In Fallibilism

Structures of Gettier Problems and a Challenge to Turri's Solution

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Abstract:

Edmund Gettier shook the philosophical world by seeming to vanquish the traditional notion that knowledge is justified true belief. John Turri aimed at refuting Gettier's thesis by arguing that knowledge is *adept* belief, a condition in which subjects in Gettier cases lack. However, Stephen Hetherington argued that Turri's basis for responding to Gettier isn't properly based in a Fallibilist epistemology. Hetherington suggests that proper responses to Gettier problems *must* be grounded in Fallibilism. In this essay, I argue that Hetherington's challenge doesn't pose a significant threat to Turri, insofar as such responses don't *have to* be grounded in Fallibilism. I utilize Julien Dutant's argument that *Infallibilism* is necessary for responding to Gettier cases, in order to establish that there is enough reason to believe that Fallibilism is not *necessary* for responding to Gettier. In fact, Fallibilist responses could result in Gettier subjects having knowledge! So, Turri's argument isn't threatened by Hetherington's challenge.

In his essay, "*Manifest Failure: the Gettier Problem Solved*", John Turri assesses several responses to the problems Edmund Gettier raised about Knowledge not being Justified True Belief (JTB hereafter) before presenting his own modified version. Gettier cases are supposed to demonstrate how a subject can have a JTB without having knowledge. Each response has fallen short in their aim to define knowledge in a way that explains how subjects in Gettier problems don't have knowledge. Turri's solution builds on Sosa's thesis by adding *adeptness* to reach this end. Stephen Hetherington posed a challenge to Turri's response, suggesting that it relies upon an '*Infallibilist*' conception of knowledge. Hetherington claims that Gettier problems *must* rely on Fallibilism, thus rendering Turri's suggested solution improperly grounded and an unsuitable response to Gettier. I will assert Hetherington's claim does not pose a significant challenge to Turri in that there are strong enough reasons to believe that formulating Gettier problems doesn't rely on the 'Fallibilist spirit' Hetherington suggests. To support this claim, I will use Julien Dutant's "*The Case for Infallibilism*". Prior to taking this step, however, I'll need to exposit a few things.

First, we need to address the structure and elements that go into Gettier problems before assessing Turri's proposed solution. Gettier sets up a 'form' to his problems that try to show how it is possible for a subject to obtain a JTB without gaining *knowledge*. Turri states that, "Gettier cases follow a recipe. Start with a belief sufficiently justified…to meet the justification requirement for knowledge. Then add an element of bad luck that would normally prevent the justified belief from being true. Lastly, add a dose of good luck that "cancels out the bad", so the belief ends up true anyhow" (p. 1). This is what Turri calls a 'double luck' feature and is a key component to Gettier problems. I will later discuss why Hetherington suggests these elements and structure to Gettier problems necessitate Fallibilism.

Now that we've covered the structure of Gettier problems, we will examine Turri's proposed solution to them. Turri builds off of Sosa's thesis that knowledge involves accuracy, adroitness and aptness (the 'Triple-A' structure). Turri states that, "for beliefs, Sosa identifies accuracy with truth, adroitness with manifesting intellectual competence and aptness with being "true *because* competent"…Apt belief, then, is belief that is true because it is competent" (p. 5). Turri's assessment of Sosa's view is that, although it's attractive, it doesn't quite solve the problem. Turri brings up a case in which an agent (Dr. Watson) comes to form an apt belief but doesn't have knowledge. In the example Watson forms a belief that the culprit has a limp. He deduces this conclusion through 'admirably competent' means that would've normally lead him to a true conclusion. However, this conclusion was purposely misleading. Sherlock Holmes recognized this and intervened to ensure that the culprit did have a limp so as to validate the conclusion at which Watson was sure to arrive. The 'luck' resulting in this case is the fact that Watson would've come to a false conclusion if Holmes hadn't taken action. Even though Watson's belief was true because it was competently formed, the belief didn't rely on his *own* competence. Therefore, Turri claims that Watson's aptly formed belief doesn't count as knowledge.

Turri's solution adds *adeptness* to Sosa's 'Triple-A' structure. Turri brings up two cases in which a certain property is contained in something, but is only *manifested* in one of those circumstances. In *OJ*, fragility is brought about by a glass shattering on the ground. Contrarily, in *Carafe*, the glass is caught before it hits the ground because glass is fragile. So, the distinction Turri draws upon is "an outcome manifesting a disposition and…an outcome happening merely because of a disposition" (p. 6). Only in the former case do we see the property of fragility *manifested*. Analogously, he states that "Albert Pujols crushes home runs because of his power; he also receives intentional walks regularly because of his power; his power manifests itself in the

former case, but not the latter" (p. 6). Using this point about the relation between something containing a property and whether it's properly manifested, Turri applies this addendum to Sosa's view. He states that an act is *adept*, "just in case its succeeding manifests the agent's competence. For beliefs, adeptness is truth manifesting competence" (p. 7). So, if one's 'cognitive competence' is manifested in believing a true proposition, one can be said to *know* that proposition. From this, the subjects in Gettier cases cannot be said to have knowledge since their belief doesn't manifest their cognitive competence. Therefore, their belief is not *adept*. Turri anticipates some potential objections, to which he responds. Those, however, are irrelevant for Hetherington's objections, for we only needed to see the essence of Turri's view.

Now that we've seen Turri's proposal, we will turn to Hetherington's claim that Gettier problems are structured to necessarily entail a Fallibilist structure. Prior to that, however, we need to clarify what Fallibilism and Infallibilism are with respect to knowledge. Roughly, Fallibilism allows for the possibility that we *could* be wrong about a belief, regardless of whether it is actually right or wrong, and still be justified in having that belief. But the possibility that one's belief *could* have been wrong is crucial to this view. Contrarily, Dutant states that, "Infallibilism is the claim that one satisfies some infallibility condition" (p.59). Dutant distinguishes three[1] 'infallibility conditions'. The one we need to focus on is Modal Infallibilism, which is a view Dutant thinks is required for solving Gettier problems. However, I will discuss this point in greater detail later on. For now, just keep in mind that knowledge requirements are much more stringent for Infallibilism than for Fallibilism, given that you have to satisfy a standard of certainty for your beliefs to be justified.

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1. Dutant distinguishes Epistemic, Evidential and Modal Infallibilism in his work, *The Case for Infallibilism*.

In *"The Significance of Fallibilism Within Gettier's Challenge: A Case Study"*, Stephen Hetherington states "Gettier's standard formulation of his principle of fallibilism" is the following:

> In the sense of 'justified' in which S's being justified in believing P is a necessary condition of S's knowing that P, it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false (p. 540).

Alarmingly, Hetherington doesn't explicitly state *why* Gettier problems inherently contain this 'fallibilist spirit'. The most he states to this point is that, "a closure principle concerning the transmission of justification was pivotal within Gettier's challenge…the other principle adduced by Gettier as pivotal within his challenge…was a form of fallibilism" (p.540). He sets up an account that more clearly outlines the fallibilism in Gettier problems, but never directly addresses *why* Gettier problems *necessitate* fallibilism. Essentially, Hetherington is operating under the assumption that the principle stated above necessitates Gettier problems to be set up in this fallibilist way. From this, he argues that solutions to Gettier problems must adhere to this sense of Fallibilism such that, "the justification needed within knowledge that *p* does not entail its being true that *p*" (p. 542).

Hetherington then argues that Turri's thesis does not keep this 'fallibilist spirit' in mind when asserting that knowledge is adept belief. He states that, "Turri requires the relation of manifestation to be present if knowledge is to be present. In that event, though, the true belief *had* to be present, insofar as its presence is a manifestation…of the cognitive competence. The relation of manifestation…permits no metaphysical variation in that respect" (p. 545). What Hetherington is arguing is that because Turri's criteria for adeptness does not leave open the opportunity that beliefs can be formed fallibly, this entails the view to be grounded in Infallibilism. Thus, Turri's view fails to capture the 'Fallibilist spirit' that he deems necessary for solving Gettier problems.

In response to Hetherington, I now turn to Julien Dutant, who argues that 'Modal Infallibilism' is a requirement for solving Gettier problems. He states, "The idea is that one knows only if one *could not* have been wrong about *p*. The possibility here is an alethic modality[2] like logical, metaphysical or physical possibility, not an epistemic one as in closure-based infallibilism[3]. I will argue that the modal infallibility condition…is a requirement that any account of knowledge should incorporate in order to solve the Gettier problem" (p. 72). The argument he uses to demonstrate that modal infallibilism is required to solve Gettier problems is as follows:

> If our account of knowledge rejects modal infallibilism, then a Gettier case can be built against that account. Conversely, if no Gettier case can be built, then our account includes modal infallibilism. The argument does not show that modal infallibilism is sufficient to prevent Gettier cases, but it shows that it is necessary, and that is enough to show that if one thinks that Gettier subjects lack knowledge, one has to accept modal infallibilism (p. 77)

Dutant extends this thought in that a presumed Fallibilist basis actually results in the subjects of Gettier cases as having knowledge. His argument is this:

> Suppose it is argued that S has knowledge but that the basis of S's belief is fallible. Thus there are possible situations in which S has the same basis but her belief is false. Take one such situation, and make it so that the belief is true in a manner unconnected to S's basis. The resulting situation is one in which S satisfies all the conditions of the original account, and yet S does not have knowledge because it is just a manner of luck that her belief is true…if one argues that in some cases S knows *p* even though it was possible that S believed that *p* on that basis while *p* was false, then one's analysis of knowledge will classify some Gettier cases as knowledge (p. 78).

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2. *Alethic-Modality* is "roughly the logic of necessary truth and related notions". This definition was provided by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy in an article written by Paul McNamara.
3. Closure-based Infallibilism is a view that is based on the notion of 'epistemic closure'. Dutant defines this in terms of "if one knows *p* and is in a position to know that *p* implies *q*, then one is in a position to know that *q*" (p. 64).

So, even in granting Hetherington's notion that Gettier problems are grounded in Fallibilism, Dutant's argument leads us to think that a Fallibilist approach will lead to subjects in certain Gettier cases as actually *having knowledge*! Clearly, this would not only be bad for Hetherington's thesis, but Gettier's as well, given that the problems are meant to demonstrate that the subjects have no knowledge even though they have a JTB. So, it seems these views are not just at odds with each other, but instead the stronger view is Dutant's in that an Infallibilist approach is required for solving Gettier problems as opposed to a Fallibilist one.

However, I am not arguing that a Fallibilist solution to Gettier problems is implausible. What I am suggesting is that Dutant laid the groundwork for there to be enough doubt cast upon the notion that solutions to Gettier problems *must* be grounded in Fallibilism. Therefore, I believe that Turri's thesis is not threatened by Hetherington's assertion that Gettier solutions *must* be grounded with a 'fallibilist spirit'.

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- Dutant, J. (2007). The Case for Infallibilism. Latin Meeting in Analytic Philosophy Genova, 26-26. Retrieved September 13, 2015, from http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-278/paper05.pdf
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