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**Consciousness and Gettier’s problem: A suggestion for a new solution**

**Abstract:** This paper puts forward an argument for correcting the traditional definition of propositional knowledge - justified true belief (JTB) - by adding the necessary condition of consciousness: justified true and conscious belief (JTCB). This would eliminate the possibility of conceiving of a belief as knowledge, when the necessary condition of the protagonist of the case having consciousness of the real truth of this belief is not fulfilled.

Gettier (1963) proposed that there are cases which on the one hand satisfy the demands for propositional knowledge, but which on the other hand cannot be considered as knowledge. This undermines the traditionally accepted definition of knowledge, rendering a justified true belief (JTB) insufficient for knowledge. Gettier’s paper aroused considerable criticism and at the same time prompted many attempts to correct and replace the JTB account of knowledge (e.g. Hetherington 2020). The present commentary does not intend to address the wealth of literature responding to Gettier’s challenge within epistemology, but rather to propose a possible new solution to and explanation for Gettier’s problem that is based on Rakover’s (2018) approach to consciousness and understanding.

The commentary is organized in the following way. Firstly, Gettier’s most discussed counterexample to the JTB account, Case 1, will be described. Secondly, Rakover’s theory of understanding will be presented briefly. Finally, Gettier’s problem will be explained and solved by appealing to this theory of understanding.

*Case 1.* Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. Smith has evidence for the proposition that Jones will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Therefore, Smith has formed the following justified belief (S-Belief), which Gettier called proposition (e): the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. Unknown to Smith, what will really happen is that Smith (and not Jones) will secure the job, and that he himself also has ten coins in his pocket (this may be called “the real information”). Thus, S-Belief is justified and true, since Smith, who has ten coins in his pocket, got the job. However, since Smith was unaware of the real information, S-Belief cannot be considered as knowledge. As Gettier writes, it is 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 his pocket…” Italics are in the original (1963: 122).

*Dual Theory of Understanding (DTU).* The DTU is based on two components: (a) consciousness is a necessary condition for understanding, i.e. a person cannot understand a particular piece of information (description, argument, perception, etc.) without having consciousness of it; (b) the concept of understanding is wider than the concept of scientific explanation (i.e. the latter is included in the former) (for further discussion see Rakover 2018). (Incidentally, although the DTU points out that consciousness is crucial for understanding and knowledge, it does not rule out the possibility of unconscious motivation.)

*Application of Rakover’s DTU to Gettier’s problem*. Given Gettier’s explanation for why S-Belief cannot be considered as knowledge (see above), this application is made under the assumption that understanding is a necessary condition for knowledge. If a person does not understand S-Belief, then the sentence ‘the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket’ has no meaning and does not constitute knowledge. Given that consciousness is a necessary condition for understanding, it follows that it is also a necessary condition for knowledge, since without consciousness there is no understanding, and without understanding there is no knowledge. (This means that if we accept the opinion that a robot is devoid of consciousness, then we should also accept that it has no knowledge and does not understand what it is doing or saying. For further discussion see Rakover 2018.) Now, since Smith was not conscious of the “real information” (i.e. Smith himself will secure the job and he, too, has ten coins in his pocket), it follows that S-Belief is not knowledge – it is only a justified belief.

This analysis suggests that the JTB definition of knowledge should be modified, in an attempt to solve the problem raised by Gettier’s Case 1. Accordingly, propositional knowledge should be delimited by four necessary conditions: justified true and conscious belief (JTCB). Given this (re)definition, it is clear that S-Belief cannot be considered as knowledge, since Smith was not conscious of the crucial real information.

In many respects Case 1 is similar to the following situation. Imagine that a chemist in the mid-17th century, Dr Flog, explains the process of burning to his students, a phenomenon which he believes is the result of a certain material interaction (call it “F-belief”), and he establishes this belief on the phlogiston theory. Although F-belief is justified, it is not true. Many years later, Lavoiser’s oxygen theory provides a more accurate explanation of combustion (in effect, this theory has since been developed and expanded to a great extent). Clearly, Flog could not have been aware of Lavoisier’s theory, although it may be suggested, based on knowledge of this theory and by analogy with Gettier’s Case 1, that F-belief is JTB.

**References**

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