be definitively chosen, and avoidance of both is not possible.

D) The choice must be “momentous”, that is, it must be significant, not trivial (James, 2012, pp. 502–510).

I do not intend to pass judgment here on whether Clifford’s view, asserting that one should not hold any belief without sufficient evidence, is correct, or if, as James alleges, one can propose conditions for accepting a belief without evidence. What is significant here is that the above arguments show that both correctly suppose that belief is an act of the will. The role of evidence is to instill a certain kind of knowledge in humans. However, concerning belief, both agree that it is contingent on human choice and will. Their only disagreement lies in whether this choice must be based on sufficient evidence. Nonetheless, the arguments presented in this article demonstrate that they both correctly assert that belief is distinct from knowledge, residing within the domain of human will.

The relation between belief and acceptance

Based on the explanations above, it can be asserted that belief is a form of accepting a proposition, sometimes unintentionally following knowledge, and in some cases, voluntarily. Although knowledge is often associated with belief, they are fundamentally distinct. Knowledge is not volitional; when a person acquires information, they cannot accept or reject it but rather it is spontaneously realized. However, in the subsequent stage, if they choose to accept this knowledge, they believe it.

However, in contemporary philosophy, some argue that there is a distinction between belief and acceptance. According to this perspective, there are instances where there is belief without acceptance, and in other cases, there is acceptance without belief. It has been contended that acceptance without belief is a common attitude in science. Scientists may sometimes accept a theory as an adequate basis for their research without necessarily believing in its truth. Similarly, there are cases of belief without acceptance. For example, consider someone who intends to use a ladder to climb to a height. Before checking the ladder, they may believe it is stable and start climbing, but confirming its stability requires careful inspection (Bratman, 1999; Fraassen, 1980; Schwitzgebel, 2023).

It appears that both examples fail to illustrate the separation of belief from

acceptance. In the first instance, the person temporarily accepts a theory as a working hypothesis, not because he believes the theory is true, but because it serves as a provisional basis for scientific activity. Although there is belief here, it is not the belief in the correctness of this theory but the belief in the effectiveness of this theory for scientific activities. In this example, there is neither acceptance nor belief in the truth, but there is both acceptance and belief in a theory serving as a foundation for scientific activities.

In the second example, if a person believes the ladder is stable without checking, he is essentially accepting its stability. In this scenario, there is no distinction between the two epistemic states. Moreover, if the person aims to base his belief on strong evidence, he must verify the stability of the ladder to substantiate his belief. In this case, there is no separation between belief and acceptance; even when the stability is believed without checking, it is simultaneously accepted.

The nature of belief

Given the distinction between knowledge and belief, the question arises: what is the nature of belief?

According to David Hume, beliefs are spontaneous feelings caused by the experience of things in constant conjunctions, with no rational basis. They are involuntary occurrences of vivid ideas in the mind (Hume, 2007, pp. 33–34; 2008, pp. 64–65).

However, based on the position presented in this article, a different conclusion can be drawn. Belief is a type of mental state, but it cannot be asserted that it is necessarily grounded in a rational basis, nor can it be claimed to be solely based on a feeling devoid of rationality. Instead, it should be asserted that belief is contingent on our choice, whether we choose to base our belief on a rational foundation or not.

In fact, considering the distinction between belief and knowledge, we need to address two questions:

A: How *is* belief produced?

B: How *should* belief be produced?

Concerning the first question, belief may arise from deliberate reasoning or human feelings and emotions. This is an ontological issue. However, from an axiological standpoint, belief is volitional. Therefore, human belief is valuable when it is grounded in reasoning and evidence.

Knowledge, on the other hand, is different. It is not subject to human will.

While a person creates conditions for acquiring knowledge, once he knows it, he automatically possesses that knowledge without any choice or will.

Thus far, we have concluded that belief is not a prerequisite for knowledge. In the following, I will explain that justification is also not a prerequisite for knowledge.

Knowledge without justification

People sometimes possess a significant amount of knowledge without proper justification. Many individuals form their religious, political, and social beliefs based on family, friends, and their surroundings. Not all beliefs held by people are thoroughly justified. Consider the following statements:

- “Drug X is useful for treating disease V.”
- “The Earth is spherical.”
- “Water boils at one hundred degrees Celsius.”

Assuming these statements to be true, the question arises: what forms the basis of these beliefs?

While some individuals may have justified their beliefs, many accept these propositions without any justification. Now, which of the following statements is true?

A: People who are aware of these propositions without justification do not possess any knowledge.

B: People who are aware of these propositions without justification have knowledge of them. However, since their knowledge lacks a firm basis, there is no way to prove¹ and verify it.

It seems that, intuitively, the second proposition is correct rather than the first. We distinguish between two aspects:

A: The existence of knowledge.

B: The means to prove knowledge for oneself or others.

The role of justification is in the second aspect, not the first. Accordingly, justification is not a condition of knowledge or part of its definition. Instead, a person may acquire knowledge without justification. However, if he wishes to demonstrate its truth to himself or others, seeking justification becomes necessary.

Fundamentally, much of human knowledge is not grounded in justification. Knowledge is sometimes formed throughout human life without any

1. By ‘proving’, I mean its general meaning, encompassing both inductive and deductive arguments.

justification. While acknowledging that such knowledge lacking justification may not offer a solid foundation, we still consider it as knowledge.

The essence of knowledge lies in understanding reality, nothing more. Yet, establishing the reality of knowledge demands justification. The stronger the justification, the more likely we are to recognize its truth. If the justification is certain, one is confident that they have attained truth. If the justification is probabilistic, one deems it likely that their knowledge is true. In the absence of justification, a person may have knowledge, but this possibility cannot be proven. Consequently, knowledge without justification is possible, even though its truth cannot be proven.

Considering this point can challenge some assumptions in contemporary epistemology. It is assumed that one of the core intuitions about knowledge is that it cannot be based purely on luck. Thus, the role of justification is to exclude luck from what constitutes knowledge. Here, the problem of Gettier arises, and many solutions have been proposed to define knowledge in a way that excludes luck (Brown, 2017, pp. 191–212; Pritchard, 2019, p. 96).

I disagree with this entire process. Knowledge is, fundamentally, the recognition of facts. Therefore, if I happen to know some facts purely by luck, I still possess knowledge, even though I cannot prove their truth. The role of justification is to establish the truth of propositions that we assume to be knowledge. If a justification is merely probable, we cannot be certain that we have attained truth; instead, we can only rely on such propositions because they are likely to be true. However, if a justification is certain, then we can be sure that we have attained knowledge. For example, if someone is aware that the Earth is spherical, it means they have knowledge. In this case, three scenarios exist:

- 1) If they have no justification for this belief, they cannot prove that they have attained truth and thus have knowledge. However, since it is true, it constitutes knowledge gained purely by luck without justification.
- 2) If they have a probable justification, it is likely to be true and thus qualifies as knowledge.
- 3) If they have a certain justification for this belief, it can be asserted that they surely have knowledge.

In fact, contrary to the claims of contemporary epistemologists that intuitively lucky knowledge is not genuine knowledge, intuition suggests that any recognition of facts constitutes knowledge. Lucky knowledge is indeed a

form of knowledge, but its truth cannot be proven due to its reliance on luck.

In the following, I address the Lottery Paradox and Gettier Problem in accordance with the above explanation.

Lottery Paradox

The Lottery Paradox, as presented by Henry E. Kyburg Jr., revolves around the following scenario: imagine 1000 people participating in a lottery. If the lottery is fair, the chances of person C winning are very slim. Consequently, it seems reasonable to assert:

A: Person C does not win the lottery.

However, the crux of the issue lies in the fact that this justified belief contradicts another belief: the conviction that one person (potentially person C) will undoubtedly emerge as the winner (Kyburg, 1961, p. 197).

Based on the definition of knowledge proposed in this article, which posits knowledge as the recognition of facts, the question arises: How can the lottery paradox be resolved?

The answer is straightforward. If we interpret proposition A to mean that person C will never win the lottery, then proposition A is not true. This is because there exists a possibility, albeit a weak one, that person C might win, and it would be incorrect to assert definitively that person C will not win. Consequently, proposition A cannot be considered as knowledge.

However, this answer leads to another quandary. If proposition A is false, what role does justification play? If justification is meant to prove the truth of a proposition, and there is a justification provided, how could the proposition still be false?

Building on the earlier explanations, it can be argued that the role of justification is indeed to establish the truth of a statement. Yet, there are two types of justification:

A: Definite justification: If the justification is definite, it ensures that a person will unequivocally arrive at the truth. Consequently, the application of knowledge in this case will be definitive.

B: Probabilistic justification: If the justification is probabilistic, a person can only assert that they will probably arrive at the truth. In this scenario, the application of knowledge is inherently probabilistic.

It is erroneous to conclude a definite proposition while employing a probabilistic justification. Therefore, proposition A is deemed false, and the accurate statement should be formulated as follows:

B: Most likely, person C will not win the lottery.

Proposition B holds true and does not contradict the notion that someone will inevitably win the lottery.

Gettier Problem

Two examples proposed by Edmund L. Gettier, along with similar ones proposed by others, are based on the alleged intuitive assumption that knowledge cannot be lucky. I believe that the responses to the Gettier Problem vary across different examples. First, let's consider Gettier's first example:

“Suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. And suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following conjunctive proposition:

(d) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

Smith's evidence for (d) might be that the president of the company assured him that Jones would, in the end, be selected and that he, Smith, had counted the coins in Jones's pocket ten minutes ago.

Proposition (d) entails:

(e) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

Let us suppose that Smith sees the entailment from (d) to (e), and accepts (e) on the grounds of (d), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (e) is true.

But imagine, further, that unknown to Smith, he himself, not Jones, will get the job. And, also, unknown to Smith, he himself has ten coins in his pocket. Proposition (e) is then true, though proposition (d), from which Smith inferred (e), is false. In our example, then, all of the following are true: (i) (e) is true, (ii) Smith believes that (e) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in believing that (e) is true. But it is equally clear that Smith does not know that (e) is true; for (e) is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in his pocket, and bases his belief in (e) on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job” (Gettier, 1963, pp. 122–123).

Many responses have been offered to this example from Gettier. Some argue that there is essentially no justification in this example, while others suggest adding a new condition to the definition of knowledge (Hetherington 1998; Lehrer 1965; Lycan 1977; Goldman 1967; Jonathan M. Weinberg & Stephen Stich 2001). From the preceding discussions, it became evident that knowledge is not justified belief; rather, it is the awareness or recognition of

facts. Given this, the question that arises is whether there is knowledge in Gettier's first example, and what its solution is.

The answer I propose to Gettier's first example diverges from all previous responses. In my perspective, there is essentially no truth in this case. Consider the following example: Suppose A is eating, but B is sleeping. Now, contemplate the statement:

D: He is eating.

Is this statement true? The truth or falsity of this proposition depends on whom the speaker means by "he." If the speaker refers to A, the proposition is true; if the reference is to B, the proposition is false. Therefore, the truth or falsity hinges on the speaker's intended meaning of "he."

In fact, for any sentence with multiple possible referents and the use of general words, its truth or falsity depends on the speaker's intended meaning of those general words. In the provided example, the word "he" may have various referents, and the truth or falsity of the sentence relies on whom the speaker means by it.

Let's delve into a more specific example. Suppose, in a group of six people, one person named C is a thief. Now, if a person named M asserts, "Some of the members of this group are thieves," is this statement true or false?

At first glance, it may seem true because M mentioned that some members of the group are thieves, and indeed, C is a thief. However, it is not always accurate. Suppose you know, based on evidence, that person M means by "some of the members of this group" the person B, not C. In this case, you can deem this sentence false, and you might even label the speaker as a liar. Why? Because when general descriptions are used as the subject of a proposition, if a particular person is intended by the speaker, the predicate must match that same person; otherwise, the proposition becomes false.

In fact, if one does not know which person is the thief but is only sure that at least one person is the thief, the proposition would be true. However, if the speaker mistakenly intends to identify a specific person as the thief in a general description within a proposition, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the proposition itself becomes false.

Now, armed with this explanation, let's analyze the first example from Gettier. The expression "The man who has ten coins in his pocket" is a general description that can encompass multiple people. When Smith utters this sentence, he intends Jones by saying "The man who has ten coins in his pocket." Consequently, this sentence is false because the man who will get the job is not Jones.

Considering the first Gettier case as false, that is, not true, offers a unique solution distinct from previous approaches to resolving the initial Gettier example, but it can be very insightful. It changes the criterion of falsity and truth concerning general descriptions. In such cases, if the speaker does not intend a specific person, the truth can be determined by matching the predicate with the subject. However, if the speaker does mean a specific person, the truth of the statement is contingent on the predicate corresponding to the intended person.

The truth or falsity of a proposition is determined by its content, but in some cases, this content may not be clarified unless we know the speaker's intention. In general descriptions, if a specific person is intended by the speaker, the truth or falsity depends on the speaker's intention. While in some cases, we may not discern the speaker's intention, knowing that the speaker meant specific people in a general description affects the truth or falsity of the proposition. However, this does not imply a denial of the correspondence theory of truth. According to the correspondence theory, what makes a proposition true is its correspondence with the external world. However, to understand the content of a proposition, we sometimes need to know the intention of the speaker.

Accordingly, considering that Smith's intention in the general description "the man who has ten coins in his pocket" was a specific person that did not align with reality, this sentence is fundamentally false. Therefore, it can be asserted that Smith essentially lacked knowledge because the condition of knowledge involves knowing reality, which he did not.

However, this response is not adequate in all similar examples. Consider Russell's example of looking at a stopped clock. Russell holds that suppose there is a man who looks at a clock that is not running, though he thinks it is, and happens to look at it at the moment when it shows the correct time; this man acquires a true belief about the time of day but cannot be said to have knowledge (Russell, 2009, p. 140).

In my view, this example differs from Gettier's first example. Contrary to Russell's perspective, I believe that in this scenario, the man looking at the stopped clock does know the actual time, even though his knowledge was based on a false basis. His knowledge was attained through luck, but he does indeed possess knowledge. While an incorrect inference does not reliably lead to truth, in some cases, it coincidentally does, and thus can constitute knowledge. As I explained, justification's role is to ensure the truth of a proposition, but knowledge is the recognition of a fact, regardless of its foundation.

However, the issue in Gettier's first example is different. In his case, the problem is not having knowledge based on a false assumption, but rather the absence of genuine knowledge. This arises because in cases involving general descriptions, what the speaker intends—clarifying the content of the proposition—does not correspond to reality.

In Gettier's first example, the example he presents lacks truth. Therefore, the response to the Gettier problem would be that there is no knowledge in his first example, as the man intended by Smith is actually Jones. In a general description where a specific instance is intended, the intention forms part of the statement's content, implying that Jones will get the job. However, in reality, this statement is false. Hence, there is no recognition of reality here.

Conclusion

The accurate definition of knowledge must be revised to “awareness, or recognition, of facts.”¹ Belief, while often inspiring knowledge, is not a requisite condition for knowledge. Individuals may choose not to believe in what they have knowledge about, and conversely, one may hold a belief without possessing knowledge of it.

Furthermore, knowledge can exist without justification. However, knowledge lacking justification lacks a guarantee of its truth. Justification serves to ensure the truth of knowledge but does not constitute it. Knowledge acquired by chance or luck might indeed be true, but there is no means to verify its truth. While the necessity of justification is beyond doubt, its role lies in guaranteeing the truth of a proposition assumed to be knowledge rather than constituting knowledge.

Conflict of Interests

The author has no competing interests.

1. However, it is clear that this is the definition of propositional knowledge, not capacity knowledge or knowledge by acquaintance. For example, in the domain of a science like physics, one must know how to use physical theories, which constitutes capacity knowledge. Propositional knowledge in physics, however, pertains to factual knowledge about the physical world.

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