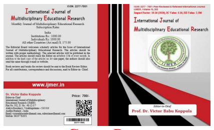
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AGAINST CHISHOLM'S DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE

Surajit Barua
S.A. Jaipuria College, Kolkata

ABSTRACT: In order to solve the Gettier problem, Chisholm proposed a definition of knowledge that included a fourth condition. While the definition successfully blocks Gettier cases, it also excludes certain types of cases which are instances of knowledge. Thus, Linda Zagzebsky's view on the inescapability of Gettier problems is vindicated.

KEYWORDS: Gettier problem; Chisholm; definition of knowledge; defectively evident

Introduction: Ever since Gettier (1969) showed that the traditional conditions of knowledge are not sufficient, a flurry of attempts have been made to deal with the problem. While some philosophers have proposed a fourth condition which must be added to the traditional ones to make them necessary and sufficient, others have attempted to modify the justification condition and some have even suggested that knowledge is unanalyzable into other epistemic concepts.

Roderick Chisholm has also proposed a modified definition of knowledge by adding a fourth condition to the traditional model and this definition has not been specifically refuted by philosophers till now. In this article, I show that his modified version fails to classify a type of instances as cases of genuine knowledge when, in fact, it is. So, the modified definition of knowledge formulated by Chisholm cannot be accepted. This is consistent with Linda Zagzebsky's analysis that there are structural issues with the problem which makes it impossible to have a solution by just adding a fourth condition.

Area of Research: Unlike some other well-known proposed solutions to the Gettier problem, Chisholm's solution has not been extensively discussed/criticized in mainstream journals. Given that the problem of the Theatetus has still not been conclusively resolved, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the solution. While analyzing the problem, Chisholm observes that the various Gettier cases have the following feature in common: 'the proposition involved is made evident by a proposition that makes some false proposition evident'. He labels propositions having this feature as "defectively evident" and defines them thus (Chisholm 1994, P-98):

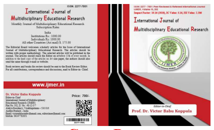
h is defectively evident for S = Df (1) There is an *e* such that *e* makes h evident for S; and (2) everything that makes *h* evident for S makes something that is false evident for S ………………(a1)

where *e* makes *h* evident for S = Df (1) *e* is evident for S; (2) *e* tends to make whatever *h* entails evident; and (3) nothing that is evident for S defeats *e*'s tendency to make *h* evident (ibid.,p-53).

However, Chisholm does not hastily go on to add "*h* is not defectively evident" as the fourth condition of the definition of knowledge in order to eliminate Gettier cases from being labelled as knowledge. For, he notes that this feature is also present in some cases which represent genuine knowledge. For example, the proposition *e* which makes h evident for S is defectively evident and yet is known genuinely to S.

Thus, to include such cases and also to block Gettier counter-examples in the definition of knowledge, Chisholm proposes the following definition:

h is known by S = Df (1) *h* is true; (2) S accepts *h*; (3) *h* is evident for S; and (4) if *h* is defectively evident for S, then *h* is implied by a conjunction of propositions each of which is evident for S but not defectively evident for S ---(a2)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According to him, the sophisticated fourth condition is satisfied by genuinely known propositions like *e* because "the conjuncts of *e*, unlike *e* itself, are not defectively evident. Although in conjunction they make a false proposition evident, none of them by itself makes a false proposition evident. (ibid., p-98)"

Objective: Chisholm did not explain how the new definition prevents Gettier counter-examples from qualifying as instances of knowledge. That was done by Bhattacharya (2004). He shows how such cases satisfy the antecedent but fail to satisfy the consequent of the conditional in Chisholm's fourth condition. [The basic idea is that if a 'purely defectively evident' proposition is implied by a conjunction of propositions, then at least one of these is true: (1) one of the conjuncts is the defectively evident proposition itself or (2) there is a pair of conjuncts which are contradictory (since contradiction implies any proposition). In either case, the consequent of the conditional becomes false.]

But successfully blocking Gettier counter-examples is not the only requirement of a good definition of knowledge. An equally important feature of such a definition is that it should not block claims which, we intuitively know, are cases of genuine knowledge. In the subsequent passages, our objective is to test Chisholm’s definition of knowledge for its scope: Does it correctly identify only and only genuine instances of knowledge while blocking Gettier cases?

Methodology: These two requirements- that of blocking Gettier counter examples and of having the correct scope- are not complimentary, rather they are contradictory. Zagzebsky(1994) argues that it is not possible to avoid Gettier counter-examples as the relation between justification (or warrant) and truth is close but not inviolable (i.e. justification does not entail truth). She suggests the following general procedure to generate Gettier cases in such cases: start with a case of justified (or warranted) false belief. Make the element of justification (warrant) strong enough for knowledge. Then, one can claim that the falsity of the belief is due to some element of luck. Now, emend the case by adding another element of luck which makes the belief true finally. So, we now have a case of a belief which is justified and true but it is not an instance of knowledge. Thus, no account of knowledge as true belief plus something else can withstand Gettier objections as long as there is a small degree of independence between truth and the other conditions of knowledge. If there is such a gap, then it is possible to exploit it to generate counter-examples to that theory. In other words, according to Zagzebsky's analysis, the following statement is true:

If there is any degree of independence between truth and warrant in a traditional-style definition of knowledge, then Gettier cases can be generated which fit that definition and yet such cases are not instances of knowledge. ……………………………………………………………………………….. …………………(AB)

This implies the following statement:

If a definition of knowledge is completely immune to Gettier counterexamples, then justification/warrant entails truth according to that definition…………………………………………..(CD)

Therefore, the most plausible choice we have, to overcome the Gettier problem is to accept that the truth condition and the justification condition (or its variants, including any fourth condition) are not mutually independent. On this approach, the truth condition is superfluous/ redundant and knowledge is simply justified (warranted) belief.

So, it follows from (AB) & (CD) that either Chisholm's solution does not succeed in blocking all conceivable Gettier counter-examples or, if it does, then he has formulated the fourth condition so strongly that the truth condition has become superfluous. On the other hand, if we are unable to find at least one counter-example to Chisholm's solution, then there is a reason to doubt Zagzebsky's claims on the inescapability of Gettier problems.

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Chisholm of course takes care to ensure that the contradictory requirements- i.e. avoiding all Gettier counterexamples on one hand and including all cases of genuine knowledge on the other- are fulfilled in his modified version of the definition of knowledge. Thus, he proposes the fourth condition as a complex conditional instead of merely saying ' *h* is not defectively evident'. Such a move makes the definition consistent with our pre-theoretic notion of knowledge in the following case (Lemos 2007, pp 30-31:

Suppose Smith knows that,

(b) Jones, who works in my(i.e. Smith's) office, has always driven a Ford in the past, has just offered me a ride in a Ford, and says he owns a Ford.

From (b) Smith deduces,

(c) There is someone, who works in my office, who has always driven a Ford in the past, who has just offered me a ride in a Ford, and says he owns a Ford.

Surely Smith knows (c). Smith’s grounds for (c) include (b) and (b) justifies Smith in believing the falsehood (f):

Jones owns a Ford. Since Smith’s grounds for believing (c) justify a false proposition for Smith, (c) is defectively evident for Smith. Further, Chisholm's fourth condition is satisfied as (c) implies itself and it is a conjunction of propositions each of which is evident for Smith but not defectively evident. Thus, in this case, Chisholm's definition does not appear to be too strong and its result matches with our intuition about whether knowledge obtains.

But now let us consider an entirely different class of propositions.

Let the proposition " Jones owns a ford"------(f) be true.

Then, the proposition "Either Jones owns a ford or Harry is in Barcelona"------ (k) is also true as it is logically entailed by (f).

Let *e* be the conjunction of propositions which makes *h* (and consequently, (f) too) evident for the subject Smith (S).

But we do not necessarily base our knowledge claims on evidences obtained from immediate perception only. A very large portion of what we know is based on evidences which have been obtained temporally prior to the knowledge claims made on the basis of such evidences. For example, in the case described above, all the conjuncts in (b)-the body of evidence which makes the proposition (f) evident- are temporally prior to the actual moment when the knowledge claim (f) is made.

Now, if (b) is good enough evidence for justifying belief in (f), then it is certainly good enough evidence for the following proposition:

Jones owned a ford at time t= l -------------(f1).

(where l is a rational number such that 0< l <t0 and t0 is the time to which the proposition (f) refers)

If (b) makes (f) evident, then it definitely makes evident (f1) which is temporally prior to (f) and hence, 'closer' to the body of evidence (b). Of course, the assumption here is that the closer a body of evidence temporally is to the proposition it makes evident, the better support it is for that proposition, provided everything else remains the same.

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I think the validity of that assumption is intuitively clear and does not need an elaborate defence.

Now suppose that (f1) is false but (f) is true. It is not impractical or outlandish to assume that this can happen. For example, let Jones' Ford be stolen for a few minutes (including at time t = l) before the police caught the thief red-handed after a brief chase and then handed the Ford back to Jones so that he became its owner once again (including at time t = t0)!

Then, as per the definition of 'defectively evident' given by Chisholm (as in (a1) above), (f) is defectively evident because the evidence *e* which makes it evident also makes evident the false proposition (f1).

But the consequent of Chisholm's fourth is not satisfied since (f) is not trivially defectively evident and any nontrivial, proper defectively evident proposition can never be implied by a conjunction of propositions each of which is evident for the subject and yet not defectively evident, as shown by Bhattacharya (2004). Thus, according to Chisholm's definition, S does not know that (f).

But what is our common/folk intuition in this case? Does our subject S know that (f)?

Results and discussions: S obviously cannot claim to know that 'Jones presently owns a Ford' on the basis of evidences gathered one year ago! But he can certainly validly make that same claim on the basis of evidences obtained five minutes ago. The point is that there is a range of 'temporal distance' from the evidence *e* to the conclusion (f) over which we can validly make the assertion that S knows that (f) on the basis of evidence *e.* Beyond that 'temporal distance', S cannot claim to know that (f) on the basis of evidence *e*.

It is easy to conceive cases like the above in a wide variety of cases. Whenever there is a gap in time between the evidence gathered and the conclusion/ inference made on its basis, we can construct such cases. We do not hesitate to ascribe knowledge in such instances which fall within the 'range'. Immediate perceptual evidences (where there is little or no gap between evidence and conclusion) are not the only sources of our knowledge of the external world. Much of our empirical knowledge rests on historical knowledge. Chisholm's fourth condition seem to deny this.

Thus, the definition may help us in getting rid of Gettier counter-examples, but it also severely restricts the things we are allowed to know. This is consistent with Zagzebsky's analysis of theories which purport to define knowledge in terms of true belief plus something else. Such theories cannot escape from Gettier cases and if they do manage to escape, it is only at a cost which is unacceptable as it leads to inconsistency with our intuitive notion of knowledge. In Chisholm's case, the warrant condition i.e. the justification condition and the fourth condition, is so strong that the truth condition entails from it. In other words, there is no degree of independence between the two. The truth condition is superfluous.

Conclusion: As a result, in this case, truth necessarily follows from the warrant which S has for his belief. So, there is no scope of truth-by-accident here which is the hallmark of Gettier counter-examples. But at the same the definition excludes all such cases wherein truth does not necessarily follow from the justification supplied in support of the concerned belief. Thus, Chisholm's definition of knowledge cannot be accepted as it is inconsistent with our pre-theoretic notion of knowledge in the type of cases discussed above.

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