Describe and explain why Gettier-style cases demonstrate that the tripartite account of knowledge is unsustainable. How should one go about offering a theory of knowledge that is immune to Gettier-style cases, do you think? Can one offer a theory of knowledge that is immune to Gettier-style cases?

Gettier's famous and admirably concise paper (1963) presented a problem which still admits of no clear solution. This essay will summarise Gettier's argument, explain why it is terminal for the classical tripartite account of knowledge, and consider some of the responses offered. That they all appear to fail points the way to different approach: Williamson's claim that knowing is "*merely* a state of mind." (p.213)

According to the tripartite account, the conditions individually necessary and jointly sufficient for propositional knowledge of the sort '*S* knows that *p*', commonly referred to as 'JTB,' are:

  (i)   that *p* is true,
  (ii)   that *S* believes that *p*, and
  (iii)   that *S* is justified in believing that *p*

This was widely accepted before Gettier showed it is insufficient for knowledge. An updated version of the stopped-clock example: I wake up and, as every morning, look at my iPhone to check the time. It displays 09:14 and I form a belief that this is the time. My belief is justified and true, so surely I know the time? Not in this case, as there is a software error and the screen has frozen with a random time displayed. It was a coincidence that I checked the phone at 09:14 thereby forming a true belief. Had I looked a minute earlier my belief would have been false – its truth is down to luck. Intuitively, knowledge is incompatible with luck as knowledge involves a cognitive success by the agent, and there is "near universal agreement amongst epistemologists" (Engel, section:1-e-i) on this incompatibility.

Gettier cases are terminal for the tripartite account, but how to provide a successful account? Initially it was thought all that was necessary was to tinker with JTB. One of the early responses sought to address the fact that the above example contains a false presupposition, as did Gettier's examples. The 'No False Lemmas' approach (Ichikawa, section:4; Pritchard 2014, pp.26-7; Clark, p.47-8) added a further condition:

  (iv)   that "*S*'s belief that *p* is not inferred from any falsehood" (Ichikawa, section:4)

Unfortunately, this also fails. Firstly, it is not clear how to define 'presupposition' – defined broadly, it rules out normal attributions of knowledge; defined narrowly it is not clear how it applies in cases such as the iPhone. Moreover, it is not necessary that a JTB be based on any presupposition as the sheep-in-a-field Gettier-style case shows (Pritchard 2014, p.27; Lycan, section:III). Here, the relevant belief is formed directly by perception, and trying to argue perception constitutes a presupposition falls pretty to the first objection above. Other attempted responses along these lines, such as no-false-grounds and defeasibility, also fail (see Hetherington, sections:9-11; Shope, pp.8-19 for further discussion).

So how might one construct a successful response to what has come to be known as The Gettier Problem? Although Gettier didn't specify any rules for generating counter-examples, the common elements of Gettier-style cases are instructive. Start with a justified belief that, due to bad luck, is formed in such a way that it would normally be false, e.g. looking at a frozen iPhone screen, and then subject it to good epistemic luck so that it is true. (Zagzebski, p.209) This shows a successful analysis of knowledge must exclude this kind of luck. That luck is a problem for fallibilist accounts of knowledge is not a new insight – it was discussed by Plato (201-6) and was the motivation for the addition of the justification condition in the tripartite account. Note that while infallibilism, in which *S*'s justification 'that-*p*' entails 'that-*p*', might seem tempting, it is not the solution as it rules out the majority of what we would normally consider knowledge and leads to wholesale scepticism.

However, not all epistemic luck is incompatible with knowledge: that I woke up at 09:14 was by chance as I could have woken up at 09:15, but this luck has no effect on whether my belief that it is 09:14 constitutes knowledge or not; per Wittgenstein, "It is always by favour of Nature that one knows something." (Pritchard 2004, p.194) To exclude the right kind of luck we need to differentiate between types of luck which are

incompatible with knowledge, and those which are not. It is generally accepted that it is 'veritic' luck which is incompatible – luck that results in a belief being true by chance, as opposed to the kind of luck that results in me forming any belief at all (Engel, section:2-f; Pritchard 2005, p.462; 2004, p.12). This allows us to identify the kind of condition need:

(v)   S's belief that *p* is not true by (veritic) luck

Clearly this condition itself – essentially a statement of not being Gettiered - will not suffice as one needs to specify *how*, if at all, veritic luck might be excluded. However, if such a condition can be specified, then the Gettier Problem might be solved.

Agent-reliabilism, an early virtue epistemology, sought to evade luck by replacing justification with a different condition:

(vi)   "*S*'s belief that *p* was produced by a reliable cognitive process" (Ichikawa, section:6.1)

The reliabilist insight is that prior responses to Gettier allow luck to intervene given the fallible relationship between truth and justification. The belief 'that *p*' is justified with respect to the agent - an internalist account - rather than that belief demanding something of the external world for its justification. Given this does not *entail* truth, and hence allows the possibility of JFBs, veritic luck can always intervene. Reliabilism sought to address this by appeal to an externalist condition to strengthen the relationship between the reason for *S* believing 'that *p*' and *p's* being true.

Once again, this approach succumbs to Gettier-style counter-examples as the Mary's-husband case shows. (Pritchard 2005, p.469) In summary, Mary forms a TB by a reliable cognitive process, but its truth is down to luck. Zagzebski concludes that "Gettier problems are inescapable for virtually every analysis of knowledge which at least maintains that knowledge is true belief plus something else" (1994, p.207) and this is true of both internalist and externalist accounts as we have seen.

However, before we can conclude that the problem is insoluble, it is worth considering other views; in this case, that of Pritchard. For reasons of concision this essay can't examine Neo-Aristotelian virtue epistemology other than to point out it requires a sensitivity-type modal condition to exclude veritic luck as it can be Gettiered, for example by the well-known fake-barn case (Pritchard 2005, pp.470-2), and if a modal condition is to succeed, a safety-type condition is more likely to achieve this (Pritchard 2005, pp.462-7; Ichikawa, section:5). Hence, if Pritchard's modal argument fails, this will be terminal for both.

Pritchard presents two essential components to supplement TB for a Gettier-proof analysis of knowledge: (1) a modal safety-based condition to exclude veritic luck, and (2) an internalist justification element (Pritchard 2005, pp.462-73). (2) might not be *necessary* for a response to the Gettier Problem, but Pritchard is right to assert that the reliabilist response, in identifying the need for an externalist condition to exclude veritic luck, introduced a new problem by excluding internalist justification – he labels this 'reflective' epistemic luck, a type of luck not present in Gettier-style cases (2005, pp.462-3). To see the point, consider the case of the naïve-chicken-sexer (pp.463-7) who can tell the sex of chicks reliably without knowing how. Pure externalists would hold that she has knowledge, but intuitively this seems wrong as she is unable to take cognitive responsibility for her beliefs, and such responsibility appears integral to knowledge (pp.462-3; also 2003 & 2004).

The success of Pritchard's response to the Gettier Problem, however, turns on his use of a modal safety-based condition. For example:

(vii)   "In all nearby worlds where *S* believes that *p*, *p* is not false" (Ichikawa, section:5.2)

It is beyond the scope of this essay to consider modal conditions in detail, but there are many epistemologists who think this approach fails (Engel, section:2-g; Ichikawa, section:5.2). Among the problems facing a modal safety-based account is the vagueness of 'nearby' in the stated condition – if not near enough, Gettier-style

counter-examples threaten. Further, specifying how nearby worlds are similar is problematic as this presupposes a definition of knowledge (Ichikawa, section:5.2) which results a circularity that seems to rule out this approach.

That analytic attempts to provide a Gettier-proof theory of knowledge fail has broader implications, although it should not be a surprise given "no effort of analytic philosophy to provide strictly necessary and sufficient conditions for a philosophically interesting concept has ever succeeded." (Lycan, section:I) If, as this might suggest, knowledge is unanalysable - cannot be explicated by more fundamental terms - we need to look elsewhere for a successful account of knowledge. One possibility is Williamson's argument that knowledge is a state of mind: "for some mental state S, being in S is necessary and sufficient for knowing *p*." (p.213) This approach certainly is not without problems, but the Gettier-induced dead-end suggests it warrants serious consideration.

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