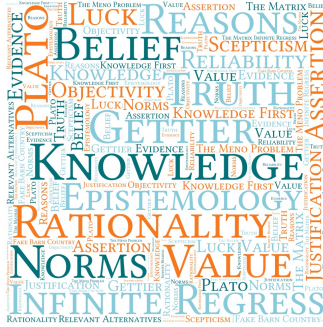




Knowledge, Information & Society

JAKE CHANDLER

Responding to Gettier: No Defeaters



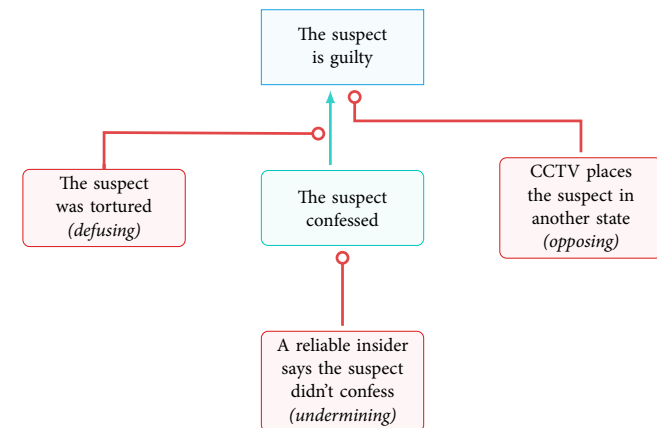
'No Defeaters'

- Here is a seemingly more modest way of strengthening NO FALSE GROUNDS:
NO DEFEATERS: *S*'s belief that *P* was not inferred from premises whose support for *P* is 'defeated' by some true proposition *D*
- **Defeaters** for the support provided by some premises either
 - (1) provide grounds to doubt the premises, or
 - (2) provide grounds to think the truth of these premises would fail to provide a sufficient reason to believe the conclusion (*P*)
- There are three broad types of defeaters
- I'll illustrate these wrt an inference that a suspect is guilty from an assumption that he confessed

Types of defeaters

- **Undermining:** give a reason to doubt the premises are true
 'A reliable insider says the suspect *didn't* confess.'
- **Defusing:** give a reason to doubt the premises are at all relevant to the conclusion
 'The confession was extracted under torture.'
- **Opposing:** give at least as strong a reason to doubt the conclusion as the premises provide for believing it
 'CCTV places the suspect in another state.'
- Note: the terminology is mine

Graphically



Some features of the proposal

- It strengthens NO FALSE GROUNDS:
 - If S 's premise E is false, then $\neg E$ provides an undermining defeater
- It is intuitively weaker than INFALLIBILITY
- It entails TRUTH:
 - If S 's conclusion P is false, $\neg P$ provides an opposing defeater
- It handles FORD and CLOCK:
 - Smith's not owning a Ford provides an undermining defeater in relation to my belief that Smith owns an American car
 - The clock's having stopped provides a defusing defeater in relation to my belief that it is 12 o'clock

A problem for the alternative

- But how about:
 - ELVIS:** Mo believes that Elvis is still alive and knows the following proposition P to be true: that *he believes that Elvis is still alive*. But Elvis is dead (D) and had Mo believed D , he would no longer have been justified in believing that P (since, by introspection, he would have known that he believes that Elvis is dead).
- We have a seeming failure of necessity (this version of No DEFEATERS would fail, but we still have knowledge)

An alternative formulation

- Traditionally, NO DEFEATERS has been characterised somewhat differently, using **counterfactual conditionals** (sentences of the form "Had it been the case that P , it would have been the case that Q ")
- Lehrer's (1965) proposal:
 - There is no true proposition D , such that, had it been the case that S believed that D , S would no longer have been justified in believing that P
- This formulation also handles FORD and CLOCK fine:
 - Had I believed that Smith doesn't own a Ford, I would no longer have been justified in believing that he owns an American car
 - Had I believed that the clock had stopped, I would no longer have been justified in believing that it is 12 o'clock

No DEFEATERS defeated?

- Here is an alleged problem for *both* formulations of No DEFEATERS (Lehrer & Paxson 1969):
 - MAD MRS GRABIT:** I see someone, who looks very much like my best friend Tom Grabit, steal a book in the library (E). Upon this experience, I form the strongly justified belief that Tom stole the book (P). This belief is indeed true: Tom has been having to cut corners and save on his textbook expenses. However, Tom's mother, Mrs Grabit, has been telling library staff and police that Tom was on holiday and that it was Tom's twin brother Dom who was in the library at the time of the theft (D). However—further twist—Mrs Grabit is demented and her testimony is the product of her over-indulgent imagination (D'). My belief that P has a true defeater (namely D) but still constitutes knowledge.
- Again: an alleged failure of necessity (No DEFEATERS fails, but we still have knowledge)

No DEFEATERS defeated? (ctd)

- Rejoinder 1:
Claim either (a) that my belief does not, as suggested, constitute knowledge or (b) that Mrs Grabit's testimony does not constitute a defeater
- Rejoinder 2:
Require that the effect of the defeater *D* be not itself be 'neutralised' (as it is by *D'*)
- Objection to Rejoinder 2:
This still seems to weak, since, in the Gettier cases that we have considered, the defeater *D* is itself neutralised (e.g. the defeat provided by the clock's having stopped is neutralised by the fact that it stopped 12 hours ago)

References

- Goldman, A.I. 1976. Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 73: 771–791.
- Lehrer, K. 1965. Knowledge, Truth, and Evidence. *Analysis* 25(5).
- Lehrer, K. & T. Paxson 1969. Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 66(8):225