THE FAILURE OF CABBOLET'S FOURTH CONDITION FOR KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT: This paper critically examines Cabbolet's JTB+S account, in particular his proposed fourth condition for knowledge: *S*'s justification for believing that *p* must be sufficient to exclude ¬*p*. Since Cabbolet's proposed fourth condition: (1) does not eliminate Gettier cases, (2) leads to either skepticism or triviality, and (3) suffers from internal inconsistency, I argue that Cabbolet fails to: (4) provide a satisfactory account of knowledge, and (5) provide a correct solution to the Gettier Problem.

KEYWORDS: fourth condition for knowledge, Gettier cases, Gettier Problem, infallibility, justified true belief, knowledge

1. Introduction

In a recent paper, Marcoen J.T.F. Cabbolet (2024) claims to have solved the Gettier Problem via the *JTB+S* account of knowledge. According to the JTB+S account, *S* knows that *p* if and only if the following conditions[1] obtain:

(i) *S* believes that *p*.

(ii) *p* is true.

(iii) *S* has a justification for believing that *p*.

(iv) *S*'s justification is sufficient to exclude ¬*p*. (Cabbolet 2024, 385)

Take note that conditions (i) – (iii) correspond to the familiar *justified true belief* (JTB) account of knowledge. Cabbolet therefore seeks to refine the JTB account by adding a *fourth* condition for knowledge as formulated in (iv) above. With (iv) in place, the JTB+S account defines knowledge as "strongly justified true belief" (Cabbolet 2024, 386). In this paper, I develop a detailed argument against Cabbolet's proposed JTB+S account of knowledge. To be specific, I will prove the following *final conclusion*:

(FC): Cabbolet's (iv)[2] fails both as a definition of knowledge and as a correct

[1] As usual, the conditions that follow should be construed as conditions that are *individually necessary* and *jointly sufficient* for knowledge.

[2] Since Cabbolet's JTB+S account only differs from the JTB account because of (iv), I will only focus

solution to the Gettier Problem.

To prove (FC), I will prove three *intermediate conclusions* (IC) regarding Cabbolet's (iv):

(IC_1): (iv) does not eliminate Gettier cases[3],

(IC_2): (iv) leads to either skepticism or triviality, and

(IC_3): (iv) suffers from internal inconsistency.

With (IC_1) – (IC_3) in place, the paper concludes with a summary of the results that we obtained in critically examining Cabbolet's (iv) and its place in the numerous attempts by epistemologists to provide a satisfactory definition of knowledge *à la* JTB and a correct solution to the Gettier Problem.

2. Eliminating Gettier Cases

In this section, I will prove (IC_1) of our argument against Cabbolet's (iv). The proof makes use of the following premises:

(P_1): Empirical propositions are propositions whose truth values depend on contingent facts about the world.

(P_2): For any empirical proposition p, it is always possible that new evidence could arise which could falsify p.

(P_3): If new evidence could, in principle, overturn a belief, then S's justification is never sufficient to absolutely exclude $\neg p$.

(P_4): Cabbolet's (iv) requires that S's justification be sufficient to exclude $\neg p$.

(P_5): Since empirical propositions can always, in principle, be overturned by new evidence, then Cabbolet's (iv) can never be satisfied for empirical propositions.

From (P_1) – (P_5), we can derive the following conclusion:

(C_1): No empirical proposition can satisfy Cabbolet's (iv).

But (C_1) is not yet our intermediate conclusion. To prove (IC_1), we need another premise:

on (iv) and determine if its addition to the JTB account can help us arrive at a satisfactory definition of knowledge and a correct solution to the Gettier Problem.

[3] In a typical Gettier case, S has a justified true belief that p but fails to know that p. See, Edmund Gettier (1963) for the demonstration. This failure is usually attributed to the presence (or role) of luck (e.g., veritic luck, environmental luck) in Gettier cases.

(P_6): Traditional Gettier cases always involve empirical propositions.[4]

From (C_1) and (P_6), we can derive the following:

(C_2) or (IC_1): Cabbolet's (iv) does not really eliminate Gettier cases.[5]

At this point, we have completed the proof for (IC_1). In the next section, we will prove that Cabbolet's (iv) leads to a dilemma.

3. Skepticism or Triviality

The proof for (IC_2) relies on the following premises:

(P_7): If Cabbolet's (iv) requires that justification be completely sufficient to exclude $\neg p$, then knowledge becomes infallible.[6]

(P_8): If knowledge requires infallibility, then no empirical knowledge is possible – leading to skepticism.

(P_9): If Cabbolet's (iv) is weakened to mean that justification is only strong enough to make $\neg p$ unlikely, then (iv) fails to differentiate itself from the JTB account.

(P_{10}): If Cabbolet's (iv) is equivalent to the standard JTB account, then it does not improve upon the traditional definition and is therefore trivial.

From the foregoing premises, we can derive our second intermediate conclusion:

(C_3) or (IC_2): Cabbolet's (iv) leads to a dilemma:

a) If we interpret (iv) *strongly*, it makes knowledge impossible.

b) If we interpret it *weakly*, it collapses into standard justification and is thus, trivial.

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[4] For example, in Edmund Gettier's (1963) Case I and Case II, we have the following empirical propositions: (a) *The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket*, and (b) *Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona*, respectively. Alvin Goldman (1967) even explicitly states that his causal theory will only deal with knowledge of empirical propositions (357). This explains why, for example, in the famous Fake Barn Case, we have the following empirical proposition: *That's a barn*. Other notable Gettier cases that involve empirical propositions, include (but are not limited to) the following: Roderick Chisholm's (1989) Sheep in the Field Case, Brian Skyrms' (1967) Pyromaniac Case, and many others.

[5] Since traditional Gettier cases involve empirical propositions, and no empirical proposition can satisfy (iv), we can say that by adding (iv) to the JTB account, Cabbolet does not actually eliminate Gettier cases. Instead, Cabbolet's (iv) rules out all empirical knowledge.

[6] This means that *S*'s justification for believing that *p* must be so strong that error is impossible.

At this point, we have the necessary elements to prove the third and final problem that plagues Cabbolet's (iv): it suffers from internal inconsistency.

4. Internal Inconsistency

To prove that Cabbolet's (iv) is internally inconsistent, consider the following premises:

(P_{11}): Cabbolet claims that knowledge is strongly justified true belief, implying that justification is strong but not necessarily infallible.

(P_{12}): However, Cabbolet (2024) also claims that if (i), (iii), and (iv) are satisfied, then (ii) is automatically satisfied (387). Essentially, this means that justification *guarantees* truth.

(P_{13}): If justification guarantees truth, then knowledge must be infallible.

(P_{14}): But if knowledge is fallible as the JTB+S account suggests, then justification does not guarantee truth.

(P_{15}): These two claims contradict each other:

(a) If knowledge is fallible, then justification does not guarantee truth.

(b) If justification guarantees truth, then knowledge must be infallible.

From the premises above, we can derive the following:

(C_4) or (IC_3): Cabbolet's (iv) suffers from internal inconsistency.

In other words, Cabbolet cannot hold both that knowledge is strongly justified true belief (but fallible) and that justification guarantees truth. One of these claims must be abandoned.

5. Conclusion

In summary, I demonstrated that (IC_1) – (IC_3) of our detailed argument against Cabbolet's JTB+S account obtain. Recall that by (IC_1) – (IC_3) we mean the following:

(IC_1): (iv) does not eliminate Gettier cases.

(IC_2): (iv) leads to a dilemma.

(IC_3): (iv) suffers from internal inconsistency.

Since (IC_1) – (IC_3) obtain, we have good reasons to believe that our final conclusion also obtains:

(FC): Cabbolet's (iv) fails both as a definition of knowledge and as a correct solution to the Gettier Problem.

What can possibly explain this failure? Ultimately, I think it stems from a mistaken view that the problem in Gettier cases is the *weak* justification that *S* has regarding their belief in a given proposition *p*. To substantiate this observation, consider the following:

> Analyzing, what Gettier's problem lays bare is that *anything goes* as a justification in the JTB definition: the two cases discussed by Gettier show that if anything counts as justification, even in those cases in which we can barely speak of a justification, then we end up with cases in which the three conditions of the JTB definition are satisfied, while we cannot speak of knowledge. The solution is therefore to eliminate these weak cases, and to add as a fourth condition that the justification must be sufficient to exclude ¬*p*. (Cabbolet 2024, 385)

This is unfortunate because, even if we restrict ourselves to Gettier's original cases, he already assumes that *S* has *strong* evidence for believing that *p*. Interestingly, the concept that most contemporary epistemologists would expect in a proposed definition of knowledge *à la* JTB and a proposed solution to the Gettier Problem – luck and its role in the emergence of Gettier cases – is entirely absent from Cabbolet's paper. This omission leaves a crucial gap in addressing the Gettier Problem.

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