

## Gettier

In Edmund Gettier's essay, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge," Gettier argues that JTB (Plato's theory of Justified True Belief) does not necessarily guarantee knowledge. This means that the necessary but not the sufficient conditions for "**S knows P**" to be true have been met. What follows is a discussion of necessary and sufficient conditions, the conditions that satisfy JTB, and Gettier's reasoning of why JTB does not necessarily guarantee knowledge.

A necessary condition for some state of affairs P is a condition that must be satisfied in order for P to obtain. For example, what are the necessary conditions (P) that must be satisfied in order for some student (S) to pass a course at some college or university? Let's say that those necessary conditions for S to pass are:

- (1) S must submit all of their assignments, and
- (2) take all of the exams and quizzes.

However, submitting all of the assignments and taking all of the exams and quizzes will not guarantee that S will obtain P (pass the course). So how can S guarantee that they will pass the course? The conditions that will guarantee that S will pass the course are referred to as sufficient conditions. A sufficient condition for some state of affairs P is a condition that, if satisfied guarantees that P obtains. For example, the sufficient conditions for P are:

- (1) S must get a passing grade on all assignments, and
- (2) pass all of exams and quizzes.

If these conditions are satisfied, this guarantees that S will pass the course.

Gettier claims that "JTB" does not necessarily guarantee knowledge even if the following conditions are satisfied. What are these conditions? One is said to have Justified True Belief (**knowledge**) if the following conditions are satisfied:

- (a) the proposition must be true (for example, the proposition, "If a student obtains a passing grade on all assignments and passes all exams and quizzes, then that student will pass the course)
- (b) one must believe that the proposition is true, and
- (c) one must be justified in believing that the proposition is true.

Similarly, **S knows P if and only if:**

- (a) P is true
- (b) S believes that P is true, and
- (c) S is justified in believing that P is true.

It is important to note that justification does not entail luck or coincidence. One must be justified **rightly**. This means that coincidence and luck are not considered as justificatory evidence in the establishment of what we consider as knowledge.

Gettier provides two counterexamples that supports his claim that JTB does not necessarily result in knowledge. In the first counterexample, two men, Jones and Smith, have applied for a certain job. Let's suppose that Smith is 'justified' in believing that the following proposition is true: Jones will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. We don't know why Smith is so confident that Jones will get the job. Perhaps, someone in human resources or Jones, himself, has advised Smith of these state of affairs. Secondly, Smith knows that Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Therefore, Smith is justified in deducing the following proposition: Whoever gets the job has ten coins in his pocket.

But Jones does not get the job. Smith gets the job. But amazingly, Smith, unknown to him, has ten coins in his pocket. Therefore, the proposition, 'Whoever gets the job has ten coins in his pocket' is true. Let's look at Gettier's reasons for asserting that in an instance where JTB does not guarantee knowledge.

Gettier claims that a person can believe in a proposition that is indeed false. The conjunctive proposition, 'Jones will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket' is false because Jones did not get the job. We know that a conjunction is false if even one of its constituent sentences is false. Smith knew that Jones has ten coins in his pocket. He is also justified in believing that Jones was going to get the job. But, Jones did not get the job. Therefore, Smith is justified in believing in a proposition that is false.

This is important because critical to the truth of proposition **S knows P** is the truth of proposition **S is justified in believing that P**. Therefore, '**S is justified in believing that P**' is a necessary condition of **S knows P**. Reiterating, the proposition 'Jones will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket' is false even though S (Smith) is justified in believing that this proposition is true.

Gettier's second claim is that if one deduces proposition **B** (that is true) from proposition **A** (that is false), one is still justified in believing that **B** is true. Smith deduced that 'Whoever gets the job has ten coins in his pocket' from the conjunctive proposition, 'Jones will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket'. We know that this proposition is false. Therefore, one can see that this deduction was made from a proposition that is false.

All of the conditions for JTB were satisfied: (1) the proposition 'Whoever gets the job has ten coins in his pocket' is true; (2) Smith believed that 'Whoever gets the job has ten coins in his pocket'; and (3) Smith was justified in believing that 'Whoever gets the job has ten coins in his pocket'. However, one cannot claim that **S knows P** because Jones did not get the job; Smith got the job; and Smith did not know he had ten coins in his pocket. He was only right via luck or coincidence.

Similarly, in the second counterexample, Gettier provides the following scenario. Smith knows that Jones owns a Ford. The justification for this belief is that Jones has owned a Ford for as long as Smith has known him. From this proposition, Smith constructs the following disjunctive propositions that speculate on the whereabouts of a friend Brown even though he has no idea where Brown is:

- (a) Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Boston;
- (b) Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona;
- (c) Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Brest-Litosvk.

But let's suppose that Jones does not own a Ford and is driving a rental. Additionally, Brown, unbeknownst to Smith, is in Barcelona. This means that disjunctive proposition (b) is true. It is not true based the proposition that "Jones owns a Ford". We know that a disjunction is true if just one of its constituent sentences is true. It is true because of the proposition 'Brown is in Barcelona'. This means that all of the conditions for JTB are satisfied: (1) the proposition, 'Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona' is true; (2) Smith believed that the proposition 'Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona' is true; and (3) Smith is justified in believing that 'Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona' is true. But it does not result in knowledge because it is not true that **S knows P**. Smith did not know of Brown's whereabouts and, apparently, he did not know that Jones no longer owned a Ford. He does not know **P**. He is right only via luck or coincidence.

In conclusion, Gettier claims that JTB does not necessarily guarantee knowledge because (1) one can be justified in believing in a proposition that is false. This is problematic for JTB because **S believing that P** is a necessary and sufficient condition for **S knows P**. And, (2) one can be justified in deducing true conclusion from a false proposition.