Gettier Cases and Some Responses

1. **Review** knowledge and the three conditions

2. **Is knowledge justified true belief?**

3. **Gettier examples: aren’t they a bit weird?**

4. **Gettier examples: what’s going on?**

Gettier’s own examples have the following structure.

1. A person acts in an epistemically responsible manner and forms a belief that \( p \). Let’s call this the “original” belief or, we might call it a *basic*.

2. From the belief that \( p \) the person validly infers something else: that \( q \). Let’s call this the *derived* belief or a *nonbasic* belief.

   (i) Although the person has acted as they ought, the original belief that \( p \) is in fact *false*.

   (ii) The derived belief that \( q \) happens to be true.

   (iii) The believer has no other reason to believe that \( q \) other than \( p \)

5. **The gap between justification and truth**

The underlying general problem is that being justified doesn’t entail *truth*.

6. **Responses to Gettier 1: focus on the original belief and add a “fourth condition”**

6.1 **“No false premises”**

Gettier cases can arise for perceptual beliefs that aren’t based upon a false belief.

A second problem with the “no false premises” response is that many of our beliefs may involve *some* false premises as part of the reasoning that supports them, but this does not stop them being justified, or cases of knowledge.

The “no false premises” response seems to rule out cases of knowledge, and thus seems to be too strong a condition for knowledge.

6.2 **Defeasibility**

in order to *know* something, there must be *no further true proposition* which, had the subject come to believe it, she would have *not* formed the original or derived beliefs.

The underlying idea here is that Gettier cases aren’t *knowledge* because although the belief is justified, there are *further* things that the responsible believer *could* come to believe which would “defeat” her justification.

example. Suppose you **look at your watch** to check the time.
Knowledge would seem to be something that would flip in and out of existence depending upon what other things one would come to believe.

One response we might make at this point is that a justified true belief is only if, when we consider all the truths that one could come to know.

Defeasibility approaches very quickly seem to leave us with a very limited range of knowledge

7. Responses to Gettier 2: reliabilism and the causal theory of knowing

So why not add a fourth condition that knowledge is non-accidental justified true belief.

7.1 Reliabilism

One proposal that has been made is knowledge is justified true belief that is arrived at via a reliable method. A reliable process can give rise to false beliefs.

There will be cases where it is only by accident that the reliable process gives rise to true ones.

7.2 The causal theory

Someone knows that p if and only if they have a justified true belief that p that is caused by the fact that p

Example, historical events. How do we all know these?

But this view, that means the causal view, as a general theory of knowledge seems to be problematic.

How do I know things about the future or about mathematics or that bachelors are unmarried?

Truths about the future, logical truths and abstract truths – what exactly cause me to believe any of those?

More generally, we might worry about whether facts are the kinds of things that can cause things.

8. Summing up: is Gettier inevitable?