

Gettier's argument that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge

One account of the nature of knowledge:

Sally knows that rockhoppers are the most widespread of the crested penguins if and only if:

- 1) rockhoppers are the most widespread of the crested penguins (the truth condition)
- 2) Sally believes that rockhoppers are the most widespread of the crested penguins (the belief condition)
- 3) Sally is well justified epistemically in believing that rockhoppers are the most widespread of the crested penguins (the justification condition)

On this account of knowledge, justified true belief is both a) necessary and b) sufficient for knowledge.

a) Justified true belief is a necessary condition for knowledge:

If Sally knows that p, then "p" is true, Sally believes that p, and Sally is well justified in believing that p

b) Justified true belief is a sufficient condition for knowledge:

If "p" is true, Sally believes that p, and Sally is well justified in believing that p, then Sally knows that p.

If, though, justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge, then it is possible that "p" is true, Sally believes that p, Sally is well justified in believing that p, and yet Sally does not know that p.

Edmund Gettier's argument that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge:

Suppose that Sally has been carefully led to believe that Roger is taking piano lessons. Roger has told Sally that he is, Sally has heard Roger practicing the piano, Roger has introduced Sally to a piano teacher who spoke as if Roger is her pupil (the piano teacher is in on the deception), and so on.

Sally does not know that Roger is taking piano lessons, for he isn't, and one cannot know something that is false.

Nonetheless, Sally is well justified in believing that Roger is taking piano lessons, for she has plenty of evidence that he is.

Sally is with Roger and a dozen other parents watching their children rehearse a class play. The teacher says "I wonder whether any of the adults here are taking piano lessons." Sally deduces from her belief that Roger is taking piano lessons that at least one of the adults here is taking piano lessons. Unbeknownst to Sally, Regina, one of the adults present, is in fact taking piano lessons.

Sally believes that one of the adults present is taking piano lessons, and she is right, for Regina is taking piano lessons. Sally is well justified in believing that one of the adults present is taking piano lessons, for she acquired her belief that at least one adult present is taking piano lessons by validly inferring it from her well justified belief that Roger is taking piano lessons. (Since she is well justified in believing that Roger is taking piano lessons, she is well justified in believing any logical consequence of that belief, so long as she believes it to be a logical consequence of it.)

Thus, Sally has a justified true belief that at least one adult present is taking piano lessons.

But Sally does not know that at least one adult present is taking piano lessons.

Therefore: To have a justified true belief that *p* is not sufficient for knowing that *p*.

Therefore: Knowledge is not identical to justified true belief.

More explicitly:

1. One can be justified in believing a proposition true though that proposition is false.
2. One is justified in believing any proposition that is validly implied by a proposition one justifiedly believes (so long as one believes it because it is validly implied by one's belief).
3. A false proposition can validly imply a true proposition.

Therefore: 4. One can be justified in believing a true proposition simply one validly infers it from a false proposition one justifiably believes. (From 1, 2, and 3.)

5. One does not *know* of a true proposition that it is true if one believes it only because one inferred it from a false proposition one believes.

Therefore: 6. One can have a justified true belief without that belief standing as a piece of knowledge. (From 4 and 5.)

Therefore: 7. One can have a justified true belief that *p* without knowing that *p*. (From 6.)

8. If to have a justified true belief that *p* is to know that *p*, then one cannot have a justified true belief that *p* without knowing that *p*. (The thesis that justified true belief is sufficient for knowledge.)

Therefore: 9. To have a justified true belief that p is not itself to know that p. (From 7 and 8.)

If 9 is true, then knowledge is not identical to justified true belief, for 9 says that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge.

While the truth, belief, and justification conditions are necessary for knowledge (let's suppose), they are not enough.

There is at least one further condition that must be met before a justified true belief counts as knowledge.

Objections:

1) The argument falsely supposes that a person can be well justified in believing something false. But one cannot be well justified in believing something unless one's justification ensures the truth of one's belief.

2) The argument falsely supposes that one's justification for believing the true proposition is that it follows validly from the false proposition one believes. What in fact would justify one's belief in the true proposition, though, is the evidence that justifies one's belief in the false proposition. Since that evidence does not justify one's belief in the true proposition, one is not well justified in believing the true proposition.

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