

Are the Gettier cases successful in showing that knowledge is not justified true belief?

What is knowledge? Edmund Gettier argues that justified true belief cannot be considered knowledge. He does this by presenting two counterexamples of inferential knowledge. These cases, according to Gettier, disprove the tripartite analysis of knowledge that states, *if something is known to be true and is justified in this belief then it is knowledge*. In other words for someone to *know* something, they must be justified in the belief that the proposition is true. This then presents the question, if what we think/believe to be true is in fact false, is this knowledge? Gettier would say that both the proposed statement and the evidence which justifies it must be true for it to be knowledge.

The problem with this is that knowledge, in my opinion, is not the same as truth. I would argue that knowledge, in this case, is in itself, infallably false. The only thing that is entirely true in our world is mathematics as it is one hundred percent observational i.e. two plus two makes four, it always will, it always has (according to our current laws of physics) and there are no other possible outcomes from adding two and two together. This is undeniable truth, there for, according to Gettier, undeniable knowledge. There for mathematics is the only true knowledge, everything else is just chance and probability. For example, person A throws a pen to person B, now, there are only two possible outcomes, either person B will catch the pen or they will not. In other words the pen will end up in the hands of person B or it won't. According to the laws of physics there are no other possibilities. It is in my opinion that being able to determine the probability of a certain outcome is knowledge, whether or not that outcome is true. In other words I can know that the probability of person B catching the pen will go down if person A throws it too high or too low but by no means does this determine whether or not person B actually catches it.

In Gettier's first case he demonstrates how using understanding and probability to provide evidence in order to justify a belief does not make it knowledge, even if the outcome is true, if the basis on which you hold these beliefs is false then you do not have knowledge of it. What I am suggesting is that without *physically* experiencing the "premise" on which you base your knowledge you cannot truly *know* it. In accordance to this Gettier's case is moot because in the example he uses, the first proposition on which the second is based is not a *physical* observation therefore it cannot have been known which means the conclusion drawn from it in the second proposition isn't valid. However I do think that this case is successful in showing how knowledge is not justified

true belief. Regardless of how you view knowledge Gettier's case still stands in its own right.

In his second case Gettier approaches the subject of knowing several propositions, one of which is true and the others false. Technically, I think that the knowledge is there but that the understanding of the knowledge is missing. Does this mean that knowledge could be said to be complete and incomplete? No, according to Gettier you do not have knowledge of something in this case, I do not agree. If you know one premise to be true and the other to be false then this would be considered knowledge, you cannot *know* something unless you are able to act on it. You cannot act on incomplete knowledge.

Gettier's cases provide epistemologists with a nice and tidy easy way out of confusion. However this discounts the inappropriate infallibilistic approach to knowledge which his cases force them to use. For example if someone was looking into a field and saw what they thought was a sheep, when in fact it was a dog dressed to look like a sheep, if I then asked that person if there was a sheep in that field and they said yes, would they be lying? Now consider that there is an actual sheep concealed by a tree in that same field, does the person *know* that there is a sheep in the field or not? Epistemologists would say that just because your belief is justified by sensory evidence, if that evidence is false then it cannot be knowledge. Which suggests that in order for you to have knowledge of something, it must be true. This Gettier infallibilism can be seen across the board in epistemological writing (Synthese p217-218).

Besson discusses Gettier's cases, she says that because they are largely based on luck they are not an accurate representation. In such cases as Gettier presents there are few real life situations where one could use them because they are based on luck. Therefore preventing them to be considered knowledge. Besson seems to argue that Gettier's examples lack logical rule and are based on luck, which I would agree with. "Knowledge of the basic rules of logic is often thought to be distinctive" (C.Besson logical knowledge and Gettier cases, introduction). However, her own example of a Gettier case involving a necessary truth is even more obscure than his. I feel therefore that although Besson makes a good point about luck and logic (similar to my own view on Gettier's cases) she does not provide a suitable case to support her own deductions.

In conclusion Gettier does provide a sound argument for knowledge not being justified belief but he does not then examine what knowledge really is. Therefore with no alternative how can he deny that there is an argument against him. Knowledge, truth

and understanding come hand in hand but they are not the same thing. This is why I do not think that the Gettier cases are as relevant as epistemologists would like to believe.

E. Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge', in J. Cottingham, *Western Philosophy: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009). First published in *Analysis*, Vol.23, 1963, pp.121-23.

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