CHAPTER 6

The Sandwich Theory of Knowledge

Adam Grobler

Abstract

In response to some problems of epistemology a novel account of knowledge is offered. Firstly, in order to distinguish outdated knowledge from mere error or superstition, the truth-requirement of the tripartite definition of knowledge is relaxed to that of non-falsity in the sense of logic of presuppositions. This also helps to resist the skeptical challenge that appeals to the Closure and Brain-in-a-Vat story. Secondly, in the face of the insufficiency of purely testimonial justification, the justification-requirement is strengthened to cover the applicability of what is claimed to be knowledge. The structure of justification is sketched in the framework of erotetic logic. Next, the relations between knowledge, its presuppositions and applications are briefly discussed. Finally, some open problems for the contextualist theory thus outlined are listed.

1 Knowledge and Truth

1.1 Outdated Knowledge vs. Superstition

The aim of the present paper is to give a preliminary sketch of a unified analysis of knowledge and the related concepts that stems from some of my previous attempts (Grobler 2001; 2012) at making up for some inadequacies of conventional accounts. I take as an obvious point of departure the tripartite definition of knowledge. As it is widely known, Edmund Gettier (1963) put this definition forward just for the purpose of putting it into serious doubt. The definition runs as follows:

\[
K_a(p) \iff (i) B_a(p) \\
\quad (ii) JB_a(p) \\
\quad (iii) p
\]

---

1 I wish to thank an anonymous referee who through much effort made many valuable suggestions to improve my English.
that is: a subject $a$ knows a proposition $p$ if and only if $a$ believes $p$, $a$ is justified in believing $p$, and $p$ is true. Gettier produced examples to the effect that even if one is genuinely justified in believing a proposition, one's justification may be of the kind that does not preclude the belief in question from being true (or false) by sheer luck. Since a lucky guess is by no means knowledge, Gettier's examples show that a tripartite definition is too weak. The question of how the definition is to be successfully strengthened is known as the Gettier problem.

Although I am inclined to think that in what follows a solution to the Gettier problem will emerge, let me put aside its thorough discussion, as well as the discussion of its long lasting history. For the time being I shall focus on quite a different question, the question with regard to which the tripartite definition seems too strong. Consider the outdated Aristotelian belief that heavy bodies fall down. Given that there is no absolute top-down direction, his belief is hardly true. Yet it is quite natural to say that the belief in question represents a piece of knowledge of the time. If we didn't accept that, we could hardly call knowledge any contemporary scientific belief, for any scientific belief is liable to revision. As Ryszard Wójcicki used to put it in his seminars more than two decades ago, Aristotle clearly knew something, even if his wording was inaccurate. This observation puts the truth-requirement in the tripartite definition into doubt.2

One possible reaction to this challenge is to deny that scientific beliefs constitute knowledge. Instead, one may maintain that scientific knowledge consists in knowing the content of some theories, regardless of their truth-value, and knowing how those theories “help us to understand the world” and possibly where and how they fail (e.g. Ichikawa and Steup 2012). This move, however, does not do justice to the difference between science and the less trust-worthy bodies of opinion. Consider the belief that there are witches in the world. Obviously, one can know the content of a theory of witchcraft, regardless of its truth-value, and know how this theory helps us (or used to help people in the past) to understand the world and where and how it fails. Thus one can have some knowledge of witchcraft just as one can have some knowledge of science.

There is nothing wrong in calling one's knowledge of or about witchcraft knowledge, so long as the knower is not committed to the contents of the theories s/he knows. Commitment to the contents of the kind in question counts as superstition rather than knowledge. In contrast, scientific knowledge is not just knowledge of or about science. Rather, it deserves the name of knowledge only insofar as the knower is committed to at least some of the contents s/he knows. To draw the difference between the commitments under comparison we need to distinguish clearly between outdated or hypothetical knowledge

---

2 The factivity of ‘know’ has been challenged, for independent reasons, also in Hazlett (2010).