



THE GETTIER PROBLEM

The Gettier Problem

- Recap - Tripartite view of knowledge
- S knows that P iff.
 - 1) S believes that P
 - 2) S is justified in believing that P
 - 3) P is true
- Conditions are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for knowledge.
- **Edmund Gettier: Is it possible that S fulfils all 3 conditions but yet does not have knowledge?**



Preliminaries

- 1) It is possible for a person to be **justified** in believing a proposition that is in fact **false**.
E.g. Flat Earth
- 2) For any proposition P, if S is justified in believing that P, and P **entails** Q (i.e. If P then Q), and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, S is justified in believing that Q.
- Example
- I am justified in believing that it is raining outside because I am seeing it from my window. From this, I deduce that the floor outside is wet even though I haven't actually seen the wet floor. I merely deduce it from seeing it rain through the window.



Gettier Case: Smith and Jones

- Smith and Jones have both applied for the same job.
- Smith has strong evidence for the following proposition A: “Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has 10 coins in his pocket”.
- Proposition A entails proposition B: “The man who will get the job has 10 coins in his pocket.”
- Smith sees this entailment and accepts B because of his justification in believing A
 - Recall Prelim. Pt. 2



Plot Twist...

- However, unbeknownst to Smith, he himself will get the job.
- And unbeknownst to him, he also has 10 coins in his pocket.
- Prop. B (the man who will get the job has 10 coins in his pocket) - true
- *Even though* prop. A (Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has 10 coins in his pocket; from which Smith deduced B) - false
 - Recall Prelim. Pt. 1
- Furthermore, Smith believes that B *and* is justified in believing that B
- So Smith has JTB of prop. B!
- **But** he doesn't seem to have knowledge of B. Why?
 - B is true only because of the number of coins in Smith's pocket **but Smith doesn't know how many coins there is in his pocket.**
 - Rather, he believes B only on the basis of knowing the number of coins in Jones' pocket.

More Gettier Cases



- Gettier provides one more example in his reading (slightly harder to understand)
- Key: “either...or” statements are justified so long as **one** of the conditions are true
- E.g. Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Boston – justified so long as Jones owns a Ford (regardless of the location of Brown)
- E.g. Either I am beautiful or RI is in Bishan.

Simpler Gettier Case

- I look at the clock and say that I know that the time now is 12pm
- Unbeknownst to me, the clock has stopped working with its hands showing exactly 12 o'clock
- *But* I just so happen to glance at the clock at indeed 12pm
- Do I have knowledge? According to the tripartite view:
- J – clock is sufficient justification for time-telling
- T – it is indeed 12pm
- B – I believe that it is
- And yet, I can't be said to know that it is 12pm since the clock has stopped working



Consequence

- Tripartite view of knowledge appears insufficient to give us knowledge.
- Some have suggested that we need a **4th** condition
- Two possible responses (more on this in tutorial):
 - 1) Infallibilism
 - 2) Virtue Epistemology

Infallibilism

- Gettier-style counterexamples work because the believer only has **reasonable** justification
- But reasonable justification can still result in beliefs that are **true only by luck** (cf. the clock e.g.)
- Solution? Have **more robust justification** to guarantee truth
- Infallibilism: count as knowledge only those things which we cannot rationally doubt
- Group 1: “ $2+2=4$,” “I am feeling pain right now,” “I am having an online lecture-like sensation”
- Group 2: “There are things like flowers in the world,” “Things fall when let go from a height,” “Clocks are reliable ways of telling the time”
- Which group of propositions is not open to doubt?

Gettier Resolved?

- No longer susceptible to the Gettier Problem
- Absolute justification guarantees truth and removes that element of luck
- Example: spoiled *analog* clock showing exactly the '*right*' time, weird use of logic rules (inferring from the false belief to a true disjunctive proposition)



Objections

- A lot of our knowledge relies on **fallible** justification
- For example, our senses!
- We could always be dreaming
- Upshot: we know **very little**, such as definitional truths and mathematics
- Problem: unintuitive! We know lots of stuff! Too restrictive
- Not how we normally define “knowledge”

Virtue Epistemology

- Takes cue from Virtue Ethics (is this a good act? -> is this a good *person*?)
- V. Epist: justify knowledge in terms of intellectual **virtues** and **vices** of the knower
- Two broad camps: virtue reliabilists and virtue epistemologists
- Virtue **reliabilists**: intellectual virtue as roughly any stable and reliable or truth-conducive property of a person, i.e. **cognitive faculties or abilities**
 - Paradigm virtues: vision, memory, and introspection
- Virtue epistemologists: intellectual virtue as good **intellectual character traits**
 - Paradigm virtues: Inquisitiveness, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, thoroughness, tenacity, etc

Gettier Resolved?

- V. Reliabilists: Gettier-style cases are beliefs that are not gained via the exercise of an intellectual virtue such as vision
 - E.g. To see that the clock is showing 12 o'clock right at this instance is not a case of intellectual virtue because **sight alone cannot tell us that it is indeed 12** (as the clock has stopped working); it is rather luck that has allowed me to get to the truth
- V. Epistemologist: Gettier-Style cases are beliefs that are not gained via the exercise of an intellectual virtue such as inquisitiveness
 - Eg. Similarly, my looking at the clock to say that it is 12 o'clock is a true belief by luck, and **not due to my inquisitiveness of the time**; that alone would not have gotten me the true belief (unless I went to check if the clock is working etc)



Objection – V.Relialibilists

- V. Relialibilists: they are externalists, i.e. they deny that the factors grounding one's justification must be cognitively accessible from one's first-person or internal perspective.
- So if one is an internalist about justification, then v. reliabilism would not be accepted.
- E.g.: recall "Twin Me" thought experiment by Keith DeRose
- Internally identical all the way through
- But Twin Me no longer has a body and any experiences he has does not correspond to anything in the real world
- Purely 'fabricated stimuli' by the aliens who kidnapped and 'debrained' him
- Hence, no difference in our internal lives, i.e. mental states, experiences etc.

“There is a cup of coffee in front of me”



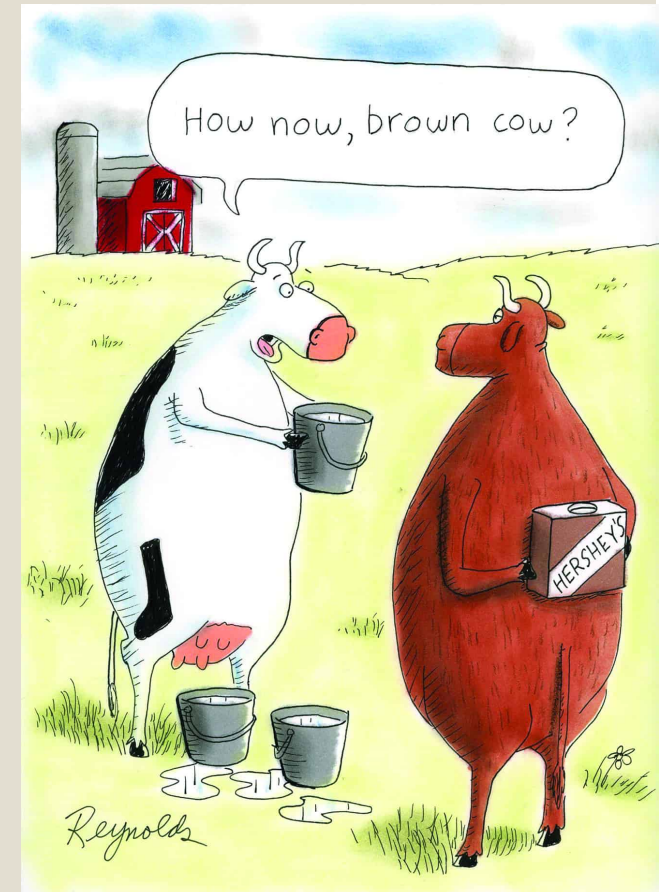
- Both of us hold the belief above
- There is indeed a cup of coffee in front of me which I just drank from and placed on the table
- Twin Me, while not actually doing so, has had the exact same experience
- But – Gettier-style – the aliens have placed a cup of coffee in front of his brain
- Internalists: both Twin Me and I are equally justified since we have the exact same mental states AND because there is a cup of coffee in front both of us, we both have knowledge
- Externalists/ V.Relialibilists: only I have knowledge, not Twin Me, as only I have the relevant intellectual virtue of a functioning cognitive faculty that can reliably tell me what is in the external world
- Hence, V.Relialibilism is not accepted by all.

Objection – V.Epistemologists

- V. Epistemologists: knowledge is often acquired in a passive way **without the necessary exercise of an intellectual virtue.**
- Instead, it is through a more or less automatic operation of my cognitive faculties like vision.
- E.g. Suppose, for example, that I am working in my study late at night and the electricity suddenly shuts off, causing all the lights in the room to go out. I will immediately know that the lighting in the room has changed.
- **Extremely unlikely that I exercise any virtuous intellectual character traits**
- Rather, my belief is likely to be produced primarily, if not entirely, by the routine operation of my faculty of vision.

A Preliminary Conclusion

- Gettier Problem remains unsolved as possible solution candidates face issues
- What then?
- Give up ever defining knowledge?
- Accept some level of uncertainty?
- Hold on to JTB?
- Qn: does JTB function most of the time as a theory/definition of knowledge?



Homework

- Gettier reading
- Discussion questions

