Impressão

Michael Clark, "Knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier's Paper"

In his paper "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (*Analysis* 23.6, June 1963) Mr. Gettier provides two counter-examples which show that it need not be. In each case a proposition which is in fact true is believed on grounds which are in fact false. Since the grounding proposition in each case entails the proposition it justifies (the conclusion), and the grounding proposition, although false, is justifiably believed, the conclusion is also justifiably believed.

Gettier's examples are stronger than they need have been to prove his point. Grounds need not of course entail their conclusions in order to be good grounds. Cases can be devised in which true justified belief fails to be knowledge because a *non-deductive* ground is false. To adapt Gettier's second case, take the proposition

   (1) Jones owns a Ford.

Smith believes this because his friend Brown, whom he knows to be reliable and honest, has told him that Jones always has owned one, etc. Now as it happens Brown, despite his general reliability, has made an unusual slip: he has mixed Jones up with someone else. Jones never did have a Ford. However, he just happens to have bought one. So Smith truly believes that he owns one, but he cannot be said to know this since he believes it on false grounds. He is none the less justified both in accepting the grounds and in accepting Jones' past ownership etc. as grounds for the (non-deductive) inference to present ownership.

It is not enough, however, to add the truth of the grounds to a version of the definitions Gettier criticises as a further necessary condition of knowing a proposition. The following definition of knowledge still fails to give conditions which are jointly sufficient:

   S knows that p IFF (i)   p is true,
                              (ii) S believes that p,
                              (iii) S is justified in believing that p, and
                              (iv) it is on true grounds that S believes that p.

For consider this further adaptation of the example. It is true that Jones always

owned a Ford and he still does. Brown, who is known by Smith to be generally reliable and honest, tells Smith that Jones has always owned one. But, in fact, Brown knows nothing about Jones or his Ford; he has just invented what he tells Smith (an act quite out of character), and he happens by chance to be right. Now Smith's belief is not only true and justified, but the grounds on which he holds his belief are true. Yet Brown's wild guess can hardly be regarded as providing Smith with knowledge merely because it happens to be right. In this case, then, the grounds on which Smith believes (1) are true, but the grounds on which he accepts these grounds, *viz*. that Brown knows them, are false; but Brown's general reliability and honesty justify his believing it to be true.

Very often we can go on for quite a long time asking why, asking for the grounds for the grounds, for the grounds for these second-order grounds, and so on, but eventually the question will become logically odd. For example,

(2) "What are your grounds for saying Jones owns a Ford?"
(3) "Brown told me he always has owned one."
(4) "What are your grounds for claiming Brown knows this?"
(5) "He is generally reliable and honest."
(6) "What are your grounds for saying Brown is reliable and honest?"
(7) "I am nearly always with him and I seem to remember no unreliable or dishonest act on his part."

It would clearly be out of order to ask for Smith's grounds for saying he seems to remember. (We might question the reliability of his memory. In this example I assume that we may take his memory to be reliable so that I may avoid having too long a chain of reasons.) If any ground in this chain, that is, either (3) or (5) or (7), is false, we may properly deny that Smith *knows* that Jones owns a Ford. If each ground in this chain is true, then I will say that the belief is "fully grounded". We may now modify the definition under consideration by changing (iv), so that it reads:

(iv)′ S's belief that p is fully grounded,

in which form (i)–(iv)′ jointly will give the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing that p.

It might be thought that the addition of (iv)′ would enable us to drop (iii). For surely, if p is fully grounded in the sense specified, then S is justified in believing that p. Yet he might believe all the grounds, and they might be good grounds without his seeing that they were *good* grounds; he might be sure of what be believed but not appreciate how the evidence he had for it really justified his belief. (Cf. Cohen, "Claims to Knowledge", *Proc. Arist. Soc., Suppl. Vol.* 1962, p. 35 ff.) In such a case we might want to deny that S was fully justified in his belief, and, if so, we need to retain (iii).

I think that the revised definition illuminates the issue as to whether so-called incorrigible knowledge is to be counted as knowledge at all. If I can't (logically) be wrong, for example, as to whether I am in pain, then, it is claimed, it is not properly a question of knowledge. For knowing entails having found out, and finding out is something which I may fail to do. If I say I am in pain and you ask

me how I found out, you have asked an obviously silly question. Now it might be thought that this argument could be met by denying that knowing entails having found out: might I not be born having certain concepts and knowing certain truths? But the need for condition (iv)′ in any definition of knowledge shows that where the question "How did you find out?" is inappropriate the term "know" is also inappropriate. For it is usually just as odd to ask, "On what grounds do you say you are in pain?" Where one knows in virtue of having grounds, it seems plausible to say that it is a case of finding out. To talk of knowledge in the cases in question precludes a unitary definition of knowing, for we should have to say that condition (iv)′ was inapplicable in these cases.

In particular, the question "If I know that p, does it follow that I know that I know that p?" is seen to be odd (unless it is a question about my having the concept of knowing). For, among other things, it asks whether my belief that I know that p is fully grounded. And, among other things, *this* question asks whether the belief's being fully grounded is itself fully grounded, that is, whether the grounds for saying that the complete chain of grounds for p do actually constitute grounds for p, are true. Thus, if p is "He is running away" and my grounds for believing that p are that I am watching him (in this case the chain has only one link), the question is "Why is your watching him a ground for saying what he is doing?" Now this question is very odd; special circumstances might be devised for giving it point, but generally there is no question as to the grounds for this being a good ground which is not silly or of a special, philosophical nature.

QUESTIONS

1 According to Clark, what four conditions are required in order for S to know that *p*?
2 Which of those conditions is not satisfied in Gettier's examples?
3 What does it mean for a belief to be "fully grounded"?

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