Case II:

Let us suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following proposition:

(f) Jones owns a Ford.

Smith's evidence might be that Jones has at all times in the past within Smith's memory owned a car, and always a Ford, and that Jones has just offered Smith a ride while driving a Ford. Let us imagine, now, that Smith has another friend, Brown, of whose whereabouts he is totally ignorant. Smith selects three place-names quite at random, and constructs the following three propositions:

(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.

Each of these propositions is entailed by (f). Imagine that Smith realizes the entailment of each of these propositions he has constructed by (f), and proceeds to accept (g), (h), and (i) on the basis of (f). Smith has correctly inferred (g), (h), and (i) from a proposition for which he has strong evidence. Smith is therefore completely justified in believing each of these three propositions. Smith, of course, has no idea where Brown is.

But imagine now that two further conditions hold. First, Jones does not own a Ford, but is at present driving a rented car. And secondly, by the sheerest coincidence, and entirely unknown to Smith, the place mentioned in proposition (h) happens really to be the place where Brown is. If these two conditions hold then Smith does not know 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.

These two examples show that definition (a) does not state a sufficient condition for someone's knowing a given proposition. The same cases, with appropriate changes, will suffice to show that neither definition (b) nor definition (c) do so either.

Notes

1Plato seems to be considering some such definition at Theaetetus 201, and perhaps accepting one at Meno 98.


IV.2 An Alleged Defect in Gettier Counter-Examples

RICHARD FELDMAN

Richard Feldman is professor of philosophy at the University of Rochester. He is the author of numerous articles in epistemology, including "Evidentialism"(with Earl Conee) (Philosophical Studies 48, 1985), "Fallibilism and Knowing That One Knows" (The Philosopher Review 90, 1981), and "Good Arguments" (Knowledge and the Social, edited by Fred Schmitt, Rowman and Littlefield, 1994). He also has written Reason and Argument (Prentice Hall, 1993). An essay on the generality problem by Earl Conee and Feldman appears in Reading VI.4. In this essay Feldman examines the criticism of Gettier counter-examples that alleges they fail because the justification is based on propositions that are false. Feldman claims to have provided a case in which, although the proposition in question is true, the person who believes it doesn't have knowledge.

A number of philosophers have contended that Gettier counter-examples to the justified true belief analysis of knowledge all rely on a certain false principle. For example, in their recent paper, "Knowledge Without Paradox," Roben G. Meyers and Kenneth Stern argue that "counter-examples of the Gettier sort all turn on the principle that someone can be justified in accepting a certain proposition b on evidence p even though p is false." They contend that this principle is false, and hence that the counter-examples fail. Their view is that one proposition, p, can justify another, b, only if p is true. With this in mind, they accept the justified true belief analysis. D. M. Armstrong defends a similar view in Belief, Truth and Knowledge. He writes:


This simple consideration seems to make redundant the ingenious argument of . . . Gettier’s . . . article. Gettier produces counter-examples to the thesis that justified true belief is knowledge by producing true beliefs based on justifiably believed grounds, . . . but where these grounds are in fact false. But because possession of such grounds could not constitute possession of knowledge, I should thought it obvious that they are too weak to serve as suitable grounds.

Thus he concludes that Gettier's examples are defective because they rely on the false principle that false propositions can justify one's belief in other propositions. Armstrong's view seems to be that one proposition, p, can justify another, b, only if p is known to be true (unlike Meyers and Stern who demand only that p in fact be true).
I think, though, that there are examples very much like Gettier’s that do not rely on this allegedly false principle. To see this, let us first consider one example in the form in which Meyers and Stern discuss it, and then consider a slight modification of it.

Suppose Mr. Nogot tells Smith that he owns a Ford and even shows him a certificate to that effect. Suppose, further, that up till now Nogot has always been reliable and honest in his dealings with Smith. Let us call the conjunction of all this evidence $m$. Smith is thus justified in believing that Mr. Nogot who is in his office owns a Ford ($r$) and, consequently, is justified in believing that someone in his office owns a Ford ($h$).

As it turns out, though, $m$ and $h$ are true but $r$ is false. So, the Gettier example runs, Smith has a justified true belief in $h$, but he clearly does not know $h$.

What is supposed to justify $h$ in this example is $r$. But since $r$ is false, the example runs afoul of the disputed principle. Since $r$ is false, it justified nothing. Hence, if the principle is false, the counterexample fails.

We can alter the example slightly, however, so that what justifies $h$ for Smith is true and he knows that it is. Suppose he deduces from $m$ its existential generalization:

$(n)$ There is someone in the office who tells Smith that he owns a Ford and even showed him a certificate to that effect, and who up till now has always been reliable and honest in his dealings with Smith.

$(n)$, we should note, is true and Smith knows that it is, since he has correctly deduced it from $m$, which he knows to be true. On the basis of $n$ Smith believes $h$—someone in the office owns a Ford. Just as the Nogot evidence, $m$, justified $r$—Nogot owns a Ford—in the original example, $n$ justifies $h$ in this example. Thus Smith has a justified true belief in $h$, knows his evidence to be true, but still does not know $h$.

I conclude that even if a proposition can be justified for a person only if his evidence is true, or only if he knows it to be true, there are still counter-examples to the justified true belief analysis of the Gettier sort. In the above example, Smith reasoned from the proposition $m$ which he knew to be true, to the proposition $n$, which he also knew, to the truth $h$; yet he still did not know $h$. So some examples, similar to Gettier’s, do not “turn on the principle that someone can be justified in accepting a certain proposition . . . even though (his evidence) . . . is false.”

**Notes**


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Alvin I. Goldman is professor of philosophy at the University of California. Goldman accepts Gettier’s contention that the traditional account of knowledge is deficient and seeks to repair the weakness in the traditional account of knowledge. Examining Gettier’s second example involves proposition $p$, either Jones owns a Ford or Smith believes that Jones owns a Ford. Goldman argues that $p$ fails to qualify as knowledge, not on a false proposition but because there is no causal mechanism that can account for Smith’s belief in $p$.

Goldman’s analysis represents a radical revision of epistemology, which views epistemological matters as distinct from logic or justification, for rather than focusing on the logical correctness of a person’s belief, Goldman views knowledge as primarily a causal matter.

Goldman’s views further develop in Readings IV.5 and IV.6.

Since Edmund L. Gettier reminded us recently of a certain important inadequacy of the traditional analysis of “$S$ knows that $p$” several attempts have been made to correct that analysis. In this paper I shall offer still another analysis (or a sketch of an analysis) of “$S$ knows that $p$” one which will avert Gettier’s original objection. My concern will be with knowledge of empirical propositions only, since I think that the traditional analysis is adequate for knowledge of nonempirical truths.

Consider an abbreviated version of Gettier’s second counterexample to the traditional analysis. Smith believes:

$(g)$ Jones owns a Ford

and has very strong evidence for it. Smith’s evidence might be that Jones has owned a Ford for many years and that Jones has just offered Smith a ride while driving a Ford. Smith has another friend, Brown, of whose whereabouts he is totally ignorant. Consequently, Smith does not know Jones’s address.

$(p)$ Either Jones owns a Ford or Smith believes that Jones owns a Ford.

Seeing that $(g)$ and $(p)$, Smith is justified in believing $(h)$—Smith believes that Jones owns a Ford. Since he has no adequate evidence for $(h)$, Jones does not own a Ford. Smith is misled by what he believes to be evidence that Jones owns a Ford. This is quite by coincidence.

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