

## PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE

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The article claims that there is a connection between the theory of perception and the account of knowledge one is able to provide. Using the standard definition of knowledge as justified true belief, the permutations of justifiedness and the truth values allow the introduction of Gettier situations. The study of cases shows us that the object of perception has its role in this. There are two basic approaches to the direct or indirect form of perception, coextensive with the intensity of the mind/brain activity in the process, and thus in explaining the stimulus to be a distal or proximal one. The Gettier cases are the ones where the mind/brain could be said to play crucial role in perception.

### I.

1. There is a connection between the theory of perception and the account of knowledge one is able to provide. To explain this connection, the best way to proceed is to see in which form the problem of knowledge usually arises.

2. The problem of defining knowledge has recently taken the form of so called Gettier problem.

Gettier problem is formulated using the definition of knowledge as (a) justified (b) true (c) belief.

Now, belief alone, meaning condition (c), can not be enough, because if I believe that it is raining, it is perfectly possible, that I only believe this, without knowing it. Justification is not enough, either. For, consider the situation where I am in a room with the windows shut, and there is no way for me to check what the environment outside of the room looks like. Assume further that I have some justification, (a), to believe this, thus (c) the justification being for example that I hear some tiny rain-like sounds on the window. But, suppose further, that the justification for my belief is not the right one, that those tiny rain-like sounds are actually the sound produced by the wind blowing in a blanket hanging from my window, or that there are some tiny birds eating corn on the window's ground. In this case the justification connected with the belief will not do. Because, as I open the window,

I see that my belief has not been true, and according to this, I have to change this belief of mine with a more appropriate one. So, it is pretty clear that what we need for our beliefs to be knowledge is not just the element of justification, but something else as well. And this we find in condition (b), the justified belief has to be true if it is to count as knowledge.

This means that in the previous case as described, the true belief would have been: *It is not raining outside*, and if I hold a belief with such a content in this situation, this belief is justified because it is true.

Here I am taking the externalist position according to which truth is a component of justifiedness.

Take another example (Hodges, 1977). We have a pair of sentences  
He knows I'm at home.

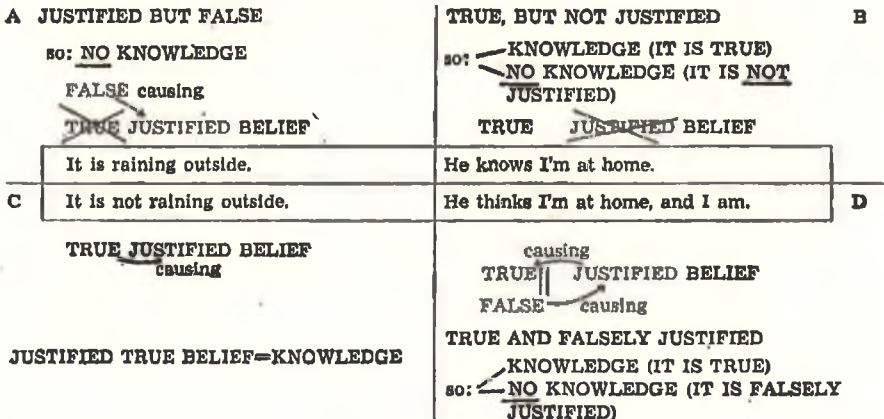
He thinks I'm at home, and I am.

where the first sentence is false and the second sentence is true in the following situation:

»I'm normally not at home at this hour, because it's my evening for Yoga. But they cancelled the class, so I stayed at home. The man watching the house had been told I was at the class; but he saw Tim walking into the house just now, and he thought it was me coming home from the class. Tim and I are often mistaken for each other.«

Let us compare the two situations.

3. Only the second situation is a Gettier-situation. Let us look at the diagram to see why:



It is easy to explain why only the second situation is the Gettier one: only this one has choices.

But let me look attentively at each sentence in both examples and ask myself whether that one could express some knowledge (in the situations described).

## Case A:

P believes: *It is raining outside*, (and it is not raining, only the sound is like the sound of rain)

Here it is clear that in the described situation this cannot be knowledge. It is belief only, with a justification. But this enough that the justification does not lead to truth. So, P has no knowledge. What is important here is that the source of justification is not appropriate.

## Case C:

P believes: *It is not raining outside*.

Here we have knowledge, because the belief is justified and the justification is caused by the appropriate means, by a true cause. So, there is no problem here.

P truly but without justification believes I am at home.

Here we have a dilemma: the sentence can express knowledge in the situation described, but it is possible as well to say that it does not.

Let us look at the two possibilities, and be attentive to the source of justification in doing this:

a) He knows I'm at home. He has the belief concerning my being at home, and the belief is true. Here we have a strong inclination to say that this is a case of knowledge. This is because belief is true.

a') But again, we have a stronger inclination to say that this is not knowledge, if we think about the fact that the belief expressed, although it is true, is not justified. So there is a true belief, but we somehow feel that it could not be called knowledge, because the justification is lacking. Missing the justification, the person in question misses the knowledge as well, we feel, although he is entertaining true belief. We feel that an important part of the conditions to call a belief knowledge is missing. If a person is wrong in his justification, we argue, there can be no knowledge.

(a—a') But I would like to point out that there is a dilemma here, because we have the inclination to say that the person has the knowledge and we have as well the inclination to say that he has not any knowledge. The source of information is here, but there is no appropriate *link* between the belief and its external truth-givers.

## Case D:

P justifiably believes that I am at home, I am at home, but his belief is mediated by a false premise.

Here again we have a dilemma, as we try to determine whether we have a case of knowledge or not. The sentence at first sight does not seem to express knowledge, but a little reflection can make us think that it does.

a) P thinks I'm at home, and I am. At first, this does not seem to be a case of knowledge. The reason is that the belief is »justified« in a perverse way — the source of justification is false (the man watching the house saw Tim walking into it and not myself). So this does not seem to be a case of knowledge.

a') But there is one other intuition that says we have a case of knowledge here, although we do not have the right source of information. This is the intuition supported by the fact that, although the source of justification is False, this False source activates a True source of belief (Tim as source of information so acts on me as a source of justification). And so one feels that this is a case of knowledge, because belief is justified and true. But although the right source of justification comes into the picture, the person entertaining the belief does not know about it. So this seems to knock the knowledge out. But again, as here we have all the tree conditions (a, b, c) listed at the beginning of this article, we are inclined to say that the above sentence expresses knowledge.

(a—a') As in case a

(a—a') As in case a, we here have trouble with the *link* which ties together the belief with its source of justification. But the situation is different from the previous one in the sense that the justification is not absent; it is present. Still more, it has an active part to play: it acts as a »transducer« of the False source of justification to the true source of justification. It does this in such a manner that the true source of justification fits in an appropriate way. So justification, although it causes the True source to move in, blurs the issue in such a manner that we do not even have the feeling we have a case of knowledge here.

So we have a situation in the second pair of cases (B and D), the Gettier ones, that the dilemma arises because of something that is happening with the justification, and the link between the source of justification and belief.

It is now becoming gradually clear what is important for something, for a belief, to become a piece of knowledge.

It does not seem difficult to conclude that it is the source of justification, the »object«, True or False.

## II.

If the external object (or state of affairs) is crucial for a belief to have a status of knowledge, we might draw an analogy with perception.

So I have to say something in a few words about perception. If I am right, then we schematically dispose of two basically different approaches to perception. The first one is the traditional one where the relation to the object is important (B. Russell would be an example). In this sense, it would be important to establish whether perception is direct or indirect, meaning that we have immediate access to the object, or that some other object interposes itself in our way of access to it.

The second approach uses the distinction of immediate or mediate forms of perception as well. But it does not point to the object, it is not the object which is in the focus of dispute. What is important is the activity of mind/brain. The object comes into the picture eventually, but there is the question whether mind plays an active part in perception. An example will help clarify this. I shall start with the traditional account of perception and reverse it. Let us say that John perceives a horse. At this stage it seems that only the object is important: the perception would be different if he perceived a cat instead. And perception seems to be direct. But let us say that John perceives a written number 32. What does he need is to perceive it as number 32 and not as a pair of signs? A whole system of arithmetical elements and some elementary rules to combine them. But this is good enough to deduce that the perception of the horse will need a similar complicated apparatus, if we want to see a thing as a horse.

This is a commonplace in psychological theories of perception, but its relevance can be glanced from this simple example.

So, the object one perceives has to be there. But the dispute does not center on the object, once the mind is moved in decisively. The dispute touches the question whether the role of mind/brain in perceiving the external object is decisive or not. In these theories the contribution of mind is criterial for directness/indirectness:

If the information coming to the mind from an external object is decisively worked-through by the mind, we have a case of indirect perception. If there is a decisively smaller amount of mind/brain engagement in the elaboration of information, we have a case of direct perception.

The two approaches can be respectively labelled object oriented approach and process oriented approach.

Now in the case of Gettier-problems, we have seen that on the level of belief, both »object« (state of affairs, or True/False) and process (linkage, causation) play a role in determining whether a given belief is knowledge.

Given general similarities between the notions of »knowledge« and »perception« (mental state + factitive presupposition + appropriate link), it is to be expected that we could learn the lesson from Gettier cases: object is not enough, and process counts, and vice versa.

The Gettier-cases, the third and the fourth one, present a clear parallel to the new kind of theory of perception, where the mind/brain plays a crucial role in saying whether a relation is direct or indirect.

But at this point I have to say something about how the object of perception is treated in the new theory of perception. If the working-through of information coming from the external object by the mind/brain is crucial, then we have proximal control.

If, on the other hand, the role of mind/brain in working-through the information stemming from the external object is minimal, then we have a case of distal control, and the relation to the object is »direct« in this case.

With this apparatus, we can look at the Gettier cases.

I would suggest that the Gettier cases be treated as involving »distal« and »proximal« approaches to content respectively.\*

So the object is still important in this account, but there is something else that is important as well, namely the elaboration of the external information by the mind/brain.

If we state the third and the fourth case in the above apparatus, we have the following situation:

Case B:

We have a *distal object*, True, and this object is *proximally introduced*, in a peculiar way.

Case D:

In a way, we have a *proximal object* (he's thinking about me and this is True), but *distally introduced* (he saw my friend, and so his belief about seeing me is False).

This means that in the situation as it stands there is real knowledge about proximal object. But this knowledge is the knowledge which is not caused by the external, real object.

The belief here is introduced in the wrong distal way, through the wrong real object (»Tim«).

I have a strong inclination to interpret the Gettier cases in the way of relying on the object. Why?

Because I think that once the new theory of perception is introduced, and the role of mind in perception is accentuated, it would be wrong to cut the object's part in the perceptual story away.

The morals of Gettier cases are thus naturalistic and anti-solipsistic. What is needed is a theory of processing which takes into account the distal »control« of content, in the same way the reliabilist epistemologies take into account the external component of justification.

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\* A theory of content is »distal« (more precisely, oriented to distal control of the content), iff it claims that the content should be described in terms of its distal source, »proximal« otherwise.

I hope that my crude skech has made this claim sound at least to some plausible degree.

#### LITERATURE:

H o d g e s: Logic, Penguin 1977

#### MATJAZ POTRČ: PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE

##### S a ž e t a k

U ovom se članku tvrdi da postoji veza između teorije percepcije i teorije znanja. Koristeći standardnu definiciju znanja kao opravdanog istinitog vjerovanja, permutacije opravdanosti i istinosnih vrijednosti dopuštaju uvođenje Gettierovih situacija. Proučavanje ovih slučajeva pokazuje da objekt percepcije ima u tome svoju ulogu. Postoje dva temeljna pristupa direktnoj ili indirektnoj formi percepcije, koekstenzivna s intenzivnom aktivnosti svijesti/mozga u tom procesu, pa tako i u objašnjenju stimulusa kao distalnog ili proksimalnog. Gettierovi slučajevi su oni za koje se može reći da u njima svijest/mozak igra bitnu ulogu u percepciji.