

Gettier Problems

Gettier Problems, as introduced in Edmund Gettier's 1963 paper, attempt to prove that the justified true belief (JTB) conditions for having knowledge are incomplete and can result in people being able to claim they have knowledge that they do not truly possess¹. The justified true belief conditions for knowledge can be shown in the form:

- “(a) S knows that P IFF (i.e., if and only if)
(i) P is true,
(ii) S believes that P, and
(iii) S is justified in believing that P”²

Gettier believed that the justification condition is flawed as there are many scenarios where someone may have incorrect justification and therefore whilst they may believe they have claim to knowledge, they simply do not³.

Initially, Gettier gave the example of two people, Smith and Jones, who have both applied for the same position. Smith is of the belief that Jones will get the job as he was told this by the head of the company. Smith has also counted the ten coins in Jones' pocket and has come to the conclusion that the propositions of a) John will get the job and b) the person who will get the job has ten coins in their pocket are both correct. However, the first propositional claim was incorrect as Smith gets the job. Unbeknownst to Smith, he also has ten coins in his pocket. According to JTB this means that Smith still knew proposition b) despite his justification for doing so (Jones will get the position and he has ten coins in his pocket) is now false. This therefore shows that JTB is not sufficient for knowledge as Smith's justification was incorrect⁴.

This article has a severe and dramatic impact in the epistemological community as everyone now attempted to fix the issue raised by Gettier problems as most agreed that he was correct in his belief that JTB was not sufficient. Such attempts to define knowledge includes: the 'no false lemmas' condition which is where the person can only truly know something if they did not infer the knowledge from something else, the reliabilism condition where the belief is caused by a reliable method in order to be true knowledge, and the infallibilism condition where there needs to be the impossibility of doubt. However these new conditions all have a similar issue as they are seen as too strict, especially Descartes infallibilism. It is argued that this condition means that very few pieces of knowledge exist as any amount of doubt no matter how improbable the scenario is enough to disqualify the claim as knowledge. No singular consensus has been reached so far as to the best solution to Gettier cases despite the general agreement that something must be done to correct the issues within the justified true belief conditions of knowledge.

¹ Edmund Gettier, Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?, 1963, p. 1

² IBED, p. 1

³ IBED, p. 1 - 2

⁴ IBED, p. 2

Bibliography

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