

How Gettier helps to understand justification

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There are Gettier cases for justification. I will describe two such cases, cases involving veridical hallucination. In the first place, these cases show that rational, evidenced belief need not be justified. In the second place, they show that justification has the same kind of abstract structure that knowledge has. In Gettier cases, a certain status is achieved and a corresponding competence is exercised, but the status is not reached because of the exercise of the competence (but luckily). In the good, non-Gettier cases, the same status is achieved in virtue of competence. For knowledge, the status is being true, and the competence is a kind of truth tracking ability (cf. Sosa 2007; Greco 2010). For justification, I submit, the status is *being evidenced*, and the corresponding competence is a reason tracking ability. Exercizing a reason tracking ability makes the resulting belief rational, since reason tracking abilities are rational capacities. A belief that p has the status of being evidenced, by definition, if and only if there is some evidence for p. It is supported by evidence, in a certain sense; it is in accordance with reasons. (I will use the notions 'evidence' and 'reason' synonymously here.)

The two Gettier cases that I will describe show that 'evidentialist accounts of justification' are false. They provide at best necessary, but not sufficient conditions. According to such evidentialist accounts,

- (E) A subject's belief that p is (*prima facie*) justified if and only if
- (i) she possesses some evidence e for p and
 - (ii) she bases her belief that p on her possession of evidence e for p.

(Cf. Conee and Feldman 1985 who speak of 'well-foundedness'.) Possession of evidence is understood in the factive way, i.e., as entailing the existence of evidence. And evidence itself is understood in the non-psychological sense: fingerprints, traces, and all sorts of indicators count as paradigmatic pieces of evidence.

I will now briefly describe two (hypothetical) cases in which a subject is in a Gettier condition with respect to justification. Both cases involve veridical hallucination. In a case of veridical hallucination a subject undergoes a perceptual experience whose perceptual representational content is correct (satisfied), but only by mere luck. It is a mere coincidence that the way things appear to the hallucinating subject is indeed a way things are. We can also suppose that the subject is not aware of undergoing a hallucination. So the two cases are cases of unrecognized veridical hallucinations.

Consider the first case, the 'tomato case'. Suppose that Daniel has taken some drug and is hallucinating. His hallucination involves a perceptual experience as of a red, tomato-shaped object in

front of him. So there appears to be a red, tomato-shaped object to him. In fact, and by mere coincidence, there is such a red, tomato-shaped object in front of him. So the representational content of his perceptual experience is correct (satisfied).

We can suppose that in normal conditions for visual perception, Daniel is quite good at perceiving the shapes and colors of objects like tomatoes correctly – he possesses ordinary, normal visual perceptual capacities with respect to these kinds of properties and objects. Now, however, he is not in normal conditions, since he has taken a drug which induces hallucinations in him. Nevertheless, he is exercising his normal abilities to form perceptual beliefs on the basis of perceptual experiences. Therefore, by exercising these abilities, he forms the belief that there is a tomato in front of him. The belief is thus formed in a rational way; it is a rational belief. Only because the conditions for exercising the relevant perceptual abilities are so bad is it the case that his perceptual experience is merely luckily correct. (In normal conditions, we can assume, his perceptual experiences are not merely luckily correct but very reliably correct.) But since a red, tomato-shaped object is present and is a piece of evidence for the presence of a tomato, Daniel's belief has evidence in its favor. It is supported by real evidence – it is 'evidenced', as I call it. And Daniel is in possession of this evidence, since he represents it perceptually. (I will present some arguments for this claim.) Things appear to him to be a certain way in his perceptual experience, and things really are that way. Nevertheless, I submit, Daniel's belief is not justified. Intuitively, it is rational and evidenced (and true), but not justified. Therefore, in the tomato case Daniel's belief is a kind of 'Gettier case for justification'.

In the second case, the 'wax case', everything is just like before, with the exception that the real tomato is replaced by a wax tomato exhibiting the same appearance as the real tomato. Perceptually, the wax object is not distinguishable from the real tomato. Daniel's perceptual experience, again, is hallucinatory, but veridical. There really is a red, tomato-shaped object in front of him – and that's how things appear to Daniel perceptually. He forms the same belief, namely, that there is a tomato in front of him. This time, the belief is false.

Again, his belief is formed in a rational way, by exercising normal and quite good perceptual abilities. (Daniel still has and exercises normal, good perceptual abilities. Only the conditions for exercising them are bad, since Daniel has taken the drug.) And again, there is (misleading) evidence for the presence of a tomato. So Daniel's belief in the wax case is rational and evidenced. Nevertheless, it is not justified. Therefore, in the wax case Daniel's belief is again a kind of 'Gettier case for justification'.

In the wax case, Daniel's belief is false. Thus it cannot be a Gettier case for knowledge. The second case, therefore, shows the independence of Gettier cases for justification from Gettier cases for knowledge. (In the first case, we do not have a Gettier case either, since the belief is not justified.) The two phenomena are really different.

References:

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Sosa, E. (2007), *A Virtue Epistemology Vol 1.*, OUP.