

Applications in Epistemology: The Analysis of Knowledge

I. Grounding the Gettier Problem

The Gettier problem is often characterized as the project of seeking a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing that p , like so:

S knows that p if and only if _____.

There are two ways in which grounding could interact with this project and explain why it has proven so difficult to carry through successfully:

1. Maybe what we should plug in for “_____” will appeal, in part, to the grounding relation.

This would explain the lack of progress on the Gettier problem in the latter half of the 20th century: that was before philosophers were willing to appeal to the notion of grounding in their theories.

Solutions to the Gettier problem that make use of the grounding relation (or a similar notion, such as truth-making) have been proposed by Ernest Sosa, John Greco, Dale Jacquette, Adrian Heathcote, Sven Bernecker, and others.

2. Maybe we should characterize the analysis of knowledge in terms of the grounding relation; that is, maybe what we are seeking when we attempt to solve the Gettier problem is way of filling in the following (where the “because” picks out the grounding relation):

S knows that p if and only if, and because, _____.

This would also explain the lack of progress on the Gettier problem in the late 20th century: philosophers during that time were not thinking about whether a proposed set of necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge constitutes a plausible full grounds for knowledge.

In favor of this proposal: advocates of the so-called KK principle believe

(KK) S knows that p if and only if S is in a position to know that she knows that p .

But advocates of KK never put this forward as an analysis of knowledge, because it is not very plausible to suppose that the left-hand side of KK is grounded in the right-hand side.

Chudnoff endorses both of these ways of bringing the grounding relation to bear on the Gettier problem.

His way of developing the second point is extremely interesting:

Chudnoff's proposal: The Gettier problem is the search for a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge that are also full grounds for knowledge.

However, it's not true in general that a fact's full grounds necessitate that fact, and facts about knowledge are one such case in which full grounds fail to necessitate.

So the Gettier problem itself is insoluble, although the related task of searching for the full grounds of various types of knowledge is a viable and worthwhile project.

Or, at least, this is one plausible way of interpreting Chudnoff's proposal.

(Chudnoff is not consistent in what he takes the Gettier project to be: sometimes it is defined as the project of seeking necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge which are explanatory [“What Should a Theory of Knowledge Do?” pp. 561, 571; “Grounding and Entailment,” p. 32], other times he defines it as the project of seeking necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge whether or not those conditions are explanatory [“What Should...,” pp. 561, 562, 572, 577].)

II. Chudnoff on Why Full Grounds Do Not Necessitate

Like Dancy, Chudnoff denies the following:

the (simplified) necessitation principle: If $[p]$ fully grounds $[q]$, then $[p]$ necessitates $[q]$.

note #1: Following a point that James Bondarchuk and Tom Donaldson made in our second meeting, I am going to translate Chudnoff's talk of entailment into talk of necessitation, since Chudnoff's identification of entailment with necessitation is both controversial and not needed for his purposes.

note #2: I say "simplified" since here I neglect the fact that grounding is a one-many relation.

Chudnoff's argument against the necessitation principle starts with the following two widely held principles:

- (1) *first explanatory principle:* If $[p]$ fully grounds $[q]$, then $[p]$ explains $[q]$.
- (2) *non-monotonicity:* If $[p]$ fully grounds $[q]$, then it does not follow that $[p],[r]$ fully grounds $[q]$.

An example of non-monotonicity:

[The ball is vermillion] fully grounds [The ball is red].
[The ball is vermillion],[Socrates is a philosopher] does not fully ground [The ball is red].

Intuitively, monotonicity fails here because [Socrates is a philosopher] is *not explanatorily relevant* to [The ball is red]. More generally, Chudnoff holds:

- (3) *second explanatory principle:* If $[p]$ partially grounds $[q]$, then $[p]$ is explanatorily relevant to $[q]$.

(Chudnoff doesn't explicitly add the "partially" to (3), but this must be what he has in mind, or else (3) would not explain the vermillion ball example.)

Chudnoff insists that the following is a "trivial" consequence of (3):

- (4) If there are $[p]$, $[q]$, and $[c]$ such that:
 - (a) $[p]$ grounds $[q]$,
 - (b) $[p]$ does not necessitate $[c]$,
 - (c) $[[p]$ grounds $[q]]$ necessitates $[c]$, and
 - (d) $[c]$ is not explanatorily relevant to $[q]$,
 then:
 - (e) $[p]$ grounds $[q]$ even though $[p]$ does not necessitate $[q]$.

(Note that in his first article Chudnoff dropped a "necessarily" in (c) that he fixed in his second article.)

I find it completely baffling why Chudnoff thinks (4) is a consequence of (3).

If "grounds" in (e) means "partially grounds," then (e) is not the denial of the necessitation principle, as Chudnoff needs it to be.

If "grounds" in (a) and (c) means "partially grounds" and in (e) means "fully grounds," then the first conjunct of (e) does not follow from (a), (b), (c), (d), and (3).

If "grounds" in (a), (c), and (e) means "fully grounds," then I don't see how to get (e) unless we assume the following:

- (f) If $[p]$ grounds $[q]$ and $[p]$ necessitates $[q]$, then $[p]$ necessitates $[[p]$ fully grounds $[q]]$.

But (a), (b), (c), and (f) on their own entail (e), so there is no need to appeal to (3) in securing (4).

Maybe (a) should be "Either $[p]$ fully grounds $[q]$, or $[p],[c]$ fully grounds $[q]$," and "grounds" in (c) and (e) should be interpreted to mean "fully grounds." Then (3) does entail (4) if we assume (f) above.

The final step in Chudnoff's argument is to insist on the following substantive claim:

- (5) There are $[p]$, $[q]$, and $[c]$ such that:
- (a) $[p]$ grounds $[q]$,
 - (b) $[p]$ does not necessitate $[c]$,
 - (c) $[[p]$ grounds $[q]]$ necessitates $[c]$, and
 - (d) $[c]$ is not explanatorily relevant to $[q]$.

In support of (5), Chudnoff appeals to basically the same example that Dancy does when defending holism about reasons for belief:

Red/Green Switch: There are situations in which $J = [S$ is justified in believing that there is a red light ahead] obtains in virtue of $V = [S$ is having a visual experience as of a red light ahead]. However, V does not necessitate J : if V and $P = [S$ knows that she has taken a pill that makes green things look red] both obtain, then J does not obtain.

(Actually, this isn't quite right, since it suggests that in *all* situations in which V and P obtain, J does not obtain. However, Chudnoff has neglected the possibility of defeater defeaters. For example, in some situations in which V , P , and $A = [S$ knows that she has taken an antidote for the pill that makes green things look red] obtain, it is plausible to think that J obtains.)

Following Woodward, Chudnoff holds:

- (6) $[c]$ is explanatorily relevant to $[q]$ only if $[c]$ contributes to understanding why $[q]$ obtains.

From this, he derives two constraints on explanatory relevance:

- (7) *non-vacuity:* $[c]$ is explanatorily relevant to $[q]$ only if $[c]$ is not vacuous given $[q]$.
- (8) *naturalness:* $[c_1],[c_2],[c_3],\dots$ are explanatorily relevant to $[q]$ only if $[c_1],[c_2],[c_3],\dots$ are not too unnatural relative to $[q]$.

It is a little obscure how Chudnoff intends to move from (7) and (8) via (4) and (5) to the denial of the necessitation principle. The only way I can figure out how to do so involves circumventing (4) and (5) altogether. Let us define the following:

$\Gamma = [S$ does not know she has taken a pill that makes green things look red],[S does not suspect that the lighting condition are off],[S does not suspect that she is hallucinating],...

ND = [The *prima facie* justification for which V suffices is undefeated]

Chudnoff argues that the following follow from (8) and (7), respectively:

- (9) Γ is not explanatorily relevant to J (since it is too unnatural)
- (10) ND is not explanatorily relevant to J (since it is vacuous)

My best attempt at interpreting Chudnoff is to take him to be insisting on the following:

- (5*) In Red/Green Switch, we have:
- (a*) Either V fully grounds J , or V,Γ fully grounds J , or V,ND fully grounds J ;
 - (b*) V does not necessitate Γ , and V does not necessitate ND;
 - (c*) $[V$ fully grounds $J]$ necessitates Γ , and $[V$ fully grounds $J]$ necessitates ND.

From (3), (f), (9), (10), and (5*), we can derive the following:

- (11) In Red/Green Switch, V fully grounds J , even though V does not necessitate J .

III. Chudnoff's Solution to the Gettier-Problem Problem

According to Lycan, the growing consensus that there is something particularly hopeless, irrelevant, or misguided about the Gettier problem gives rise to a meta-problem:

the Gettier-problem problem: What, if anything, is distinctively wrong with the Gettier problem?

Chudnoff's solution to the Gettier-problem problem rests on his claim that full grounds do not necessitate.

According to Chudnoff, the following "has a good chance to be the correct view of [the grounds of] perceptual knowledge" ("What Should...", p. 570):

the Simple View: If S has perceptual knowledge of $\langle p \rangle$, then [S knows $\langle p \rangle$] is fully grounded in [S believes $\langle p \rangle$ on the basis of a perceptual experience E such that (i) E is an experience in which it perceptually appears to S that p , and (ii) E is an experience in which S is aware of something x such that: x makes $\langle p \rangle$ true.]

However, Chudnoff insists that this is one of those cases in which a fact's full grounds do not necessitate that fact. Consider the following example:

Fake Barn Country: Henry is driving through the countryside with his son. He looks to his right and sees a (real) barn in broad daylight, under good viewing conditions, etc. As a result, he comes to believe \langle That's a barn \rangle . However, in the vicinity there are a large number of fake, papier-mâché barns, any of which would have fooled Henry into thinking it was a real barn.

Many people's intuitive verdict about this case is that, in it, Henry does not know \langle That's a barn \rangle .

However, it is plausible to suppose that this is a case in which the full grounds picked out by the Simple View obtain, where S = Henry and $\langle p \rangle = \langle$ That's a barn \rangle .

Chudnoff employs an argument similar to the one he used with regard to Red/Green Switch to argue that these verdicts about Fake Barn Country are compatible with the Simple View being true.

It follows that there is no way of filling in the following (since any substitution instance which satisfies the "because" part will violate the "if" part, and vice versa):

S has perceptual knowledge of $\langle p \rangle$ if and only if, and because, _____.

Chudnoff generalizes from this that there will also be no way of filling in

S knows $\langle p \rangle$ if and only if, and because, _____.

If this is what the Gettier problem is after, then it follows that the Gettier problem is insoluble. This solves the Gettier-problem problem.

What, though, is the connection between justification and knowledge? Chudnoff points out that even if Gettier cases show that knowledge is not correctly analyzed as justified true belief, they are compatible with the following:

S knows $\langle p \rangle$ only if, and only because, S has a justified true belief in $\langle p \rangle$.

On Chudnoff's own view, the connection between justification and knowledge is more complicated than that. He endorses:

Another Simple View: If S has a perceptual experience which justifies her in believing that p , then [S is justified in believing $\langle p \rangle$] is fully grounded in [S has a perceptual experience E such that (i) E is an experience in which it perceptually appears to S that p , and (ii) E is an experience in which S *seems* to be aware of something x such that: x makes $\langle p \rangle$ true.]