

Rejecting the Counterexamples

Four Options

1. Accept the counterexamples, and try to improve the definition.
 - No false lemmas
 - No true defeater
 - Causal
 - Reliabilist
 - Nozick's Truth-Tracking
2. Knowledge cannot be defined but it is a useful concept.
3. Knowledge is a useless concept for epistemology.
4. Reject the counterexamples.

Rejecting the Counterexamples

- A Gettier counterexample is any counterexample that attacks the sufficiency claim of proposed definitions of knowledge.
That is, it is a case where the XTB conditions are met but it is claimed that the subject does not have knowledge.
- Luck: Presumably all Gettier counterexamples involve an element of luck, i.e. the subject attains a true belief by luck.
- It is claimed that the subject does not have knowledge because (s)he could so easily have not attained the true belief.
- Option 4 rejects the counterexamples on the basis that our intuitions about luck are faulty, i.e. when the subject has X true belief (s)he also has knowledge.

Lucky Knowledge

- X knows that p if and only if:
 - (1) X believes that p
 - (2) p is true
 - (3) X's belief p is well supported by evidence.
 - (4) None of X's evidence for p is false.
- Condition 3: Standard justification condition.
- Condition 4: Similar (but not identical) to the no false lemmas and the no true defeater conditions.
- We can have knowledge even when our beliefs are true by accident, i.e. we can have lucky knowledge.
- Prominent Advocate: Stephen Hetherington.

Lucky Knowledge (2)

- Hetherington: The standard interpretation of counterexamples involves an appeal to counterfactuals at some point.
- Standard Interpretation: The subject lacks knowledge because the subject could easily have been deceived, i.e. the subject could easily have had a false belief.
Example: Smith does not know that p because it is just an accident ('pure luck') that Smith has ten coins in his pocket. If that weren't the case, Smith would not have a true belief.
- Hetherington: We are guilty of the counterfactual fallacy, i.e. the counterfactual lack of knowledge implies the actual lack of it.
- Avoiding the counterfactual fallacy allows one to accept lucky knowledge.

Henry and the Fake Barns (1)

- Standard Interpretation
 - (1) Henry believes that there is a real barn in this area.
 - (2) The proposition ‘There is a real barn in this area’ is true.
 - (3) Henry’s belief is well supported by evidence.
 - (4) None of Henry’s evidence is false.

Justified true belief: YES

Knowledge: NO

Intuition: Henry was lucky to have looked out at that time.

Relevant counterfactual: “If Henry were to have been looking at one of the fake barns while driving along, he would unwittingly have been deceived (while having the same belief, ‘I see a barn’, along with seemingly similar evidence)”.

Henry and the Fake Barns (2)

- Alternative Interpretation

Justified true belief: YES

Knowledge: *YES*

Intuition: Granted, Henry was lucky to have looked out at that time. That just means he was close to being deceived and hence close to lacking knowledge.

- Almost being deceived is not the same as being deceived.
 - Generous act vs. ungenerous man
 - Almost to lose a race is not the same as losing a race.

“The fact that if he had continued his drive, then he would have been deceived, should not be assumed to entail that he lacks knowledge *now*”. The standard interpretation is not entailed by the relevant counterfactual.

Henry and the Fake Barns (3)

- Alternative Interpretation - continued

The standard interpretation fails to distinguish between two possible ‘continuations’ of the story:

- (1) Henry is *never* deceived by any fake barns.
- (2) Henry *is* deceived by some fake barns as he continues on.

This story, like all the others, leaves significant details open but epistemologists imagine the worst – in this case option two.

They need not. The first option lends more credence to the view that Henry almost was deceived but wasn’t, and, therefore, that Henry almost had no knowledge but actually had knowledge.

Jill and the Political Assassination (1)

- Standard Interpretation
 - (1) Jill believes that a political leader has been assassinated.
 - (2) The prop. ‘A political leader has been assassinated’ is true.
 - (3) Jill’s belief is well supported by evidence.
 - (4) None of Jill’s evidence is false.

Justified true belief: YES

Knowledge: NO

Intuition: Jill was lucky not to have heard the government announcement denying the above proposition.

Relevant counterfactual: “If Jill had heard of the government announcement, she would have been unwittingly deceived”.

Jill and the Political Assassination (2)

- Alternative Interpretation
Justified true belief: YES

Knowledge: YES

Intuition: Granted, Jill was lucky not to have heard the government announcement. That just means she was close to being deceived and hence close to lacking knowledge.

Standard Interpretation fails to distinguish between two possible ‘continuations’ of the story:

- (1) Jill is *never* deceived by the government announcement.
- (2) Jill *is* eventually deceived by the announcement.

All we are entitled to infer is that Jill is lucky not to have been deceived and thus lucky to have knowledge.

Objection

- To accept lucky knowledge is to collapse the distinction between true belief and knowledge.
 - After all, this account says that we can have knowledge even when our beliefs are true by accident.
 - Reply: It is important to remember that the definition of knowledge contains conditions 3 and 4 requiring that the true belief is *well supported by evidence none of which is false*.
- Example 1: The stopped clock case now counts as knowledge.
NB: Depends on whether there is good evidence here.
- Example 2: The lottery case still does not count as knowledge.

Food for Thought

- Is all knowledge in some sense lucky?
- Do all Gettier-counterexamples involve an element of luck? If not, what happens to Hetherington's conclusion?

Reading

- S. Hetherington (1998) 'Actually Knowing', *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 193, pp. 453-469.