

THE ORIGIN OF THE 'GETTIER' PROBLEM: SOCRATES AND *THE THEAETETUS*

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the origin of what has become known as the Gettier Problem. It examines the claim put forward, though not expounded or defended, by J. Angelo Corlett in *Analyzing Social Knowledge* that the basis for Edmund Gettier's article "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" was originally argued for in Plato's *Theaetetus*. In his article, Gettier argues that the Justified True Belief condition is not sufficient for knowledge. However, Corlett questions the originality of this argument. This article examines Gettier's article followed by the *Theaetetus*. After which, the two articles are compared, and the claim is shown to be correct in accusing Gettier of failing to consider the full work of the *Theaetetus*. Socrates also argued that the Justified True Belief condition was not sufficient for knowledge. However, this article concludes by arguing that Socrates went further with his examination than Gettier did. Socrates not only put forward the claim that this condition was insufficient for knowledge, he also tried to supply answers to the problem.

KEYWORDS: Gettier, *Theaetetus*, epistemology, Socrates, coherentism, justification

I. Introduction

In *Analyzing Social Knowledge*, J. Angelo Corlett states that Edmund L. Gettier, in his infamous article "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"¹ seems to merely reiterate what Socrates (in Plato's *Theaetetus*) already articulates: that "simple justified true belief is insufficient for knowledge."² In this article, I will argue that Corlett's statement is correct. I will argue that it originated not with Gettier, but at least as far back into the writing of western philosophy as Socrates. I will also argue that Socrates also presented several options for answering this very problem.

¹ Edmund L. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23, 6 (1963): 121-3.

² J. Angelo Corlett, *Analyzing Social Knowledge* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 95.

I will use the Socratic Interpretation to approach Plato's work and help explain why Socrates presented the Gettier Problem and solutions in the way he did.³ Before we begin arguing that Socrates originated this problem, however, we must discuss what the Gettier Problem actually entails.

II. Gettier

Gettier begins his article by presenting three conceptions of epistemic justification. All three of these phrasings, however, result in the same thing: for a person to possess knowledge, they must hold a belief, that belief must be true, and they must be justified in holding the belief. This is the standard basis of Justified True Belief (JTB) epistemology. Even though these three conditions may be disputed, the variations are never that far removed from this internal core. Some may argue that you need to not just believe it, that you must accept it.⁴ Many will argue what it means to be justified: what the minimum necessary amount of justification is, whether we need justification beyond reliable cognitive faculties, etc.⁵ Some will even argue what it means for something to be true.⁶ However, most JTB theorists will agree that these three conditions need to be satisfied (whether they can or not is a different issue) for someone to know *that P*.⁷ Nevertheless Gettier argues that these three conditions are not sufficient for knowledge.

From there, Gettier goes on to give us two pivotal points. The first is that "it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false." This merely states that sometimes we can have sufficient reason to believe a false statement. A simple example of this is believing a hallucination. If we have never hallucinated before, are not on any drugs, etc.; we can be justified in relying on our reliable cognitive faculties. However, this can lead to the outcome that we are justified in believing that we saw something that we, in fact, did not see.⁸

³ See J. Angelo Corlett's *Interpreting Plato's Dialogues* (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2005) for an explanation of the Socratic Interpretation.

⁴ Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 12-4.

⁵ Laurence Bonjour and Ernest Sosa, *Epistemic Justification: Internalism vs. Externalism, Foundations vs. Virtues* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 21.

⁶ Alvin I. Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 41-68.

⁷ Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief," 121.

⁸ Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief," 121.

The second is, "... for any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, then S is justified in believing Q." Here, Gettier is merely showing the flow of logic.⁹

With these two points in mind, Gettier provides us with two examples in which he argues that the three conditions are satisfied yet the person cannot be said to 'know' the proposition. Since both examples lead to the same conclusion, we will only be covering the first. Gettier's example is as follows:

Case I:

Suppose that Smith and Jones have applied for a certain job. And suppose that Smith has strong evidence for the following conjunctive proposition:

(d) Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket.

Smith's evidence for (d) might be that the president of the company assured him that Jones would in the end be selected, and that he, Smith, had counted the coins in Jones's pocket ten minutes ago. Proposition (d) entails:

(e) The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

Gettier then states that "Smith sees the entailment from (d) to (e), and accepts (e) on the grounds of (d), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (e) is true."¹⁰ Still, Gettier continues, "But imagine, further, that unknown to Smith, he himself, not Jones, will get the job. And, also, unknown to Smith, he himself has ten coins in his pocket."¹¹ This is where the 'problem' arises.

The Gettier problem is basically a problem of finding the necessary and sufficient conditions for human propositional knowledge. Gettier argues that JTB is not sufficient for knowledge. He argues that we can be justified and believe something that is false (such as proposition (d) in his example). This then leads either to the belief that we possess knowledge when we do not or to the accidental possession of knowledge (such as his transition from (d) to (e)). As in the case of Smith and Jones, Gettier would argue that JTB would allow Smith to know (e). However, we would not want to agree that Smith has knowledge. He may believe

⁹ Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief," 121.

¹⁰ Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief," 122.

¹¹ Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief," 122.

it. It may be true, and he may even seem justified. However, this is not enough to make us want to accept that Smith has knowledge.¹²

III. The *Theaetetus*

With this done, we can now examine the *Theaetetus*. In this dialogue, Theaetetus and Socrates discuss the nature of knowledge. For the sake of time, we will simply presuppose that Socrates' discussions at 151, 178c, and 201b are enough to accept that Socrates believes that a truth belief is necessary but not sufficient for knowledge.¹³ As Gail Fine notes, "At least as early as the *Meno*, Plato is aware that true belief, although necessary for knowledge, is not sufficient. In addition, he claims, true belief must be 'fastened with an explanatory account (*aitias logismos*)' (98a)."¹⁴

From here, Socrates begins his discussion of adding a justification element to true belief to give us knowledge. At 202c, he states,

Now when a man gets a true judgment about something without an account, his soul is in a state of truth as regards that thing, but he does not know it; for someone who cannot give and take an account of a thing is ignorant about it. But when he has also got an account of it, he is capable of all this and is made perfect in knowledge. (*Theaetetus*, 202c)

This establishes the foundation of JTB theory. From here, Socrates gives three possibilities for what counts as justification. "The first would be," Socrates asserts, "making one's thought apparent vocally by means of words and verbal expressions-when a man impresses an image of his judgment upon the stream of speech, like reflections upon water or in a mirror." (*Theaetetus*, 206d) However, Socrates quickly rejects this for being too weak of a justification. He argues, "But isn't that a thing that everyone is able to do more or less readily ... And that being so, anyone at all who makes a correct judgment will turn out to have it 'together

¹² Many philosophers have tried to solve this dilemma by bolstering what is required for justification. As Corlett pointed out to me, Lehrer and Quine attempt to solve this problem through an explanation of how a coherentist explication of the concept of justification would complete the analysis. However, foundationalists like Chisholm and reliabilists like Goldman try to solve the 'Gettier' problem through other means related to epistemic justification.

¹³ All translations are from *Plato: Complete Works*, eds. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

¹⁴ Gail Fine, "Knowledge and Logos in the *Theaetetus*," *The Philosophical Review* 88, 3 (1979): 366.

with an account'; correct judgment without knowledge will no longer be found anywhere". (*Theaetetus*, 206d-e)

Socrates then expands this possibility to mean "being able, when questioned about what a thing is, to give an answer by reference to its elements." Once again, though, he is concerned about epistemic justification being too weak or too strong. When asked what a wagon is, all he could answer is, "Wheels, axle, body, rails, yoke." With an answer like this, Hesiod, a man who could list all the parts, would "think us ridiculous, just as he would if we were asked what your name is, and replied by giving the syllables." To give a full account, we must go through a thing element by element. With a name, we must not just say 'so' 'cra' 'tes' is the name 'Socrates.' To show we know, we must be able to give account of all its elements. (*Theaetetus*, 207a-b)

Earlier in the dialogue, Socrates discusses whether the complex or the elements are knowable. He begins with the premise "that the elements are unknowable and the complex are knowable." (*Theaetetus*, 202d-e) To model this theory, he asks Theaetetus if one "can give an account of the syllables but not of the letters." (*Theaetetus*, 203a) When asked what the first syllable of 'Socrates' is, that is, what 'SO' is, Theaetetus replies that it is an 'S' and an 'O' (*Theaetetus*, 203a). This shows how the complex is knowable. Theaetetus shows that 'SO' is knowable through the combination of 'S' and 'O.' Socrates then moves on to ask for an account of 'S' (*Theaetetus*, 203b). Theaetetus replies in confusion stating, "S is just one of the voiceless letters, Socrates, a mere sound like a hissing of the tongue." (*Theaetetus*, 203b) This would seem to argue that the elements of something are indeed unknowable. Socrates is not done, though. He goes on to point out how odd a notion that would be. For us to know 'SO,' we must know 'S' and 'O.' To say that we can know the two in combination, but are ignorant of them separate would be, as Theaetetus says, "... a strange and unaccountable thing ..." (*Theaetetus*, 203d) This discussion goes on for a bit more. Nevertheless, the point is clear. If we are to know a complex thing, we must also have a grasp of the elements that make up the complex. If we are to know the name 'Socrates,' we must know all the letters individually and know how they combine to form the syllables of the name, and how the syllables combine to form the complete name.

This argument shows us that the complex, the wagon, can only be known through the elements. To be able to give an account of what the wagon is, we must be able to account for all the elements of it. We must be able, like Hesiod, to list the one hundred timbers of the wagon. This would then allow us to have "true judgment with an account" in reference to the wagon.

Nevertheless, as good as this possibility sounds, Socrates has some objections to it. He argues that being able to place the letters or syllables in the correct order is not enough. As Theaetetus admits, when first learning how to spell, we sometimes put letters in the correct order and sometimes put them in the wrong order. If we admit that being able to, at sometime, putting the syllables in the correct order is knowledge, we must admit people have knowledge in situations in which we really do not want them to have knowledge. In this we see why Socrates has rejected that form of justification. There must be a way to be certain when someone has knowledge and not merely allow them to stumble onto it.

This leaves us Socrates' third suggest of what an account is: justification through differentness. It argues that you can provide an account when you are "able to tell some mark by which the object you are asked about differs from all other things." (*Theaetetus*, 208c) Socrates goes on to give an example to clarify this suggestion. He replies to Theaetetus, "Well, take the sun, if you like. You would be satisfied, I imagine, with the answer that it is the brightest of the bodies that move round the earth in the heavens."¹⁵ (*Theaetetus*, 208d) That is, if we are holding something in our minds that everything in that category has in common, we do not have knowledge of whatever particular thing we want to have knowledge of. Take the example of the wagon again. If all we know of the wagon is that it is made of wood, there is no way for us to distinguish a particular wagon from any other wagon. However, if we can say its driver side wheel is smaller than its passenger side wheel and it has got this funny burn mark on the third plank from the left in the bed, we can pick it out from the rest. We have knowledge that differentiates it from all the other wagons.

Once again, Socrates brings up an objection to this possible form of justification. His objection is simple. For us to have a true judgment about someone, before we can claim we have knowledge about them, we have to be able to differentiate that person from the "proverbial 'remotest Mysian'." (*Theaetetus*, 209b) This makes the requirement for knowledge circular. You have to have knowledge of the differences to have knowledge of the thing. That means that to have knowledge, you have to have true belief and knowledge. This becomes an infinite regress (*Theaetetus*, 209d-210b).

¹⁵ This was when people believed the Sun revolved around the Earth.

IV. Socrates' Gettier Problem

With the *Theaetetus* laid out before us, we can now begin to examine where, within the dialogue, Socrates lays out what has become known as the Gettier Problem. The work was written in dialogue form and with an aporetic ending. Socrates never gives us a definite and complete answer to the problem of knowledge. The dialogue is left without such unification. It is our job as veteran readers of Plato to finish the analysis.¹⁶ We must continue the search to find out what forms of justification are inadequate, and why. Part of this task is to find if Socrates did in fact pose the Gettier problem and warn us to avoid it long before Gettier even laid pen to paper.

As we noted in earlier, Gettier's problem was one of insufficient justification. That is, he believed a justified true belief is not enough to reach knowledge. Socrates argues this when he asserts, "And so, Theaetetus, knowledge is neither perception nor true judgment, nor an account added to true judgment." (*Theaetetus*, 210b) This is the first indication that Socrates laid out the problem of knowledge long before Gettier.

We also saw Socrates rejected all three of the suggestions for what counts as justification. He rejects the first suggestion for being too weak. This is a straightforward rejection and a necessary one. He rejects the second suggestion because it gives knowledge in situations that we would not want to give knowledge. This is a much more interesting objection.

In Socrates' second possibility for justification, we can see a specific rejection of the Gettier Case. In the example supporting his objection, Socrates points out that school boys sometimes put the syllables in the right order and sometimes not (*Theaetetus*, 203a). He also points out that we do not want this to be considered knowledge (*Theaetetus*, 208b). This would make *accidental* knowledge possible. This is the same as the Gettier problem. Smith is *accidentally* right that the man with ten coins in his pocket will get the job. He does not know that it is true. It is only true by *accident*. In the same way, the boy who only spells the word right sometimes does so only by *accident*. Fine argues along these same lines when she states, "[I]f I utter some true and even explanatory account which, however, I do not understand (I've accidentally uttered an appropriate Russian sentence, or learned some answer by rote that I could not explain), I do not have

¹⁶ David Sedley, "A Socratic Interpretation of Plato's *Theaetetus*," in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 28, eds. John J. Cleary and Gary M. Gurtler (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), 281.

knowledge.”¹⁷ She continues this train of thought by asserting, “Enumeration of elements is not sufficient for knowledge since it might not issue, as knowledge must, from proper understanding. To know a word involves not just spelling it correctly some number of times, but also the ability to handle its constituents in a variety of contexts; one must be able to display a grasp of the combinatorial powers of letters and the like.”¹⁸ That is, for something to be knowledge there must be more than just a moment of having a justified true belief. There must be a repeated ability to justify the knowledge. There must be something more than mere justification.

Gettier argues that we must either have a much more stringent justification than what is considered normal justification, or we must have something beyond justification. If we take his condition seriously, that “it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false”; we have to take it that he means there must be something beyond justification. This could mean Gettier was arguing for a fourth requirement or a more stringent requirement for justification. However, Socrates is aware of this. This is why he rejects all three forms of justification. They end up being too weak or too strong, or lead to some conclusion that we do not want to accept.

All three of Socrates’ suggestions for justification are instances where we merely recite something to have justification. In the first situation, we merely recite our true belief. In the second situation we merely recite the elements. The third one we recite what differentiates it. However, Fine argues,

First, the account that certifies that one knows a particular thing will itself be a proposition: one knows a thing through or by knowing certain propositions to be true of it. Knowledge of things, for Plato, is description-dependent, not description-independent. Second, Plato tends to speak interchangeably of knowing *x* and know what *x* is. Thus a sentence of the form “*a* knows *x*” can always be transformed into a sentence of the form “*a* knows what *x* is”; and the latter, in turn, is readily transformed into “*a* knows that *x* is *F*.” Hence even if Plato’s primary concern is knowledge of objects, this concern can readily be phrased in modern idiom as knowledge that a particular proposition is true.¹⁹

That is, justification, for Socrates, will be something that is possible to recite. It will be a proposition we can tell someone else. That is one of the requirements.

¹⁷ Fine, “Knowledge and Logos,” 367.

¹⁸ Fine, “Knowledge and Logos,” 388.

¹⁹ Fine, “Knowledge and Logos,” 366-7.

As we noted earlier, for justification we must be able to answer the question, "How do you know that you know?" This will necessarily be in proposition form. Socrates recognizes this. He knows that justification will come as propositions. However, we must keep in mind that Socrates rejects all forms of justification that results in merely reciting something that we may or may not get right when we recite it. There must be something more either to justification or along with justification to make it turn to knowledge. This is exactly what Gettier wanted.

We can see how much Socrates' discussion of the requirement of justification for knowledge lines up with what Gettier argued for in his article. Gettier's point that JTB is not sufficient for knowledge was previously argued by Socrates. Socrates originally points out that we need something more, whether in justification itself or along with justification, to produce knowledge. He even gave us what has become known as a Gettier Case to show why this is necessary.

This is not to say that Gettier necessarily plagiarized Socrates. We must remain charitable to Gettier. There are two possible mistakes that Gettier might have made. The first is that he was not charitable to Socrates.²⁰ He may have taken Socrates' objections to justification at face value. It is possible that Gettier treated this dialogue Socratically and merely thought that Socrates was leaving it up to us to continue the discussion. He may have tried to do this very thing. His article may have been what he saw as this continued discussion; though, it seems he added nothing new. Another possibility is that he merely did not spend the time following proper scholarship. This is a simple and common mistake. We often look at philosophical works merely to find what we want. We often do not look at them entirely. It is possible that Gettier was negligent this way. In either of these cases, the result remains the same: Socrates clearly argued for this problem before Gettier. We must learn from Gettier's error and not make the same mistake.

At this point, it might be objected that Socrates did *not* bring about the Gettier Problem before Gettier. That is, it might be said that because the characters in Gettier's example were genuinely justified while Socrates' examples were not of genuine justification there is a disconnect between the two. However, if we look closely, we can see how Socrates makes Gettier's point, but in a different way.

In Gettier's examples, he presupposes justification. Without any more information, we must understand this to be genuine justification and not absolute justification, as absolute justification would preclude any possibility of being wrong. Gettier then goes on to show how, even with this justification, Smith can be said, according to justified true belief theory, to know that "the man who will

²⁰ Thanks Jonathan Hect for pointing out this possibility.

get the job has ten coins in his pocket" when we do not actually want to attribute that knowledge to him. If we refer back to Gettier's first case, we will remember that (d) is "Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket" and (e) is "The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket." From here, Gettier goes on to state, "Let us suppose that Smith sees the entailment from (d) to (e), and accepts (e) on the grounds of (d), for which he has strong evidence. In this case, Smith is clearly justified in believing that (e) is true."²¹ When we looked at this earlier, we saw how Gettier was right that (d) is false while (e) is true, and the justification that allowed Smith to accept (d) also allowed him to accept (e). The problem is that we do not want admit that Smith knows (e) because he did not actually know that he, and not Jones, would get the job.

If we continue to examine what is going on, we can see what Gettier is actually trying to show us. He is trying to show that we can accidentally 'know' something we should not know. It was only by accident that Smith stumbled into (e). Gettier's point is to show us how our current conception of justified true belief theory is not always enough for us to be said to have knowledge. It allows that attributing of knowledge in situations where we would not want to attribute knowledge. This is the heart of Gettier's examples.

This is exactly what Socrates is trying to show us. He gives us examples of what justification can look like, and he follows them by telling us how justification can fall short. He is showing us where something that is considered justification is not always sufficient. In his first example he shows us how simply stating a belief would often lead to attributing knowledge in situations where we would not want to attribute it because that is "a thing that everyone is able to do more or less readily ..." as Theaetetus says (*Theaetetus*, 206d-e). In the second example he states that requiring a listing of the 'elements' of thing would also be problematic (*Theaetetus*, 207c). We would either be attributing knowledge in situations where it would not exist (the example of the U.S.S. *Arizona* comes to mind) or never attributing knowledge (the example of having to name every part of a wagon shows this). He also rejects this form of justification because it can lead to accidental knowledge (such as the school boy accidentally spelling the name correctly). Finally, Socrates rejects the third example for being circular and requiring knowledge to gain knowledge. In each of these examples, Socrates finds some reason to show how justified true belief theory (and particularly the justification aspect) is insufficient to lead to knowledge.

²¹ Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief," 122.

Through this, we can see how both Socrates and Gettier are arguing for the insufficiency of justification. Gettier uses his examples to show how Smith can be said to 'know' (e) when he does not actually possess that knowledge. Socrates uses his examples to show how certain forms of justification will lead us to attributing knowledge where it does not exist. The main difference is that Gettier's example is broad and not tied to any particular theory of justification while Socrates points to several, at that time widely accepted (at *Theaetetus* 208c Socrates claims the third example of justification he gives is "what the majority of people would say"), theories of justification. Though slightly different, both Gettier and Socrates *were* discussing the same situation. Gettier may presuppose justification while Socrates is examining justification; however, they both are questioning the sufficiency of a justified true belief leading to knowledge. Gettier is just arguing that we need something *more* to find knowledge where as Socrates is arguing that our current conceptions of justification are the problem. If we want to be extremely charitable with this, we could even argue that Gettier, though failing to give Socrates credit for this, is simply arguing that we still do not have enough of an understanding of justification to accept the sufficiency of the justified true belief condition as it pertains to leading to knowledge. Regardless of which conclusion we accept, whether or not to be extremely charitable to Gettier, the situation is the same: both Socrates and Gettier are arguing that there are cases where justification (or justified true belief theory) is insufficient for knowledge. Socrates simply blames the current conceptions of justification for this shortcoming while Gettier merely points out the problem, claiming no particular fiend for the shortcoming.

V. Solutions to the Gettier Problem

Before we begin to examine whether Socrates also presented answers to his Gettier Problem, we must note two things. The first is what we are going to do in this section. This will allow us to set a scope and be as charitable as possible to Socrates. The second is to finish looking at what Socrates asserts about justification. Once we have done both of those things, we can see if Socrates provided us clues to answer the problem of knowledge.

Within this section, we are only trying to see if Socrates answered what has become known as the Gettier Problem. One possible way this could be done is by merely providing the outline to justifications designed to avoid this problem. This is what we are looking for. We are not trying to find a complete analysis of justification. We are merely trying to see if Socrates provided an answer to the specific Gettier-style problem. To find a complete theory, to examine his theories

to see if they answer all objections to justification, or to try to construct a complete theory out of Socrates' hints, is outside the scope of this thesis.

With the first of our two goals accomplished we can move on to the second. Here we are going to see what other implications are involved in his three suggestions and objections regarding justifications.

There is another problem we can infer from Socrates' discussion of the elements and the complex. We must not make the epistemic standard for justification too stringent. This would prevent us from possessing knowledge that we believe intuitively that we should have. If we refer back to the wagon example, and update it a little, this becomes clear. Let us look at a car, the modern wagon. Almost all, if not all, of us can give an account of what a car is. However, our account is more like Socrates' original account of the wagon: wheels, axle, seats, steering wheel, gas, engine, transmission, etc. Some of us can list more; some can list less. However, we all know the *basic elements* that are necessary for something to be called a car. If we had a requirement like Socrates' second account of justification, that is, if we were required to list every part that goes into making a car, most of us would not be able to provide an account for knowing what a car is. If our account requires something as comprehensive as that, knowledge becomes almost impossible.

What could be possible for a solution to this is to merely consider the requirement for the major parts of the object we are trying to know. For example, when we consider our knowledge of a person, we need not list every part of the human body. When we are thinking of a person, we do not need to list every characteristic they possess. We may only need to be familiar with the major/important characteristics or parts of that person. Another possibility is that we need to know all of these things, but only indirectly. This could be accomplished in the same way that we can 'borrow referents.'

Hilary Putnam argued that there is a "division of linguistic labor."²² This idea holds that each person in society has a different job when it comes to words. He uses the example of gold to explain this. Some people have the job of wearing gold. Some people have the job of selling gold. Some people have the job of telling if it really is gold. Not everyone has to be able to do all the jobs. Each person only has to be able to do their job. In the same way, people in a community have different jobs when it comes to words. It is up to the experts to tell us when something is gold and we can apply the word to it. We do not all need to be able to tell that it really is gold to be able to apply the word to it. We have experts that

²² Hilary Putnam, "Meaning and Reference," *The Journal of Philosophy* 70, 19 (1973): 704.

tell us whether something is Au or not. We rely on them to tell us where it is appropriate to use the word 'gold.' In this way we borrow the reference from experts. They tell us that such and such is gold or such and such is water. From then on, we can refer to that substance (or substances that share the properties of it) when we use the word 'water' or 'gold.' We do not need to be able to determine the reference of these words. The experts tell us what the reference is, and we borrow it to allow us to use the word to successfully refer to the substance.²³

In the same way, we can borrow the knowledge from the experts on any subject we choose. This would allow us to have knowledge while still having a strict requirement for justification. This strict requirement may then be able to avoid the Gettier problem. However, we must be wary and not fall into the mistake of which Socrates warns us: we must not reduce justification to merely reciting something.

This knowledge (or justification borrowing as would be a more appropriate term) would fit well with Socrates' earlier statements in the *Theaetetus* about authority. At 144e, Socrates uses the example of tuning a lyre. This example gives two implications. The only one we need to be concerned with is the implications that appeal to authority is a valid form of justification. Socrates asks Theaetetus if they should trust Theodorus about the tuning of a lyre. He notes that they should only do so if they found him to be a musician or knowledgeable about music. Only in fields that Theodorus is reliable in should he be trusted as an authority. At 167c-d Socrates discusses, in Protagoras' place, having authorities in certain areas of knowledge. A gardener is one who can make plants healthy. A teacher is one "who is able to educate his pupils ..." Also at 170a-b Socrates argues that even the common man admits that others know more than himself in certain areas and that we must appeal to their authority on issues. Still at 178d he provides a few more examples of appeal to authority including that of a wine connoisseur. Finally, at 179b Socrates states that we ought to appeal to authority on certain issues.

Nevertheless, we must remember that, even though the dialogue ends in an aporetic manner, there is still truth to be found in the dialogue. Socrates still wants us to finish the discussion. The aporetic ending does not preclude us from finding justification that could answer the Gettier Problem. Simply because Socrates did not hand down the answer to us does not mean that there is no answer to be found.²⁴ We can use his guidance to see what answers may possibly lay within the dialogue.

²³ Putnam, "Meaning and Reference," 704-6.

²⁴ Corlett, *Interpreting Plato's Dialogue*, 47.

With this said, let us begin to see if we can answer the problem Socrates has posed to us. Fine gives us a lead onto how to answer this problem from a general perspective when she argues, “Plato’s *logos* condition on knowledge concerns the content of one’s claim to know: a *logos* must be suitably explanatory. In addition, Plato claims, one counts as knowing a particular object only if one also knows the referents of any terms contained in its *logos*.”²⁵ If Fine is right, this would be a simple solution to the Gettier Problem. Within Gettier’s first case, Smith believes that “The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.” He is also, according to Gettier, justified in this proposition because of other information he has. He takes this justification and changes the referent from Jones to ‘the man who will get the job.’ However, if we take Searle’s Cluster Theory of Proper Names into consideration, we can understand how this solves the problem.²⁶ According to this theory, the referent is whatever satisfies enough of the associated descriptions.²⁷ While ‘the man who will get the job’ is not a proper name, it still has a particular referent. That is, ‘the man’ is supposed to refer to someone specific. In Gettier’s example, Smith believes that the referent is Jones. This is supposedly what justifies Smith in accepting that he knows (e). However, when we acknowledge that the referent of ‘the man who will get the job’ refers to Smith and not Jones, we can see how knowledge could not be attributed to Smith. The information that justified Smith’s believing that Jones would get the job would all have a particular referent, and the descriptions that belong to referent could not be satisfied by Smith. They could only be satisfied by Jones. In this way, Smith could not be justified in believing that Jones. He would only be justified in believing Jones would get the job. That is, Jones is the only person that could satisfy enough of the descriptions that Smith believes are included in the justification. Even without ‘the man who will get the job’ being a proper name, we can understand how Searle’s concept of a description having a particular referent can avoid the Gettier Problem. It allows us to argue that Smith was *not* justified in knowing (e) and, therefore, did not possess knowledge.

However, we still have the concern about circularity from Socrates’ third suggestion. This may not be a wholly bad thing, though. As Alston states, “[D]espite appearances, epistemic circularity will not prevent one’s using what is learned from perception as a basis for knowledge or justified belief that perception

²⁵ Fine, “Knowledge and Logos,” 367.

²⁶ Thanks Robert Francescotti for helping me clarify this point.

²⁷ John R. Searle, “Proper Names,” *Mind* 67, 266 (1958): 170-3.

is reliable.”²⁸ While this has to do with the reliability of perception specifically, the point is still important: circularity is not necessarily a bad thing. As Schmitt argues, “[E]pistemic circularity does not force us to abandon the traditional connection between justifiedness and answering legitimate doubts. An epistemically circular inference can justify a belief ...”²⁹ Even Fine agrees with this when she asserts, “... [Plato] shows that the circularity resulting from his interrelation model is virtuous, not vicious.”³⁰ She continues,

The view that the regress is infinite and linear need not concern us further here, for Plato’s interrelation model of knowledge avoids it: on his view, one does not continue supporting claims to knowledge linearly *ad infinitum*, but only within the confines of a particular framework, music or medicine, say. Still, this leaves us admitting that accounts will circle back on themselves, within a particular discipline. I agree that this sort of circularity results from Plato’s interrelational model. But it is not an unfortunate problem. Rather, it is one of Plato’s significant contributions to epistemology to have seen that we do not possess bits of knowledge in isolated, fragmented segments. One never knows a single entity, in isolation from its ties to other things; all knowledge involves systematic interconnecting. Correspondingly, that one knows a particular object cannot be ascertained solely by looking at what one says about it, in isolation from one’s general epistemic repertoire ...³¹

One way to take this is that Fine is arguing that Plato’s model is based on a coherentist scheme. Sosa states, “Coherentism tries to explain [justification] by appeal simply to relations of coherence among beliefs in [the agent].”³² He goes on to state, “When a belief is epistemically justified, it is so in virtue of being part of a coherent body of beliefs, one sufficiently coherent and appropriately comprehensive.”³³ If we take justification to be coherentist in nature, as Sosa explains it, this would avoid Socrates’ objection to this suggestion. It may not make it, in and of itself, sufficient for knowledge. However, it does allow it to be used as one of the several justifications. This combined with Fine’s other

²⁸ William P. Alston, “Epistemic Circularity,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 47 (1986): 28-9.

²⁹ Frederick F. Schmitt, “What Is Wrong with Epistemic Circularity?” *Philosophical Issues* 14 (2004): 398.

³⁰ Fine, “Knowledge and Logos,” 389.

³¹ Fine, “Knowledge and Logos,” 396.

³² Bonjour and Sosa, *Epistemic Justification*, 107.

³³ Bonjour and Sosa, *Epistemic Justification*, 109.

statement, “Socrates agrees with the third suggestion to this extent: accounts must at least involve uniquely referring descriptions. But he emphasizes that they are not sufficient for knowledge, since they are also necessary for true belief,”³⁴ gives us two conditions that would allow the Gettier Problem to be avoided.

However, it is questionable whether we want to accept this coherentist interpretation of Socrates’ statements. We might want to accept a foundational approach, a reliabilist approach, or some other coherentist approach. However, deciding whether this dialogue fits better with a foundational or coherentist approach is outside the scope of this section. The scope of this section is only to see whether the Gettier Problem can be found within the *Theaetetus* and if Socrates offers any possible answers to the problem he himself poses.

Nevertheless, regardless of which epistemic interpretation or approach we take, the conclusion is the same: we can see that Socrates argued for what has become known as the Gettier Problem long before Gettier. When we looked at Gettier’s article, we saw that it is based on the insufficiency of the justification requirement. Gettier argues that an additional requirement, beyond merely holding a justified true belief, must be fulfilled before it can be said that someone possesses knowledge. He argues that without this additional requirement, whether it be a stronger justification requirement or another requirement, we are forced to attribute knowledge to people in situations where we would rather not. We also looked at the *Theaetetus*. In this dialogue we saw that Socrates suggested three possibilities for justification. He rejected each as not being sufficient for knowledge. In the end he finally said that knowledge is not JTB; there must be something more. Socrates shows that this is the case. He argues the same thing that Gettier claims. He even gives us a Gettier Case to show where the justification fails. It is a case where we would be forced to attribute knowledge where we would not want to. It results in the same alleged accidental ‘knowledge’ that the cases Gettier provides in his own article results in. In all this we can see that Socrates presented what has become known as the Gettier Problem and Gettier Case long before Gettier even laid pen to paper.

³⁴ Fine, “Knowledge and Logos,” 389.