

AN EVALUATION OF EDMUND GETTIER'S PAPER: "IS JUSTIFIED TRUE BELIEF KNOWLEDGE?"

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Abstract

The problem of philosophy within the gamut of epistemology has been the issue of knowledge and the justification of the knowledge one claims to have, if at all. Some theories and positions have come up in order to establish the certainty-ness of knowledge, while some cast some skepticism about knowledge; and all these come in divergent forms and formats. Sequel to this, there had been a long-held account of knowledge as "Justified True Belief". The Justified True Belief account of knowledge holds that knowledge is equivalent to justified true belief. Hence, we have knowledge of that claim if all three conditions: justification, truth, and belief, are met of a given claim. Edmund Gettier challenges and argues against this long held belief, and goes further to point out its flaws in a logico-propositional format. He explicates with the use of double counter-instances that there exists a situation where an individual can have a true belief that is justified, as regards a particular claim and yet cannot know it due to the fact that the rationale for the said belief, and its substantiation, cannot defy truth in the end. Critically, Edmund Gettier did not give any sequence of argument and propositions that would stand in place of the Justified True belief account, since he adjudged it to be false. Against this backdrop, therefore, the aim of this work is to access the claims therein, and strike a possible balance by establishing the possibility of such knowledge in part, and in a context. The work, among others, argues that the case 1 (especially) presented by Gettier is rare, hypothetical and does not always happen that someone will forget such within that context. It also argues that there exists some level of knowledge that is fundamental and not untrue given his analysis, namely; that someone necessarily will get the job in so far as there was a vacancy that needed to be filled, even though it was not pronounced. Even if it happens to be so, this work advances for the relevance of the possession of some reasonable and

indubitable epistemic virtues, (possibly lacking in the case he gave) that are pertinent to any claim, knowledge; strengthen the Justified True Belief, especially within the contexts presented by Gettier, and thus forestall such occurrences.

Introduction

The problem of what constitutes "knowledge" has been one of the hard nuts of philosophy since its inception. There have been instances found in the Dialogues of Plato, namely; the *Theaetetus* and *Meno*. An Edmund Gettier's 1963 three paged paper "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" changed the course of epistemology by refuting the traditional view that knowledge is justified true belief. In the paper, Gettier used the tools of logic and analytic philosophy of Language to argue that the Justified True Belief account of knowledge is not adequate in accounting for the entire prerequisites that are imperative and enough for the possibility of knowledge. This is then what orchestrated the term 'Gettier problem or Gettier Case', mostly employed to delineate any case in the theory of knowledge that refutes Justified True Belief account of knowledge.

As it were, Edmund Gettier is not in principle, did not first raise the issue that is accredited to him. Bertrand Russell had raised the issue in his write up; *Human Knowledge: Its scope and limits*. To state the fact, this contention has been known long ago as a philosopher from India- Dharmottara and Peter of Mantua have given some instances of it.¹ However, the relevance of the formulation of the problem by Gettier coincides with the springing up of a kind of philosophical naturalism which was promulgated by Quine W. V. O, and a host of others. It has been used as an argument for a movement for the justification theories of the externalists. It has been observed that in the recent times, the Edmund Gettier issue has primarily upturned the traits of contemporary epistemology since it poses a clear barrier to analyzing knowledge.² Hence, the task of this work is to evaluate his position and establish also that he could be right in certain senses when his arguments are so found, but that does not totally dismiss the fact that in some instances and conditions, justified true belief could give knowledge, at least momentarily and contextually.

A Brief Idea of the Theory of Justified True Belief

Plato, (428-347 BC), one of the best known ancient Greek thinkers, a student of Socrates and the teacher of Aristotle had written and postulated his famous doctrines of theory of forms, and immortality of the soul. In the same light, he is

known for the idea that Justified True Belief is knowledge. The discourse on “true belief” and “knowledge” in *Meno* springs in the analysis of the traveling men; of which, one knows the right pathway to Larissa and the other who is said to possess a true belief of the correct path to Larissa. Socrates thus tells Meno that if the duo men led to similar outcome, then true belief is no more valuable than knowledge and both beneficial.³ Plato then holds that, in order to know something, there are some criteria that must be ascertained. These are: 1. There must be a belief that the said thing is true.

2. The said thing must in fact be true.

3. There must be a justification in believing the said thing to be true.

This theory made a lot of sense to most epistemologists, and was generally accepted as true for a very long time. As it were, the Justified True Belief account of knowledge holds that knowledge is equivalent to justified true belief. Hence, we have knowledge of that claim if all three conditions: justification, truth, and belief, are met of a given claim. In other words, it claims that knowledge is possible to be conceptualized as Justified True Belief, implying that the significance of a sentence such as ‘John is aware that snow fell today, could be some sets of condition which are intrinsically sufficient and essential for the possession of knowledge. Here is the official statement of the Justified True Belief Theory:

[A] S knows that P if and only if (i) S believes that P, and (ii) P is true, and (iii) S is justified in believing that P.⁴ However, the Theory of Justification has been put forward to attempt an answer the question.

“Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” - The Edmund Gettier’s Counter Examples

The 1963, article (Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?) of Edmund Gettier opens up a strong, yet a possible argument against the hitherto position that Justified True Belief amounts to knowledge. The article shattered the epistemological orthodoxy which the Theory of Justified True Belief had enjoyed. To stretch his argument better, he traces other arguments by some thinkers like Ayer and Chisholm. For Chisholm;

[B] S knows that P (if and only if). (i) S accepts P, (ii) S has adequate evidence for P, and (iii) P is true.⁵ While Ayer states the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge thus:

[C] S knows that P (if and only if) (i) P is true, (ii) S is sure that P is true, and (iii) S has the right to be sure that P is true.⁶

From the position of the Justified True Belief theory highlighted above, Gettier argues with counter examples that there exist several instances of beliefs that are justified, true, and fulfilling every of the highlighted three stipulations logically stated above as the conditions for knowledge, within the analysis of the Justified True Belief theory, but do not come out to be certified cases of knowledge. He thus insists that his two counter instances indicate that the Justified True Belief submission about knowledge is untrue. In other words, to demonstrate his claims, he gives two instances whereby intuition gives the subject a justified true belief but fails therein to know. Gettier sustains that [A] is false because the conditions given do not in any way represent a sufficient condition for the legitimacy of the proposition that S knows that P. He gives similar argument for [B] and [C] above, showing that they both failed if the statement "has adequate evidence for" or "has the right to be sure that" is substituted for "is justified in believing that" all through.⁷ He notes two seemingly strong points. Firstly, in the instance of "justified" where S's being justified in consenting for P is an indispensable stipulation of S's knowing that P, it is probable for someone to be justified in consenting a proposition that is not true in reality. Secondly, for one proposition P, if S is justified in consenting for P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and acknowledges Q due to the above inference, then S is justified in believing the Q.⁸ From these points stated, Gettier Edmund gives his arguments where the state of affairs pointed out in (a) are true for a few propositions, though it is at the same time not true that the person in question knows that proposition. He thence contends that there is need for a divergent analysis that would impeccably trace what knowledge means. He gives two cases:

CASE I

Gettier states the first case thus: Presume that Jones and Smith have both sent an application for a particular work. Furthermore, presume that Smith has worthy proofs for these deductions: (d) Jones is the one who will be given the work, and Jones is in possession of ten coins in his bag. Gettier explains that the proof Smith has for the (d) position could be on the ground that the leader of the firm has given him an assurance that the work will be given to Jones and secondly, Smith himself has before now counted the coins in the bag of Jones. Hence, the deduction (d) involves: (e) the one who will eventually be given the work has ten coins in his bag. Presumably, Smith views this entailment starting from (d) to (e), and agrees on (e) based on the facts provided by (d), for which he has worthy

proofs. From here, Smith is noticeably justified in having the belief that (e) is not false but true. On the contrary, picture more that without Smith knowing it, that he (Smith) has ten coins in his bag also, and on that ground, will be given the work. Analytically, deduction (e) is thus true, although the deduction (d), on which Smith assumed (e), is not true, rather false. In the instance given, these are all true: (i) (e) is true, (ii) Smith has the belief that (e) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in the belief that (e) is true. On the contrary, it is lucid that Smith has no knowledge that (e) is true; for (e) is true because of the amount of coins in the bag of Smith; while Smith does not know how many coins are in the bag of Smith, and based his strong belief in (e) strictly on the number of coins in the bag of Jones, whom he erroneously taken to be the one who will get the work.⁹

This first Case is the most discussed of the two cases he presented. The Case 1 has a hero called Smith. He and Jones had applied for a certain job; however, Smith has been told by the president of the company that Jones will be considered for the job because, anyone who has ten coins as a prerequisite for the job gets it. Smith then combines that testimony of the president with his observed evidence of the certainty of ten coins in the pocket of Jones, because he counted them himself. This informs his (Smith's) inference that whoever will get the job has ten coins available in his pocket. For clarity sake, and to explain further; the belief "x" (which is that Jones will get the job) of Smith is true and justified because there is an "n" (10 coins- a condition sine qua non for the possession of the job; and confirmed by Smith), in the pocket of Jones, coupled with the "m" (testimony of the president) that Jones will get the job. To state this with Mathematical symbols; $x \equiv n + m$; where "x" is the belief (called the 'initial' "knowledge" that Jones will get the job; and " \equiv " herein symbolizes "implies", and "m" means (the testimony of the president). Belief "x" is in that way, at the slightest way, moderately well justified, beefed by a proof which is excellent in a rationally common manner. On the contrary, and as it became evident, the belief "x" is true, even though, not in the manner expected by Smith as true. This research therefore, calls the 'new or later' belief that was not known by Smith as 'x².

The contrary manner that was not expected by Smith, as interpreted by Gettier could be stated thus: "for it is 'Smith' who will be given the work and 'Smith himself' is in possession of ten coins in his bag." The duo particulars combined to give his belief "x" a position that is said to be true. Nonetheless, none of those truths was known by Smith in the prior instance (on its own), (say

the actual knowledge x^2). Is his belief “ x ” thus, not knowledge? By implication, does Smith fail to know that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket? Gettier here in Case 1, thinks that Smith failed to know that the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. It therefore follows that the Case 1 herein alleged would be: “ x ” encloses a belief that is true and justified, but does not amount to knowledge (which later turned to be the case, termed in this work x^2). Gettier argues that if the immediate submission is the correct interpretation of the case, then, the ‘Justified True Belief’ as a condition for knowledge is false, since Smith, the actor in the analysis failed to know that: (a) it was himself who will get the job, (b) that the person who will get the job (Smith actually) has ten coins in his pocket, (which in what turned out to be the case, and termed x^2 in this work). By judgment, Case 1 has shown that the amalgamation of belief, truth, and justification do not in this case justify for the presence of knowledge. This, he argues, is a clear fact that the trueness and the justified-ness of a belief would not satisfactorily amount for is being termed knowledge. From this point, let us consider the second case according to Gettier.

CASE 11

In the Case II, Smith also is used as the hero. He has a positive proof that Jones owns a Ford. Smith also has a friend Brown, whom he does not know his whereabouts. “Jones owns a Ford” is what Gettier holds as proposition f , this is because Smith had in several occasions seen Jones riding a Ford and has even been given a ride by Jones. Smith went on to select three places at random and gives the proposition thus:

- (g) Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Boston.
- (h) Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona.
- (i) Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Brest-Litovsk.¹⁰

Gettier explicates that each of the propositions “ g , h , and i ”, takes its standing on “ f ”; and was accepted based on that f (Jones own a Ford), and upon which Smith is justified in believing each of them (g , h , i). Note that from the foregoing, there is no evidence of the whereabouts of Brown. Gettier there from imagines two further conditions; firstly, that Jones does not possess a Ford, but driving a rented car; and secondly, the place mentioned in proposition “ h ”(Barcelona) coincidentally and unknown to Smith is where Brown is. Gettier with these stances infer that, if these conditions hold, then Smith has no knowledge that “ h ”

is true, “even though (i) (h) is true, (ii) Smith does believe that (h) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in believing that (h) is true.”¹¹

Here, Gettier draws the conclusion that the examples given show that definition [A] above, namely; (S knows that P if and only if (i) S believes that P, and (ii) P is true, and (iii) S is justified in believing that P) does not affirm an adequate provision for someone's knowing a certain proposition. In the same vein, he insists that the same cases, with appropriate changes, will be sufficient to show that neither the explanation [B] namely; (S knows that P if and only if: (i) S accepts P, (ii) S has adequate evidence for P, and (iii) P is true) nor [C] namely; (S knows that P if and only if: (i) P is true, (ii) S is sure that P is true, and (iii) S has the right to be sure that P is true) do so either.

Evaluation

From the foregoing, it can be rightly said that, only things that are true will constitute knowledge. The truth in this manner and context will always be in tandem with whatever is the claim, evidenced and justified. There are some sentences that literarily untrue. For instance, I know that Atiku was going to win the Presidential election.

In the past, some thinkers have maintained that the Gettier's case cannot be escaped. In this light was Linda Zagzebski , who in her article of 1994 titled “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems”, insists that there is no breakdown that is similar to that of the Justified True Belief that would substantially push out the issues pointed out by Gettier's cases. In clear terms, she argues that any point like Justified True Belief plus “x”, where “x” is a further condition for more justification would throw out the examples of Getteir, and would not solve it.¹² Against this backdrop by Zagzebksi, there are some certain points that are worth noting, and are seemingly not thoroughly considered by Gettier cases. In the Case I of Gettier, there exists a level of knowledge, (that is fundamental), and is not untrue in his analysis in Case I, namely; that “someone necessarily will get the job.” In an unpronounced way, Smith has the intuitive knowledge that someone will get the said job, even though not pronounced, and even though he thought it would be Jones in the analysis. This position in a sense is itself “knowledge” not pronounced though, given that the analysis of Gettier was hypothetical. Other things being equal, one would know at once that someone will necessarily get the said job, if and only if, the job must be given, and in so far as the vacant position remains constant. This addresses the issue that Gettier example was looking for the knowledge of the “to whom” exactly (specificity,

that is- specific pointer), not necessarily the knowledge of “someone” (possibility, that is- probable pointer) that answers the question of “who”, not that of “to whom.”

Suffice it to state categorically that the Gettier Case 1 is hypothetical and rarely happens within the context he analyzed the Smith and Jones case. However, even if it were feasible that such will happen, will only be so when Smith lacks (the necessary) epistemic virtue, which is an approach to the study of epistemic evaluations. Arguably, the Justified True Belief Theory needs further elements that will strengthen it, which could be the problem of Smith at that moment in the Case presented by Gettier, hence; the epistemic virtues. These epistemic virtues are some traits that scientists would possess to arrive at truth or knowledge better than others possibly. For instance, a scientist who possesses patience, curiosity and doggedness, is likely to get the experiment with a good result.

This epistemic virtue is likened to William James’ *Passional Considerations* when he averred that in some unique categories of instances, “it is sane to believe propositions even if one has small or no proof to sustain one’s beliefs, and one’s beliefs, in such situations can be established by the considerations that are passional. These considerations that are passional are: partisanship and imitation, hope and fear, passion and prejudice, the circumpressure of one’s caste and set.¹³ Williams advances that “there exists two distinct paths of which one can view one’s duty in the case of opinion. These paths he contends are completely special, and yet paths about whose dissimilarity, the theory of knowledge seems thus far have shown very slight worry. This is expressed thus; one should discern the truth; and one should stay away from any form of error.¹⁴ In the light of the preceding argument, these virtues are necessary for knowledge, in which case, Smith could have lacked (if one follows the analysis of Gettier), that made him not to remember that he had ten coins on him. These epistemic virtues are: (1) patience to actually reconsider the moments past, in the form of examination of consciousness; (2) the power of reminiscence which would have also helped him to recall that he had those ten coins; which was eventually discovered, (3) Diligence, and open-mindedness which are all naturally pragmatic. Anyone, in such manner as Smith, without these attitudes, is possible to have a momentary forgetfulness as in the case of Smith.

Gettier confuses a probable belief with a factual belief. In principle, the Justified True Belief theory is that which is factual in its stance. Let us examine this reality: Mr John slept for the night. He had a dream where he slept in that same dream world that he drove a car. He eventually woke up and found out that he was actually dreaming, and that also, he slept in that dream world and dreamt where he rode a car which he does not own in reality. The instances of Gettier could be said to be like this man who dreamt in his dream world that he rode a car, yet wakes up to see that he actually was in a dream, and dreamt in that dream (which is of course feasible in reality that someone could be in a dream, yet dreamt in that dream world). Hence, dreaming in a dream does not make a reality but that of a fiction in a fiction. The Case II (particularly, the part two of those premises that tries to place a tag on the location of Brown) of Gettier is such like a dream in a dream, vested with a probable belief statement namely; "either". Each of the examples of the Justified True Belief always begins with a bi-condition: "if and only if"; and by extension, the truth position of that knowledge, coupled with the justification and adequate evidence for such a belief and knowledge, it then suffices to state that the examples of Gettier, especially in Case II, failed in that the premises he used began with a probable word "either". It is apparent that the last part of each of the propositions in Case II was based on probability ("either") of which, going by their constructions are statements of belief in a weak sense, by high merit of being quite confident that "it is most likely true." However, the Belief" in the framework of the Justified True Belief theory is that (of a belief in a "strict sense") which is full and outright; filled with evidential justification, that cannot be otherwise; hence the phrase, "if and only if". Gettier would have had a case if he had insisted on the failure of the Justified True Belief theory on the premise of the possibility of someone knowing something (say p); that is true also, but the person does not believe in it. Hence, Mr Lagbaja might hear and know about a man who is good and philanthropic; but does not believe he can help him probably because of his personal hatred for that man, and would not want such help from him by any means whatsoever and no matter the situation either.

It could be argued further that the cases presented by Gettier have no justified belief, due to the fact that it is not possible to justify anything that is untrue; and in so far as any proposition happens not to be true is a clear indication that it was not in the first instance justified substantially. By this fact, the Justified True Belief stands, thus, the movement of the problem from knowledge to the

definition of justification. In order to strengthen this view, Boghossian argues that justification and non-justification are not in double resistance. He avers that justification is predicated on the case of amount or better still, degree, with the idea of being more justified or even in the lesser instance, justified.¹⁵ Furthermore, Gettier did not give any sequence of argument and propositions that would stand in place of the Justified True belief account, since he adjudged it to be false.

Conclusion

It is worth noting that the level of attention paid to the article of Gettier by thinkers has made it an outstanding thought overtime. Glaringly, it changed the course of the thought of time from the Justified True Belief stance, to the new world of thought and seemingly possibility within the history of philosophy. With the tools of logic and analytic philosophy of Language, he argued out that the Justified True Belief account of knowledge is not adequate in accounting for every condition essential and enough for knowledge. Apparently, the cases of Gettier have substantially shown that not all feasible “Justified True Beliefs” can be said to be knowledge. Hence, a belief, that is justified and true is never enough to be adjudged as knowledge.¹⁶ The Gettier cases have made an epistemological advancement in the real sense in that it reveals the paucity of being justified and true in making a belief count as knowledge. This is of course the reason for Philosophizing; as no theory in philosophy without some flaws. One would necessarily want to appreciate knowledge in all its conceivable illustrations and externalizations, and not only in a certain number of them.

Nevertheless, the research among others has shown that his work is more of a rare case, and hypothetical in its sense. It has furthered that Gettier did not give any sequence of argument and propositions that would stand in place of the Justified True belief account, since he adjudged it to be false. Be that as it may, even if Gettier’s examples remain constant, the work has shown and advanced for the relevance of the possession of some reasonable and indubitable epistemic virtues, (possibly lacking in the case he gave) that are pertinent to any claim, knowledge; strengthen the Justified True Belief, especially within the contexts presented by Gettier, and thus could forestall such occurrences.

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