

Infallibilism

Stephen Wright

University of Sheffield

Infallibilism

Necessity

S knows that p only if S's belief that p is supported by infallible justification.

And

Sufficiency

If S's belief that p is supported by infallible justification, then S knows that p .

Sufficiency

'[a]ccording to the infallibilist, it is impossible to justifiedly believe something false. This has the tidy result that justification is sufficient to convert belief into knowledge'

(Sturgeon, 1993, p. 156).

Gettier Cases

- ▶ Are the fallibilist's problem:

'one way to solve the Gettier problem is to give up the independence between the justification condition and the truth condition'

(Zagzebski, 1994, p. 72).

See?

'the Gettier cases turn on the possibility of a person's having a justified, yet false, belief'

(Kaplan, 1985, p. 353).

On the Other Hand...

Here's a case:

Someone (infallibly) believes that X drank a bottle of poison and (infallibly) believes that anyone who drinks such poison will be dead within 24 hours. 24 hours later, the observer comes to believe that X is dead. Unbeknownst to the observer, X was actually run over by a bus before the poison took effect.

Isn't This Knowledge?

Suppose our observer reasons as follows:

(1) Anyone who drinks the poison would die within 24 hours.

(2) X drank the poison 24 hours ago.

Therefore

(3) The poison has killed X.

Therefore

(4) X is dead.

False Beliefs

- ▶ There's a false belief in this.
- ▶ And it looks like this is ordinarily sufficient to stop someone's belief being knowledge.
- ▶ This is what we learn from Gettier cases.

Things I'm NOT Saying

- ▶ That all beliefs formed through reasoning from falsehoods aren't knowledge.
- ▶ That all Gettier cases involve false beliefs.
- ▶ That this is a Gettier case in a deep and important sense.

Objection 1 – Fallibility

- ▶ How are we supposed to make sense of the idea that X really has *infallible* justification?
- ▶ This is an objection to the idea of necessity.

Objection 2 – More Fallibility

- ▶ Our believer's grounds contain a falsehood, so they aren't infallible.
- ▶ This doesn't mean that her premises don't guarantee the truth of her belief.

Objection 3 – It's Unintuitive

- ▶ Intuitively, it looks like the infallibility trumps the falsehood.
- ▶ Maybe that's so, but then I don't know what to make of this case. It's looks structurally similar to cases that aren't knowledge, so why does infallibility make the difference?

That's all...

... thanks for listening.