## Justified True Belief is Knowledge
By Jeff Morris

BEFORE the 'Gettier case', knowledge had been thought to be accounted for by a tripartite method. This means there were three parts to knowledge: a belief, which is true, and justified. Although the tripartite account stood the test for years, Edmund Gettier cast a doubt on this criterion by trying to demonstrate the fallibility of the tripartite account by what have become known as 'Gettier cases'.

In this paper I will argue that 'Gettier cases' do not undermine the standard tripartite definition of knowledge. This is because how Gettier wants us to understand justification is incomplete, and therefore, incorrect. The 'Gettier cases', though not able to undermine tripartite, do give us a better definition of justification.

The standard tripartite criterion of knowledge is as follows: (Edmund Gettier 1963)

(a) S knows that P if:

1) P is true
2) S believes that P is true, and
3) S is justified in believing that P

Gettier uses two cases in order to try and show that (a) does not stand up. Before presenting his cases, he asks the reader to grant him two liberties. The two liberties separated do not seem controversial, but when the two requests are combined they reveal a view of justification which fails. To understand the problem, we need to understand the two items that Gettier wants us to grant.

The first item is that it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a false proposition. (Edmund Gettier 1963) Of course, this is a fair request. I may have justification for believing that my friend owns a lizard, but if the lizard died recently and I was never told, the justified belief is false.

The second item that Gettier asks us to grant also looks harmless: 'For any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, then S is justified in believing Q.' (Edmund Gettier 1963)

To be sure, Gettier's logic looks sound, but these two requests combined show that the second request is fallacious. Gettier used two cases, which grant both a justified false belief, and a belief which is deduced from a justified false belief to try and show that (a) fails. I have included the first case in its entirety:

> Case I:
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> Suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. And suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following conjunctive proposition: (d) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Smith's evidence for (d) might be that the president of the company assured him that Jones would in the end be selected, and that he, Smith, had counted the coins in Jones's pocket ten minutes ago. Proposition (d) entails: (e) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. Let us suppose that Smith sees the entailment from (d) to (e), and accepts (e) on the grounds of (d), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (e) is true. But imagine,

further, that unknown to Smith, he himself, not Jones, will get the job. And, also, unknown to Smith, he himself has ten coins in his pocket. Proposition (e) is then true, though proposition (d), from which Smith inferred (e), is false. In our example, then, all of the following are true: (i) (e) is true, (ii) Smith believes that (e) is true, and (iii) Smith is justified in believing that (e) is true. But it is equally clear that Smith does not know that (e) is true; for (e) is true in virtue of the number of coins in Smith's pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in Smith's pocket, and bases his belief in (e) on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job. (Edmund Gettier 1963)

At first blush, it looks as though Gettier has succeeded at something. He has shown that someone can be justified in having a false belief, and that this justified false belief could lead to true beliefs that are not considered knowledge. This covers at least two of the three criteria for (a), Smith has a true (1) belief (2), but can we really say that Smith is justified (3)?

The problem in the way that Gettier forms his case is how he interrelates primary and secondary propositions. As we already saw, the first criterion of (a) is that S knows P, if P is true. Clearly the proposition: 'Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket', is not true, because Smith is the one who got the job.

Since it is difficult to see the mistake Gettier makes by introducing primary and secondary propositions, we will run through his case and number the propositions in order to make them clear. Let's say that (P1) is the primary proposition, and (P1a) is the secondary proposition based on the false justified belief.

(P1) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket (false)

Based on (P1) you get (P1a)

(P1a) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket (True)

According to the standard definition of (a) we would say that S knows P1 if P1 is true, but P1 is false, and therefore Smith does not have knowledge in this case.

Let's see what would happen if we take (P1a) and make it the primary proposition.

(P1) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket

In this case (P1) is true, and Smith believes (P1), and he justified (P1) by thinking that Jones was going to get the job. This is clearly not a very good source of justification, because Jones did not get the job, so how we can rightly say that Smith is justified in believing (P1).

The fact that propositions entailed by justified false beliefs do not lead to other propositions which are considered justified is hardly controversial. Since knowledge doesn't care about secondary propositions based on justified false beliefs, (P1a) is either irrelevant or should be analyzed on its own. We can use my friend with the lizard to further demonstrate this.

(P1) My friend has a lizard, and his lizard is green.

If P1 is true, this leads me to be justified in believing a secondary proposition.

(P1a) My friend has a green reptile.

Unbeknownst to me, my friends lizard died and he went out and bought himself a green snake. According to Gettier I satisfy all of the requirements of (a) but still do not *know* anything about the green snake. Clearly (a) should not be based on the truth of (P1a), but (P1), and in this example, as well as Gettier's own cases, (P1) is not true, and therefore, the requirements of (a) have not been satisfied.

Let's see what happens in the reptile example if we move (P1a) from a secondary proposition to a primary one (P1).

(P1) My friend has a green reptile.

The first question someone might ask is how I justified myself in believing this, and if I respond that it's because my friend has a pet lizard, and you show me that he does not because the lizard is dead, and that in fact, what I thought was a lizard is actually a snake, than it seems clear that I am not justified for believing (P1), because I justified the belief on something false.

Although Gettier has not succeeded in undermining the tripartite criteria for knowledge, what he has shown is that 'For any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, then S is justified in believing Q' is not complete and should add a final line which states, 'if and only if P is true, otherwise further justification, beyond P entails Q, is required for S to be justified in believing Q.'

In other words, S is not justified in believing P if the only way S knows P, is by deducing P from Q, and Q is false.


**Bibliography**

Edmund Gettier 1963, Is justified true belief knowledge? Analysis Vol. 23, No. 6 (June 1963)