

## CHISHOLM'S SOLUTION OF THE GETTIER PROBLEM : AN INCONSISTENCY

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Gettier's short paper "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" challenged one traditional view in epistemology and generated a considerable amount of philosophical literature over the past quarter century by influencing a number of philosophers. According to this traditional view, the necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of the statement that *S* knows that *p* are (i) *p* is true, (ii) *S* believes that *p*, and (iii) *S* is justified in believing that *p*.<sup>1</sup> Gettier presented two alleged but puzzling counter examples to this view, and thus tried to show that the satisfaction of the three conditions stated in this definition does not ensure the truth of *S* knows that *p*.<sup>2</sup> It may be noted that he does not, however, deny that the three conditions are necessary for knowledge.

A number of philosophers, such as Roderick Chisholm<sup>3</sup>, have argued in some way or other that Gettier-style counter examples are defective, not genuine. On the contrary, Richard Feldman has argued that "There are examples very much like Gettier's" that are not defective.<sup>4</sup> Thus he attempts to show, in effect, that justified true belief is not knowledge.

In this paper I will examine Chisholm's view of knowledge as justified true belief, and then prove that Chisholm's proposed solution of the Gettier problem entails a logical contradiction. I will begin with an explanation of the Gettier problem. In trying to reject the traditional view Gettier does not develop any complete theory of justification, but only notes two points regarding the logic of justification which play a crucial role in his argument. These are : (i) A person *S* may be justified in believing a statement *p* which is in fact false. (ii) *S* is justified in believing any known logical consequence *q* of an already justified statement *p*. It is worth mentioning that these two statements taken

together entail that a false statement can justify one's belief in other statements.

In my exposition of the Gettier problem I will concentrate on the second example of Gettier. The example is like this :

- (e) Smith has seen Jones driving a Ford, and keeping it in his garage. Jones has said to Smith that he possesses a Ford and has even shown him an ownership certificate. Moreover, Jones has always been honest and reliable in his dealings with Smith.

The above conjunction (e) of statements makes evident for Smith the following statement :

- (f) Jones owns a Ford.

But suppose that, unknown to Smith, the statement (f) is in fact false, because Jones has lied to Smith on this occasion. Smith, however, derives the following statement (h) as a logical consequence of his supposedly justified statement (f) and accepts (h) on the basis of (f) :

- (h) Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona.

Now suppose that Brown is in fact in Barcelona, although Smith has absolutely no idea about where Brown is. Then (h) is *true*, and Smith is also *justified* in *accepting* (h), since he has deduced (h) from his justified statement (f). Thus Smith has justified true belief of the statement (h). However, the first disjunct of (h) is evident to Smith but is in fact false, whereas the second disjunct is true but not evident to him. Thus the disjunction derives its evidence from its false part and its truth from its nonevident part. This situation obviously does not warrant our saying that Smith knows that (h).

Now, a question naturally arises, What does the Gettier problem show? The Gettier problem, as Chisholm points out, could be said to show that if in the traditional definition of knowledge we take "S is justified in believing that p" to mean the same as "It is evident for S that p", then the definition is insufficient. That is, we would need to add one or more conditions in order to obtain an adequate definition of knowledge. This approach to deal with the Gettier problem has been taken, for example, by Lehrer who adds a fourth condition to get an adequate definition of "S knows that p".

But the Gettier problem, according to Chisholm, could also be taken as

showing that the interpretation of "h is justified for S" as "h is evident for S" is incomplete. In that case it would only be necessary to give a complete and satisfactory analysis of the locution "h is justified for S". Chisholm understands the problem in this way, and attempts to give an account of propositional justification in terms of the notion of non defective evidence.

Having asked and then answered the question as to what the Gettier problem shows, we would naturally like to find a solution to the problem. But a satisfactory solution presupposes a correct understanding of the real root of the Gettier problem. So a second question might be : Why does the Gettier problem arise? To this question Chisholm has the correct answer :

The difficulty arises in part because .... the relation of making evident may be non-deductive. That is to say, it is possible for a proposition *e* to make evident a proposition *f* even though *e* is true and *f* is false. The false *f* may then, in turn, make evident a proposition *h* that happens to be true. And this true proposition *h*, in the Gettier cases, is the one that makes difficulties for the traditional definition of knowing.<sup>5</sup>

Since the true but troublesome statement (*h*) in the Gettier example is non deductively made evident by the true statement (*e*), one might be tempted to assume, as Chisholm points out, "that one proposition cannot make another proposition evident for a given subject unless the first proposition entails the second".<sup>6</sup> This stipulation would certainly help us avoid the Gettier problem, since (*h*) is not entailed by (*e*). But this would also drastically restrict the range of statements evident for us, and hence our knowledge of the external world, to only a few Cartesian statements that are self-evident and knowable a priori.

Next, Chisholm considers a better but still not entirely satisfactory way to diagnose the Gettier problem. As we have seen, the statement (*h*) is based on (*e*) that non-deductively makes evident a false statement(*f*). This fact might lead us to think that *belief* in an *evident true* statement can be regarded as knowledge only if the basis for this statement does not make evident any false statement. This construal would entail that the statement (*e*), which makes evident a false statement, would not be known. But this consequence is unacceptable for the simple reason that although the statement (*h*) - Jones owns a ford or Brown is in Barcelona - is not known, we must count the conjunctive statement (*e*) as a statement that S knows to be true.

Thus the second way of looking at the cause of the Gettier problem gives Chisholm a clue to his solution of the problem. A satisfactory definition of knowledge when applied to the Gettier problem should, according to Chisholm, satisfy the following conditions :

(1) Although (h) is true, evident and accepted by S, (h) is not known by S. (2) The conjunctive statement (e) cited as S's evidence for (f) is known by S. (3) Finally, S's 'ultimate basis' for (e) is the conjunction (b) of 'directly evident' statements such that (b) is known by S.<sup>7</sup>

Keeping these three desiderata in mind Chisholm proposes a definition of justification that would solve that Gettier problem and still retain the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief. To achieve this goal, he accepts "e makes h evident for S" as an undefined locution and begins by defining a basic statement :

b is basic statement for S if and only if (i) b is evident for S, and (ii) whatever makes b evident for S entails b.

[ In symbols :  $Bbs \leftrightarrow (Ebs \ \& \ (x) \ (Exbs \rightarrow (x \text{ -- } b)))$  ]

He next defines the concept of defectively evident :

h is defectively evident for S if and only if (i) there is a basic statement that makes (h) evident for S but does not entail (h), and (ii) every such basic statement makes evident some statement that is false.

[ In symbols :  $E^d hs \leftrightarrow ((\exists x) (Bx_s \ \& \ Exhs \ \& \ \neg(x \rightarrow h) \ (x)(Bx \rightarrow (Ey)(Py \ \& \ Exy \ \& \ Fy)))$  ]

Finally, he defines the sort of justification which, he thinks, was presupposed by the traditional definition of knowledge :

S is justified in believing that p iff (i) p is evident for S, and (ii) either p is non defectively evident, or p is entailed by a conjunction of statements each of which is evident but not defectively evident for S.

[ In symbols :  $(Bsp \ \& \ Js) \leftrightarrow (Eps \ \& \ (-E^d \ ps \vee (\exists x)(Cx \ \& \ (x = (e_1 \ \& \ e_2 \ \& \ \dots \ e_n)) \ \& \ (y \ \in \ \{e_1 \ , \ \dots \ , \ e_n\} \ \rightarrow (Ey \ \& \ - \ E^d \ ys)))) \rightarrow p \ ) ]$

Chisholm then goes on to test his view of knowledge as justified true belief in the light of the three desiderata listed earlier :

(I) The statement (h) of Gettier's example is defectively justified, because there is a basic statement for S that makes evident but does not entail (h), and moreover that basic statement makes evident the statement (f) that is false. Now, (h) satisfied the first condition of justification, because (h) is evident for S. But it does not satisfy the second condition of justification, since (h) is neither non-defectively justified nor entailed by a conjunction of statements each of which is non-defectively evident for S. Thus (h) being unjustified would not be counted as known.

(2) According to Chisholm, the statement (e), like (h), is defectively evident, but, unlike (h), is justified for S. (e) is justified for S, since it is entailed by a conjunction of statements each of which is evident but not defectively evident for S. Thus statement (e), through defectively evident, is counted as known. Now, a few questions could be raised : Why are the components of the conjunction entailing (e) evident? Why are they not defectively evident? Chisholm's answer to these questions are not sufficiently clear. However, his answer seems to be somewhat like this : Each of the components of the conjunction that makes (e) evident are *directly evident*. A directly evident statement is self-evident, i.e., it is made evident by itself. Since each component of the conjunction is directly evident, the conjunction itself could be said to be directly evident. Now, statement (e) is evident for S, and the directly evident conjunctive statement that makes (e) evident for S also entails (e). Therefore, by Chisholm's own definition of basic statement, statement (e) should be counted as a *basic statement*.

Now, any statement that is directly evident for S is evident for S, and hence the conjunctive statement (call it (b) ) that is directly evident for S is evident for S. Since (b) is directly evident for S, only (b) can make itself evident for S. But (b) also entails (b). Thus (b) is evident for S, and whatever makes

(b) evident for S. entails (b). Therefore, by Chisholm's definition of basic statement, (b) is a *basic statement*.

Thus there is a basic statement (b) for S that makes (e) evident for S and *does*, as Chisholm says in his explanation of the second desideratum. entail (e). But this violates that first condition of the definition of defectively evident. Therefore, (e) cannot be defectively evident for S. But Chisholm says that (e) is defectively evident for S in the same place where he says that the conjunctive statement (b) entails (e). Thus there is an *inconsistency* in his proposed solution of the Gettier problem.

(3) Finally, Chisholm correctly points that the conjunctive statement "b which is S's directly evident basis for e is not defectively evident". But no additional statement, even if true, can remove an inconsistency. Only a change through suitable subtraction, not addition, can cure this serious defect.

Chisholm's account of justification seems to be committed to an epistemic externalist position. On his view when S knows something, then S may not know that S knows, for one need not and in fact "cannot generally know whether or not one's evidence is defective". This externalist position is also implicit in Gettier's paper, for according to Gettier, it is possible for S to know p even when it is entailed, and hence justified, by a statement q that is falsely believed by S to be true.

But such externalism does not seem to be consistent with our intuitive view that if one really knows that p, then one is in cognitive possession of the evidence for believing in p, and can, if and when necessary, refer to that evidence in support of p.

In conclusion Chisholm says that in "all cases of evident true belief that are not cases of knowing", his definitions of the relevant terms would ensure that those beliefs would not be counted as cases of knowing. He maintains that in some of the Gettier example the evident true belief is defectively evident, which in others the statement corresponding to the (e) does not make evident the statement corresponding to the (h).

But if Chisholm's account of justification, as we have seen, is itself defective, he cannot be said to have solved the Gettier problem. This failure,

however, does not show that Gettier is right. It only shows that Chisholm has not been successful, and some other satisfactory analysis can perhaps solve the Gettier problem.

### NOTES

1. Gettier, E., 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis* 23 (1963), pp. 121-23.
2. *Idem.*
3. Chisholm, R. M., *The Foundations of Knowing*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1982, pp. 43-49.
4. Feldman, R., 'An Alleged Defect in Gettier Counter examples', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 52 (1974), pp. 68-69.
5. Chisholm, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 43-9.
6. *Idem.*
7. *Idem.*

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