

EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION : AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Ruchira Majumdar

Introduction: In this paper I propose to explore possible ways to resolve the Gettier-type problems, both in western epistemology wherefrom the problem has originated and in Indian epistemology, wherefrom I expect to find a possible solution. Accordingly, I have divided my paper into two broad sections: in the first section, I have briefly explained the Gettier problem, some of its proposed solutions and the principal criticisms against them. In the second section I have discussed the Gettier problem from Indian perspective and its possible solution in 'naturalised' Nyaya-epistemology.

I

The Notion of Knowledge : In the history of western epistemology, it has been a long and sustained attempt to specify the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge. In other words, the perennial question is: When one claims, "I know that P," what are the conditions he has to satisfy to establish and vindicate one's claim? Plato, in his Theatetus had highlighted this question and the epistemologists of even today, are toiling after its answer.

Presuming that we restrict knowledge to propositional knowledge alone, in almost all cases, knowledge has been traditionally defined as justified true belief (JTB) generally, the analysis of knowledge has been specified on three conditions as the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge, Prof. Chisholm has explained these three conditions as:

a) S knows that p,

iff,

1. S accepts that p

2. p is true

3. S has adequate evidence that P.

Prof. Ayer has described these three conditions as:

(b) S knows that P,

iff,

1. S is sure that P
2. P is true.
3. S has the right to be sure that P.

A third analysis may be given as:

c) S knows that P,

iff,

1. S believes that P
2. P is true
3. S is justified in believing that P.

These three analyses of the knowledge-situation are more or less similar. So far as the first condition is concerned, what Chisholm¹ states in terms of acceptance, is not basically different from believing. Similarly, Ayer's² condition of 'being sure' can be stated in terms of belief. Thus, we can designate the first condition as "Belief-condition". So far as the second condition is concerned, there is no difference among these three conditions accordingly, we can designate this condition as the "Truth-condition". The third condition as indicated in the third definition accommodates the third condition of the other two definitions. For, if a person has adequate evidence for a proposition P, he may be justified in believing that P. Again, if a man has the right to be sure that P, he is justified in believing that P. Accordingly, we can designate the third condition as the "Justification-condition". Thus, the JTB analysis of knowledge includes three conditions:

1. The Belief-condition.
2. The Truth-condition.
3. The Justification-condition.

It was presumed for a considerable period of time that, these three conditions separately are necessary conditions of knowledge, and, jointly, these are sufficient condition of knowledge. Consequently, these three conditions constituted the traditional definition of knowledge.

Gettier's Challenge: Edmund L Gettier³ in his paper "is Justified True Belief knowledge?" has challenged the sufficiency of this traditional definition of knowledge. He denied that in order to have knowledge, one need to have justified true belief alone. He pointed out that even if one has justified true belief, he may not have knowledge. He demonstrates this point with the help of two counter-examples.

In the first counter-example, he narrates the JTB of Smith who has justified belief regarding the statement, 'The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.' However, he thought this statement to be applicable to Jones since he thought that Jones would get the job and he knew that Jones had ten coins in his pocket. But actually, Smith is wrong and does not have knowledge regarding the actual person who gets the job. In reality, Smith himself gets the job, and incidentally, unknown to him, he had ten coins in his pocket. This example demonstrates that though Smith has JTB regarding the recipient of the job, yet he does not know the recipient of the job. Smith's belief, although true and justified does not constitute knowledge, for it is by sheer chance that his belief is true and justified. In other words, JTB and knowledge may coincide by chance.

Responses to Gettier: The responses to Gettier's challenge galore. Among these, we would consider three most central ones:

1. The Presence of Relevant Falsehood: As response to Gettier's problem regarding JTB, it may be suggested that we may add a fourth condition that, nothing can be known which is inferred from a false belief, or from a group of beliefs of which one is false. In this way we would be able to nullify the knowledge-claim of Smith, since his entire belief-construction is inferred from the false belief that Jones is the recipient of the job.

This response is criticised on the ground that it has at least two defects:

(a) Gettier's theme can be written in such a way that though the belief-system involves a falsehood, there is no false inference. For example, as Chisholm states, when I see a large furry dog in the next field, and take myself simply to see that there is a sheep. But, unknown to me, there is a sheep in the field, hidden by the hedge. In this case, my belief that there is a sheep in the field is true and justified, yet my knowledge is denied. This process does not involve any false inference, it is my own present sensory state. Thus a JTB can fail to be knowledge, even if it does not involve any false inference.

(b) The suggestion is too strong and may make knowledge impossible. For we suffer from numerous false beliefs which have role in our inferential processes. Consequently, none of our JTB would count as knowledge.

To eliminate these defects, we have to avoid any reference to inference and tighten up the relation between the false beliefs and the true justified ones which are not counted as knowledge. Thus we simply require an absence of relevant falsehood. In other words, we

require to ascertain that the relevant beliefs in a knowledge-situation, are not false. But, even then the question remains: How to specify the relevant false beliefs?

It may be answered that, a false belief P is relevant, if, had the believer believed in $\sim P$, his belief in Q would cease to be justified. All false beliefs are not relevant. Only those false beliefs, which if known to be false, can nullify the truth of the derivative propositions, are the relevant false beliefs. The truth claim of a JTB which is derived from any such relevant false belief is to be nullified.

However, this amendment does not remove all problems associated with this response, and more works are to be done on it.

2. Defeasibility: Some other critics like Lehrer and Paxsonpoint out that, the Gettier-counter-examples are based on the truths that destroy the justification of the derivative belief. They suggest that a fourth condition has to be added with the existing three which would ensure that, there should not be any truth P that can destroy the justification for believing Q.

This response is not above criticism. The main ones are:

(a) This analysis of knowledge in terms of four conditions, however, does not restrict that a false belief can never be justified. In fact, it involves the suggestion that, although some beliefs are defeasibly justified, we require indefeasible justification for knowledge.

(b) It indicates that knowledge has to involve coherence, and thereby makes the first condition ($Kap \rightarrow P$) of knowledge redundant. For, it appears that a false belief can never be indefeasibly justified since there is always some truth, whose addition would nullify the justification claim.

(c) The defeasibility criterion is required to be modified. For, in actual cases, the fourth condition does not work. There is always a chance that, unknown to me, some new facts are added or existing facts are changed. To avoid this situation, we have to be alert about (1) whether there is some truth which would defeat the existing justification, and, (2) find a way out to counter the way in which the piecemeal addition of further truths is possible. But it is a very difficult situation because, (1) it would require us to know all the truths which is an impossible task. (b) Moreover, it implies that we do not have any reason to believe that we know something. Thus the defeasibility condition makes our knowledge claims impossible.

3. Conclusive Reasons: Some critics of Gettier's challenge points out that the JTB must be based on conclusive reasons. This condition would restrict the cases where the agent is right by accident. In other words, where beliefs A—M constitute conclusive reasons for belief N,

A—M cannot be true if N is false.

Critics have pointed out that this condition excludes the counter-examples, but it does so, at the cost of making knowledge a rare object. For, in empirical level our reasons are never conclusive. Dretske offers a weaker version of this condition as he suggests that, reasons A—M for belief N are conclusive iff A—M would not be true if N is false. This account is weaker because to say that 'A—M 'would not be true' does not imply that they 'could not be true.' In fact, this weaker version does not require conclusive reasons. However, even this weaker version cannot explain all cases of knowledge. For example, my belief that I am in pain, may be justified, but I cannot base it on conclusive reasons. Thus the condition of conclusive reasons fails to resolve the Gettier problem.

II

The Notion of Knowledge in Indian Philosophy: In Indian philosophy, knowledge is understood in the sense of true knowledge or *pramā*, since it is obvious that 'false knowledge' is a self-contradictory term. In *Tattva-cintāmani* the great Nyāya philosopher Ganges'a has defined '*Pramā*' as '*tadvati tadprakāraṇa anubhabah*', i.e., the cognition which apprehends the adjective as characterizing the substantive. Thus *pramā* is a true belief which has grasped the reality properly. In other words, according to the Naiyāyikas, a piece of cognition is *Pramā* iff the adjectival part actually characterizes the substantive part of the cognition⁶. For example the cognition of ropeness (*prakāra*) as characterizing the rope (*tat*, i.e. *vis'esya*) is *pramā* because it corresponds to the actuality. But the apprehension of snakeness as characterizing the rope is error. A piece of cognition is a case of *Pramā*, if it has *pramāṭva* i.e. the property of being a piece of cognition which is such that the object corresponding to the subject of the cognition, has the same adjective as the subject of the cognition.

The Prāmānya Controversy: The controversy regarding the prāmānya of a pramā is a very serious issue among the different schools of Indian philosophy. The controversy centres around two main questions⁷:

- (a) How is a *pramā* / *apramā* generated and known?
- (b) How is its *prāmānya* / *aprāmānya* generated and known?

In *Tattva-cintāmani*, Ganges'a has initiated this discussion with the question:

“ *jñānaprāmānyam tad aprāmānya agrāhaka yāvajjñānagrāhakasāmagrigrāhyam na vā* ”, i.e. is the totality of conditions that reveals a piece cognition and not its falsity, sufficient for the knowledge of its truth? The Mīmāṃsakas answer to this question is affirmative, while the Naiyāyikas answer is negative.

Mīmāṃsā View: The three sects of Mīmāṃsakas unanimously accept that prāmānya is produced and is known intrinsically (*svataḥ*), but they have serious differences among themselves regarding the specific conditions contributing to the origin of *prāmā*. In this paper we would consider only the Prabhākara view, which is acclaimed as the ‘*gurumātā*’⁸. This view admits that *pramā* (knowledge) is a *kriyā* and it is perceptible, and *prāmānya* is its essential quality. *Apramā* (False knowledge) cannot be a quality of cognition, falsity consists in our behaviour only. In this view, *pramā* is essentially free of all defects, enlightening, revealing the world and self-revealing. *Pramā* is produced by the totality of conditions (*jñānagrāhakasāmagri*), which also apprehend it. Regarding the *jñāna - utpādaka sāmāgrī* and *jñāna - utpādaka sāmāgrī*, the Prābhākaras hold that, these conditions are identical. This is the reason why knowledge and its revelation occur together.

Explaining the theory of self-revelation of knowledge, the Prābhākaras hold that a *prāmā* cannot remain unrevealed. It is self-contradictory to admit that a piece of knowledge reveals its object without revealing itself. This view is supported by the Bouddha, Jaina Sāṃkhya and Vedāntin philosophers.

The Prābhākaras claim that the conditions responsible for revelation of knowledge are also responsible for revelation of its *prāmānya*. In other words, when these conditions reveal the *pramā*, they also reveal its *prāmānya*. In fact, when a *pramā* is generated, all four factors, viz. pot, knowledge, self and *prāmānya* is revealed at once and this revelation is expressed in the statement, ‘I validly know the pot (*ghaṭamaham praminomi*)’. In this way, the Prābhākaras come to the conclusion that, the validity of knowledge is known through the conditions that reveals the knowledge.

Nyāya View:

The Nyāya view, in this context, is just the opposite. The Naiyāyikas state, with elaborate arguments that ‘*jñāna - prāmānyam na jñāna - grāhakasāmagrigrāhyam*’, i.e. the validity of knowledge is not revealed by the conditions that reveal the knowledge. They

explain that, the conditions that reveal the knowledge is another piece of knowledge (*anuvyāvasāya*), while the validity of knowledge is known through an inference, where the *linga* is: '*saphala pravritti janakatva*'. They make it very clear that neither the conditions responsible for origin of knowledge are responsible for the origin the knowledge of knowledge, nor the conditions responsible for origin of validity of knowledge are responsible for knowledge of this validity.

Rejecting the Mīmāṃsaka view of *Tripūtīpratyakṣa* and self revelation of knowledge, the Naiyāyikas argue that knowledge is always an object of another knowledge, and it cannot reveal the four factors like, the object, itself, its own validity and the knower's self. For, whenever our sense-organ has contact with an object like a pot, what we have is a perceptual knowledge of pot. We do not have, at that very moment, perceptual knowledge of cloth, since our sense-organ does not have contact with cloth. Similarly, in this context, knowledge itself cannot be its object, since on the moment of its production it cannot have contact with the sense-organ. So the initial knowledge of the pot is expressed as: This is pot. But on the next moment, we have mental perception of the knowledge of pot, which is expressed as: I know the pot. In this after-cognition, one knows the object, the knowledge of the object and the self, but its validity is not known. It can be known only by another inference

Two Epistemological Models: In Indian epistemology, two different models of analyses are prevalent, viz.

- (a) Representational model and
- (b) Grasping model.

The western epistemologists generally endorse the first model, which admits intermediary entities like ideas, propositions etc., between the agent's awareness and the object of awareness. The intermediary idea or proposition is a representation of the object of awareness. The agent is first aware of this idea or proposition, and then becomes indirectly aware of the object, only through this representation. For example, when somebody is aware of a pot, there is some idea or proposition between the agent and the pot, and it represents the pot to the agent. Thus all our knowledge is indirect and representational. This representational model is admitted by the *vrittijñānavādins* like Advaita Vedāntins and Sautrāntika Baudhhas.

This model is not free from its defects. There may be questions regarding the authenticity of the representations. For, if the agent can never know the object directly, there is no guarantee that the ideas or propositions are correctly representing the object. The instances of illusions and hallucinations point to the fact that there may be some anomaly either in the representation or in the awareness or in both. These questions again bring us near the blind alley failure in epistemic justification.

The grasping model, on the other hand, states that, knowing something is not to be aware of or about some object. On the contrary, it is direct and immediate intellectual grasping of the object.

There are only two factors in the awareness situation, viz. the agent's awareness and the object of awareness, and there is no intermediary entity. Thus knowing something is always an intellectual/cognitive grasping of a complex object, like A.....POT.....BEING.....ON.....THE.....GROUND.

This model does not admit any representation of object as the content of awareness, and, consequently, the question of authenticity or justification does not arise. According to this model, either the agent succeeds in grasping the object or, he fails.

The Nyāya epistemology admits the grasping model. As we have already seen the simple mechanism of *pramā* leaves no place for representations, and consequently, there is no question of authenticity and justification raised against this view. As Pandit Visvavandhu Bhattacharya⁹ indicates, there cannot be any Gettier-type problem in Nyāya epistemology since it does not fall under any representational model. There is no distinction between the object and content of knowledge. On the contrary, knowing something is always direct and immediate.

As a consequence of admitting the grasping model, Nyāya epistemology cannot be treated as a justification-centric normative epistemology, which gives justification for the claims for validity of knowledge and beliefs. A justification-centric epistemology is also normative because, it prescribes that all epistemology should be justification-centric. Nyāya epistemology is neither justification-centric nor normative. On the contrary, it is a system of naturalized epistemology. They hold that a *pramā* is a piece of true non-dubious (non-mnemonic) cognition, and hence, there is no question of justification.

Sri Harṣa's Objections Against Nyāya Model: Sri Harṣa¹⁰, a Vedāntin, presumes some

Gettier-type problems and poses them against the Nyāya epistemology. He mentions a number of cases where the agent has true cognition by accident. He argues that, the Nyāya definition of *pramā* cannot be accepted since it fails to exclude the cases where the cognition is true by sheer luck. For example, when the cognizer makes a lucky guess about the number of shells held in a fist by the questioner, and his guess turns out to be true, the cognizer should not be credited with *pramā*, even though it satisfies the definition of *pramā*. On the contrary, the case has to be treated as ‘*kriṣāṇīya Nyāya*’ or ‘*aja kriṣāṇīya naya*’.

This objection cannot be refuted only by implanting a justification condition. The real import of this objection is far-reaching since it raises vital question against Nyāya theory of *pramā* and *pramāṇa*. If such cases are there where *pramā* is generated by accident, then we cannot identify their *pramāṇas* either as perception, inference, analogy or testimony. In that case Nyāya theory of *pramā* and *pramāṇa* has to be abandoned.

The Naiyāyikas are aware of this problem, and they suggest that such problematic cases are to be treated separately, since there is no uniform strategy to resolve them. However, as Bhattacharya¹¹ indicates, these cases cannot pose challenge to Nyāya epistemology in the same way as Gettier’s problem did to western epistemology. The key lies in the fact that the Naiyāyikas have given us two parallel explanations, viz., one about the production of the cognition and another about its being a *pramā*. These two explanations run side by side and amply explain the cases of ‘*pramā* by chance/luck/accident’. Even if there are some discrepancies (*dōṣa*) in the *pramāṇa*, a *pramā* can be generated. For example, we can have valid inferential knowledge, even though it is derived from invalid *vyāpti-jñāna*. The structure of the inference is: The hill has fire because it is pervaded by dust, and wherever there is dust, there is fire. It is argued that, if the hill actually has fire, at that point of time, then the inferential knowledge derived from the invalid *vyāpti-jñāna* (since dust is not pervaded by fire), is a *pramā*. The famous Naiyāyika Raghunātha, admits this view as he cites the example of the valid inferential knowledge that, the hill has fire on the basis of false *vyāpti-jñāna* that the property of substancehood is pervaded by the property of having fire.

Nyaya Epistemology as A Naturalized Epistemology: Naturalized epistemology, as the term indicates, is a theory of cognition where the criterion of knowledge must be formulated on the basis of descriptive or naturalistic terms alone, without the use of any evaluative or normative terms, whether epistemic, or of any other kind.

In Nyāya epistemology, it has been indicated that, the validity of the cognitive states is not responsible for the production of resultant cognition or its validity /invalidity. A valid cognition can be produced even if either the knowledge of *pakṣadharmatā* or *vyāpti* is invalid. The Naiyāyikas offer a purely psycho-physiological account of the production of cognition. They state that our cognitions are formed by other cognitive and physiological states, but the validity of these states are not important. They point out that a *pramā* has both a cognitive -aspect and a truth–aspect. The cognitive aspect is explained in terms of *pramāna*, which is the *pramā* –forming procedure consisting of psycho-physiological conditions thus the *prāmānya* of a *pramā* cannot be explained in terms of *pramāna*. The same set of psycho-physiological conditions produces both *pramā* and *apramā*.

The truth aspect of a *pramā* is explained in Nyāya *parataḥ - prāmānyavāda*, where it is stated that, the validity of a *pramā* is produced by some excellence (*guṇa*), over and above the usual causal conditions of cognition. The invalidity, on the other hand, is produced by some discredit (*dōṣa*). There is no general definition of *guṇa* and different *guṇa* are responsible for different kinds of *pramā*. For example, in case of perceptual cognition, the *guṇa* is the sense–contact with the object that is really characterized by the feature as presented in the cognition. In case of inferential cognition, it is the *parāmars'a* in a *pakṣa* where the *sādhya* really exists.

In this way the Naiyāyikas demonstrate that the valid/invalid distinction in knowledge can be explained in terms of grasping the reality properly, or failure to do that. If the cognizer succeeds, it is *pramā*; if not, it is *apramā*. Nyāya epistemology is thus a naturalized epistemology where validity/invalidity is explained as produced by natural properties like *guṇa* / *dōṣa*.

Concluding Remarks: We may compare the western and Indian perspectives of epistemic justification and point out that while in western epistemology, we cannot face the Gettier-challenge, under either doxastic/non-doxastic systems, in Nyāya naturalized epistemology, we can hope to do so. Quine realizes this point in his paper "Epistemology Naturalized", and claims that the Cartesian 'quest for certainty' is a 'lost cause', and disapproves the concept of a normative epistemology. He proposes to replace the entire justification-centred epistemology, by a purely descriptive, causal and nomological science of human cognition. By naturalization of epistemology, Quine proposed to see epistemology as a part of empirical science and hoped

that it would put an end to our search for A priori justification of true belief.

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