

Contextualism as a Solution to the Gettier Problem: Revisiting the Definition and Justification of Knowledge

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Abstract

The Gettier problem has significantly reshaped the discourse on the nature of knowledge, challenging the traditional definition of knowledge as Justified True Belief (JTB). This paper explores the philosophical implications of the Gettier problem and its impact on epistemology, focusing on two major responses: internalism and contextualism. Internalism emphasizes the cognitive subject's internal states as the basis for knowledge justification, while contextualism introduces variability in knowledge standards based on conversational and situational contexts. The strengths and limitations of each approach are critically analyzed, with internalism offering clear criteria for justification but struggling with external factors, and contextualism providing flexibility in knowledge attribution while risking subjectivity. The paper also examines how contextualism addresses philosophical skepticism and the Gettier problem by adjusting the criteria for knowledge depending on the context. Ultimately, this manuscript argues that while both internalism and contextualism have contributed to a deeper understanding of knowledge, further refinement of these theories is necessary to address their limitations, particularly regarding objectivity and skepticism.

Keywords: *Gettier problem, Epistemology, Internalism, Contextualism, Knowledge justification.*

1. Introduction

The definition of knowledge is one of the oldest and most fundamental questions in epistemology, having been explored from various perspectives by numerous scholars throughout the history of philosophy. Traditionally, knowledge has been defined as "Justified True Belief" (JTB). This definition has been continuously discussed since the time of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato and has been widely accepted due to its logical consistency and intuitive clarity (Plato, 369 BCE/2004). According to this definition, three conditions must be met to constitute knowledge: first, the content of the belief must be true; second, the subject must have confidence in the belief; and third, the belief must be properly justified (Gettier, 1963). However, this definition encountered a significant challenge when Edmund Gettier published his brief paper, *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?* in 1963. In this work, Gettier presented two cases demonstrating that JTB is not a sufficient condition for knowledge, thereby highlighting that an additional condition is necessary for a belief to be considered knowledge. Gettier argued that even if a justified belief is true, it cannot be recognized as knowledge if the truth of the belief is coincidental. For example, if

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a person believes there is a sheep on a hill and has sufficient evidence to support this belief, but what they are actually seeing is a sheep-shaped rock, with a real sheep hidden behind it, the belief is true but coincidentally so. Thus, this belief cannot be considered knowledge (Gettier, 1963).

Gettier's paper made a profound impact on philosophers, reigniting discussions on the essence of knowledge. It pointed out that the justification condition of knowledge may not necessarily be connected with truth, raising skeptical questions about whether such coincidentally true beliefs can be considered knowledge at all. This issue led philosophers to reconsider the definition of knowledge, and several approaches were proposed to resolve it (Goldman, 1967; Dretske, 1971). For instance, new theories such as the causal theory and the tracking theory emerged, attempting to redefine the justification conditions for knowledge in response to the Gettier cases (Goldman, 1976; Nozick, 1981). However, these traditional approaches failed to address the core issue raised by the Gettier problem. The causal theory requires that a belief must reach the truth through an appropriate causal path, but it struggled to clearly differentiate between justified beliefs and coincidental truths (Goldman, 1967). Similarly, the tracking theory, which posits that knowledge must track the truth in different possible scenarios, was criticized for not providing a clear standard for excluding scenarios where a belief might remain unchanged even when it is not true (Nozick, 1981). Consequently, a new approach was required to gain a more refined understanding of knowledge and to provide a solution to the Gettier problem.

Contextualism emerged as a promising solution by arguing that the conditions for the justification of knowledge are not fixed but can change depending on the context and circumstances (DeRose, 1992; Lewis, 1996). Contextualism claims that the standards for attributing knowledge can vary depending on the attributor and the context of the conversation, allowing a belief to be considered knowledge in some contexts but not in others. This view suggests that while we may know many things in ordinary contexts, we may know almost nothing in philosophical contexts where skepticism prevails (Lewis, 1996). The contextualist approach not only provides a solution to the Gettier problem but also offers significant advantages in dealing with traditional epistemological skepticism. For example, in a philosophical discussion, one might pose a skeptical hypothesis like "We might all be brains in vats receiving simulated inputs," making it challenging to completely refute such possibilities using traditional JTB approaches, which may ultimately lead to the conclusion that we can know nothing (Stone, 2000). However, contextualism asserts that such extreme possibilities should be considered only in philosophical contexts, while they can be ignored in ordinary contexts, thereby preserving our everyday knowledge claims (DeRose, 1992). In this sense, contextualism is noteworthy not only as a solution to the Gettier problem but also as a response to skepticism. This study aims to analyze how contextualism can solve the Gettier problem and, through this analysis, seeks to provide a new understanding of the definition and justification of knowledge. To achieve this, the paper first examines the philosophical significance of the Gettier problem and its limitations, and then compares contextualism with other theories of knowledge justification to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how contextualism can resolve the Gettier problem and to evaluate its limitations and strengths. First, the philosophical significance of the Gettier problem will be reviewed to clarify why a re-examination of the definition of knowledge is necessary. Then, contextualism will be compared with traditional theories of knowledge justification, such as internalism and externalism, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each approach (Cohen, 1999). In particular, the focus will be on how contextualism addresses the problem of coincidental truths raised by the Gettier problem, using case studies to empirically test its validity. The methodology of this study centers on literature analysis and case studies. The primary philosophical debates and theoretical background surrounding the Gettier problem will be examined, and the limitations of existing theories regarding the conditions for knowledge justification will be analyzed. This study will then explore the theoretical strengths of contextualism, criticizing the rigidity and lack of contextual flexibility found in internalism and

externalism (Goldman, 1979). Next, through empirical case studies, the validity of contextualism will be evaluated to determine whether it can serve as an effective solution to the Gettier problem. Ultimately, this study argues that the conditions for knowledge justification are not fixed but can change flexibly depending on the conversational context and epistemic environment. Such flexibility can overcome the limitations of the traditional Justified True Belief theory and provide key insights for addressing the Gettier problem. Moreover, by exploring how contextualism can maintain the practicality and consistency of knowledge, this study aims to offer a new alternative to philosophical skepticism (Cohen, 2002).

Additionally, the current study draws on a rich body of previous research on the Gettier problem, which has posed significant challenges to the traditional Justified True Belief (JTB) account of knowledge. Demin (2019) reviewed various strategies to resolve the Gettier problem, including altering or strengthening justification criteria, but argued that Gettier cases are inescapable. Similarly, Ward (2024) developed a general solution to deviant causal chains, extending this solution to address Gettier problems by focusing on disposition manifestation. Church (2021, 2019) critiqued virtue epistemology's struggle with Gettier counterexamples, revealing the deep connection between epistemic luck and Gettier cases. Finally, Thomas (2024) examined the JTB framework through topological epistemic logic, suggesting that while Gettier cases are inevitable in most epistemic models, certain conditions may offer a way to sidestep them, leading to a partial defense of JTB in special contexts. This extensive background supports our investigation into the contextualist approach as a potential solution to the Gettier problem, blending theoretical perspectives to propose new avenues for resolving this enduring issue. Thus, this study seeks to deeply examine the Gettier problem and the contextualist approach to address it, thereby contributing to a new understanding of the definition of knowledge. Furthermore, this research aims to expand philosophical discussions on the nature of knowledge and resolve critical issues in modern epistemology.

2. The Philosophical Significance of the Gettier Problem

2.1 The Emergence of the Gettier Problem in Relation to the Traditional Definition of Knowledge

Traditionally, knowledge has been defined as “Justified True Belief” (JTB). This definition originated from the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato and has served as an essential theoretical framework for understanding and explaining knowledge throughout medieval, modern, and contemporary philosophy (Plato, 369 BCE/2004). The definition of knowledge discussed in Plato’s *Theaetetus* was refined by numerous philosophers over the centuries and established as a fundamental concept in epistemology. According to this definition, when a person is said to know a proposition P, three conditions must be met: first, P must be true; second, the person must believe P; and third, the belief must be justified. Because of its simplicity and intuitive appeal, this definition has been accepted for a long time as a sufficient condition for knowledge. The traditional JTB definition consists of three key elements: belief, truth, and justification. Due to its applicability in everyday experiences, the JTB definition has been regarded as a robust framework for demonstrating the conditions under which knowledge can be established. For instance, if a person believes that “the sky is blue,” this belief is true, and there are sufficient reasons for holding the belief, then it can be said that the person knows “the sky is blue.” Here, ‘justification’ refers to the grounds or reasons that support the belief, preventing it from being merely an accidental truth (Chisholm, 1989). Such justification can stem from empirical evidence, logical reasoning, or the testimony of a reliable witness. Thus, justified true belief is distinguished from mere guesses or unsupported beliefs. Although this definition appears to have a simple and consistent structure, Edmund Gettier’s 1963 paper, *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?* revealed its limitations and challenged its adequacy as a definition of knowledge (Gettier, 1963). Gettier demonstrated through two thought experiments that justified true belief does not always constitute knowledge, thereby showing that JTB is not a sufficient condition for knowledge.

The core issue in Gettier's critique lies in the concept of "accidental truth." The traditional definition of knowledge assumes that when a justified belief aligns with the truth, it should be considered knowledge. However, Gettier pointed out that the manner in which the justified belief coincides with the truth can be problematic. Specifically, when a belief is true merely by accident, it cannot be regarded as genuine knowledge (Gettier, 1963). Gettier's argument highlighted that knowledge is not simply a matter of justified beliefs aligning with the truth, which prompted a reevaluation of the traditional JTB definition. The two cases presented by Gettier illustrate this point clearly. In the first case, Smith has the belief that "Jones will get the job," which is based on strong evidence. Because of the evidence, Smith's belief appears to be justified. Furthermore, Smith derives a logical conclusion from his belief, stating that "the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket." Since Smith has observed Jones carrying ten coins in his pocket, this conclusion is also considered a justified belief (Gettier, 1963). However, it turns out that Smith, not Jones, gets the job, and coincidentally, Smith also has ten coins in his pocket. In this scenario, Smith's belief that "the person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket" is true, but it is true by coincidence rather than due to the reasons Smith initially relied upon. Thus, despite being a justified true belief, Smith's belief cannot be considered knowledge. The second case involves Smith's belief that "the red car in the garage is Brown's car." Smith justifies this belief based on information that Brown owns a red car. However, the car that Smith sees in the garage is not Brown's car but another car that happens to have the same color and shape. Nevertheless, Brown does indeed own a red car, just not the one in the garage. Thus, Smith's belief is true but only due to a coincidental match, and hence it cannot be regarded as genuine knowledge (Gettier, 1963). Gettier's critique called for a fundamental reconsideration of the definition and nature of knowledge. If the traditional JTB definition does not suffice, how should knowledge be redefined? This question led philosophers to scrutinize the essence of knowledge more closely and to propose new definitions. For example, Alvin Goldman, in his "causal theory of knowledge," argued that knowledge is not simply a matter of justified true belief but also requires an appropriate causal relationship between the belief and the fact that makes it true (Goldman, 1967). In other words, for Smith's belief to be considered knowledge, it must be causally linked to the fact, rather than merely coincidentally aligning with it. Similarly, Fred Dretske, in his "conclusive reasons theory," argued that for a belief to qualify as knowledge, the supporting reasons must be strong enough to completely exclude the possibility of the belief being false (Dretske, 1971). These approaches aimed to eliminate the coincidental truths that arise in Gettier cases and to provide conditions under which a belief can be deemed genuine knowledge. However, even these theories failed to fully resolve the Gettier problem, and thus, the debate over the nature of knowledge continued to evolve. The Gettier problem, which has become a central issue in contemporary epistemology, sparked the debate between internalism and externalism and led to the emergence of new approaches such as contextualism (Cohen, 1999; DeRose, 1992; Lewis, 1996). Contextualism, in particular, offers the potential to address the Gettier problem by emphasizing that the conditions for knowledge justification can vary depending on the context. By highlighting the contextual flexibility of knowledge, contextualism provides a promising framework for redefining knowledge (Lewis, 1996).

The Gettier problem demonstrated that the traditional definition of knowledge does not suffice, thereby inviting a new investigation into the nature of knowledge. It compelled philosophers to reassess the relationship between the justification of a belief and its truth, paving the way for the development of various philosophical approaches. The next section will examine the broader philosophical implications of the Gettier problem and analyze the need for new definitions of knowledge. This study explores the application of Justified True Belief (JTB) theories within the context of intelligence analysis, drawing on various foundational epistemological perspectives. Whitesmith (2022) provides an in-depth examination of how evidentialism, process reliabilism, and indefeasibilism can enhance methodological approaches like the Assessment of Competing Hypotheses (ACH). Building on this, Artemov (2018) presents a constructive Brouwerian perspective that argues for the validity of JTB despite counterexamples from Russell and Gettier,

suggesting that JTB can yield knowledge when constructive truth is considered. In a critical dialogue, Santwani et al. (2023) challenge the idea that Smith's ambiguous descriptions invalidate JTB, asserting that linguistic ambiguities do not negate the truth conditions necessary for knowledge claims. Egre, Marty, and Renne (2021) further complicate the JTB discussion by differentiating between internalist and externalist notions of justification, asserting that Gettier cases primarily challenge internalist views, thus reaffirming the relevance of JTB under certain externalist frameworks. Lastly, Le Morvan (2023) provides a historical perspective, questioning the widely held belief that JTB was the traditional conception of knowledge prior to Gettier's counterexamples. Collectively, these studies underscore the nuanced interplay between JTB theories and their practical implications, inviting further exploration into how these philosophical frameworks can inform and enhance intelligence analysis methodologies.

2.2 The Philosophical Impact and Issues of the Gettier Problem

The Gettier problem fundamentally altered the philosophical discourse by showing that the traditional definition of knowledge is insufficient to fully explain the nature of knowledge. The two cases presented by Gettier in 1963 challenged the relationship between the justification condition and the truth condition, prompting philosophers to explore new criteria for knowledge (Gettier, 1963). This discourse revealed the inadequacy of the existing frameworks for defining and justifying knowledge, thus emphasizing the need to redefine and supplement the concept of knowledge. Consequently, the Gettier problem catalyzed the development of various new theories across epistemology and reoriented discussions on the nature of knowledge.

The Gettier cases did not merely call for a reevaluation of the definition of knowledge; they demonstrated how the justification of knowledge could be distorted by coincidence or external factors. According to the traditional JTB (Justified True Belief) definition, a belief is considered knowledge if it is true and justified. However, Gettier's two cases clearly illustrated that this definition could lead to contradictory outcomes in reality. In the first case, Smith held the justified belief that "Jones will get the job," but this belief turned out to be true only because Smith himself ended up getting the job instead of Jones, which was purely coincidental (Gettier, 1963). In the second case, Smith believed, based on good evidence, that "the car in the garage is Brown's car," but the car in the garage was actually owned by someone else, while Brown happened to own a similar car elsewhere (Gettier, 1963). These examples suggest that justified true belief must not only be true, but also directly linked to the truth in a non-accidental way. The Gettier problem also played a crucial role in the debate between internalism and externalism concerning the justification of knowledge. Internalism argues that the justification of knowledge depends solely on the internal states of the cognitive subject, asserting that the subject must possess sufficient internal evidence to justify their beliefs (Wedgwood, 2002). In contrast, externalism holds that justification is not just a matter of internal accessibility but also involves external conditions, such as the reliability of the cognitive process or the causal connection between belief and fact (Goldman, 1979). Gettier's cases intensified this debate by showing that Smith's belief appeared justified internally but could be invalidated by external circumstances. As a result, philosophers began arguing that internal evidence alone is insufficient and that a broader view incorporating external conditions is necessary for understanding justification.

The Gettier problem also gave rise to various alternative theories aimed at redefining the concept of knowledge. Alvin Goldman, for example, argued that knowledge should be more than just justified true belief and proposed the causal theory of knowledge (Goldman, 1967). According to his causal theory, a belief can only be considered knowledge if there is an appropriate causal link between the belief and the fact that makes it true. For instance, when Smith believes that the car in the garage is Brown's car, the belief is knowledge only if the process of forming the belief is causally connected to the fact that Brown's car is in the garage. This approach was an attempt to eliminate the accidental nature observed in Gettier cases. Fred Dretske, on the other hand, proposed the conclusive reasons theory, arguing that a belief can only be knowledge if the reasons

supporting it are strong enough to completely exclude the possibility of it being false (Dretske, 1971). This approach emphasized the need for powerful justification that can rule out any chance of accidental truth when dealing with Gettier-like cases. These theoretical attempts aimed to address the accidental alignment of justification and truth by setting stricter conditions for what can be considered knowledge. The Gettier problem is also closely related to discussions of philosophical skepticism. It shows that many things we are confident we know may, in fact, not be knowledge. This insight aligns with skeptical hypotheses that suggest our experiences could be entirely misleading or based on illusions, thereby suggesting that knowledge requires more than mere justification (Nozick, 1981). These discussions indicate that the criteria for knowledge must encompass not just logical or empirical justification but also the ability to rule out all alternative possibilities. Ultimately, the Gettier problem initiated a fundamental shift in how the definition and criteria of knowledge are conceptualized. Philosophers such as David Lewis and Keith DeRose proposed a contextualist approach to resolve this problem, arguing that the standards for knowledge attribution can vary depending on the context of the conversation (DeRose, 1992; Lewis, 1996). Contextualism allows skeptical possibilities to be disregarded in everyday contexts, thereby preserving our everyday use of knowledge concepts while applying stricter standards in philosophical discussions. This approach suggests that the standards of knowledge are not fixed but can be adjusted according to the context, making contextualism a promising solution to the Gettier problem. The Gettier problem did not merely contribute to an academic debate; it brought about a paradigm shift across epistemology. As a result, discussions around the definition of knowledge have become more refined, providing new perspectives on the nature and conditions of knowledge. This discourse has become a significant milestone in modern epistemology, reshaping the meaning of knowledge and establishing clearer criteria for its justification.

3. A Comparison of Knowledge Justification Theories: Internalism and Contextualism

3.1 The Concept of Internalism and its Justification Structure

Internalism is a fundamental theoretical approach in epistemology that explains the justification of knowledge based solely on factors related to the cognitive subject's internal states. According to internalism, for a belief to be considered knowledge, it must be justified through internal evidence or reasons that are accessible to the cognitive subject (Wedgwood, 2002). Here, internal evidence refers to elements that the subject can directly access through conscious states, such as subjective experiences, sensory perceptions, memory, and intuition. This approach contrasts with externalism, which emphasizes the role of external objective conditions in the justification of knowledge. Internalism's central principles can be summarized into two key tenets: the Accessibility Principle and the Reflective Justification Principle. The Accessibility Principle states that a justified belief must be based on evidence that is accessible to the cognitive subject through their mental states (Pryor, 2001). In other words, to have a justified belief, the subject must have reasons or evidence for the belief that are available to them and that they can consciously access. The Reflective Justification Principle, on the other hand, goes beyond mere access to evidence, emphasizing that the cognitive subject must be able to reflectively examine the process and structure of their belief formation (Alston, 1989). This principle means that justification is not merely a result of unconscious cognitive processes but requires the subject to be aware of and able to critically evaluate the validity of their belief.

This internalist approach serves as an important theoretical framework for explaining propositional knowledge and cognitive certainty. A classic example illustrating internalist justification is Descartes' famous proposition "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"). Descartes argued that certainty about one's own existence is based on internal cognitive processes, independent of external conditions. This shows how a cognitive subject, through direct access to their internal thought processes and reflective evaluation, can attain certain knowledge of their own existence (Descartes, 1641). The strengths of internalism lie in its clear criteria for justification, ensuring that the process of forming beliefs is logically valid and consistent. By emphasizing the subjective certainty of knowledge, internalism provides a robust framework for

explaining how we can obtain certain knowledge. It allows the cognitive subject to justify beliefs by relying solely on their internal evidence and logical reasons, thereby minimizing the risk of coincidental truths, as highlighted by the Gettier problem. In this regard, internalism offers a partial solution to problems of accidental truth by focusing on the cognitive subject's internal state and its coherence (Gettier, 1963). However, internalism also faces several criticisms and limitations. First, it risks disregarding the interaction with the external world. When justification depends solely on internal states, a belief could be considered justified even if it does not align with external reality. This is precisely what Gettier cases illustrate: a justified true belief (JTB) does not necessarily constitute knowledge (Gettier, 1963). For example, consider a person looking at a distant clock and believing "the time is 12:00," unaware that the clock is broken. Although the belief may be a justified true belief, it is merely coincidentally true and thus cannot be considered knowledge. Such cases suggest that internalism's justification structure may not be valid in all real-world situations. Second, internalism has a significant limitation in terms of cognitive accessibility. While internalism insists that the subject must have access to their internal evidence to justify their beliefs, not all cognitive subjects possess the same level of accessibility in practice. For example, the scientific evidence that an expert uses to justify complex knowledge may be inaccessible to a layperson (Williamson, 2000). This indicates that internalism may have difficulties addressing practical epistemological issues where the accessibility of evidence is not uniformly distributed. Third, the demand for reflective justification may be difficult to apply universally. Not all subjects have the cognitive capacity to reflectively examine their belief formation processes, which could disqualify many ordinary beliefs from being considered knowledge. For instance, intuitive beliefs or immediate perceptions formed in everyday contexts are often not subject to reflective scrutiny, making internalism's justification conditions overly stringent in such cases (Pryor, 2001). Despite these criticisms, internalism remains significant in epistemology by providing clear criteria for the justification of beliefs, focusing on internal evidence and logical consistency. By arguing that for a belief to be justified, the cognitive subject must be aware of the grounds for their belief and that these grounds must be logically coherent, internalism contributes crucial insights to the understanding of knowledge (Wedgwood, 2002). Thus, internalism links the justification of knowledge to the cognitive subject's internal states, thereby presenting a well-defined standard for how the subject can justify their beliefs. However, the issues of interaction with the external world, cognitive accessibility, and the limits of reflective justification suggest that internalism has yet to address several critical challenges fully. These limitations indicate why alternative approaches such as externalism or contextualism may provide a more comprehensive explanation of knowledge justification.

3.2 The Emergence of Contextualism and Its Theoretical Background

Contextualism emerged as a philosophical approach aimed at addressing the challenges posed by epistemological skepticism and the Gettier problem. It argues that the conditions for the justification of knowledge are not fixed but can vary depending on the conversational context, the situation of the cognitive subject, and social conditions. This approach was developed to account for how knowledge claims made in everyday life could still be considered knowledge even when held to higher standards, such as those applied in philosophical skepticism. During the latter half of the 20th century, philosophers began to recognize the limitations of the traditional definition of knowledge as Justified True Belief (JTB) and called for a more flexible standard of knowledge justification (DeRose, 1992). The central premise of contextualism is that knowledge cannot be evaluated based on a fixed set of criteria. Instead, it asserts that context plays a significant role in shaping knowledge claims. Thus, the same belief can be considered knowledge in one context but may not be regarded as such in another. David Lewis articulated this notion in his work "Elusive Knowledge," highlighting that whether certain possibilities can be excluded depends critically on the context of knowledge evaluation (Lewis, 1996). According to Lewis, in everyday contexts, we can claim to know many things with confidence, while in philosophical or skeptical contexts, almost everything may be doubted. This implies that the standards for knowledge are not static but vary depending on the type of conversational context or problem at hand, which in turn affects

whether a belief is considered knowledge.

One of the core concepts of contextualism is the distinction between “ignorable possibilities” and “non-ignorable possibilities.” Lewis argued that whether we can ignore certain possibilities in a given context determines the status of our knowledge. For example, in everyday contexts, the claim “I have hands” is generally accepted as knowledge. However, in a philosophical discussion where skeptical hypotheses such as “I might be a brain in a vat” are considered, the same claim may not be regarded as knowledge. This approach demonstrates that the justification of knowledge is not solely based on logical validity but is influenced by contextual factors (Lewis, 1996). This contextualist approach makes a particularly valuable contribution to resolving problems related to philosophical skepticism. Philosophical skepticism begins with the doubt that many things we believe we know about the external world could, in fact, be false. For example, the skeptical hypotheses “I might be dreaming right now” or “I am just a brain in a vat” raise the possibility that all of our knowledge is illusory (Nozick, 1981). According to the traditional JTB definition, we cannot fully exclude these skeptical possibilities, which leads to the conclusion that most of what we claim to know cannot actually count as knowledge. Contextualism, however, adjusts the standards of knowledge according to the situation, allowing us to maintain our everyday knowledge claims even in the face of skeptical challenges. That is, while the standards for knowledge may rise dramatically in philosophical contexts, making every day beliefs like “I have hands” subject to doubt, these higher standards need not apply in ordinary contexts, allowing such beliefs to still count as knowledge (Cohen, 1999).

A closer examination of contextualism reveals its significance when compared to internalism and externalism. Internalism holds that the justification for belief depends on the internal states of the cognitive subject, meaning that to count as knowledge, the subject must have access to all the reasons and evidence necessary to justify the belief (Pryor, 2001). Externalism, on the other hand, seeks the justification for knowledge outside of the subject’s internal states, arguing that the process of belief formation must be reliable and consistent with the state of the external world (Goldman, 1979). Both approaches have limitations in responding to the challenges of philosophical skepticism. Internalism tends to overemphasize subjective certainty, risking the exclusion of the external world from consideration, while externalism may focus too heavily on external reliability and neglect the cognitive subject’s epistemic access. Contextualism aims to overcome these limitations by reconstructing the justification conditions of knowledge in a more flexible and realistic manner. For instance, Keith DeRose emphasized that the criteria for attributing knowledge can fluctuate depending on the conversational context, allowing for an effective response to skeptical challenges by raising the standards for knowledge in such contexts (DeRose, 1992). He introduced the sensitivity condition, which posits that a belief counts as knowledge only if it would not be held in a situation where the proposition is false. By applying this criterion, DeRose sought to evaluate whether everyday beliefs could still be considered knowledge under skeptical conditions. Fred Dretske also contributed to the contextualist framework through his “Conclusive Reasons Theory,” arguing that knowledge requires a firm justificatory link between belief and truth. According to Dretske, for a belief to be justified, it must be supported by reasons strong enough to exclude the possibility of falsehood (Dretske, 1971). From this perspective, contextualism provides a theoretical foundation for explaining the complexity of knowledge standards and how they can be adjusted to accommodate the Gettier problem. Contextualism asserts that the criteria for knowledge justification are not fixed but instead vary according to situational and social contexts. This allows for a more comprehensive treatment of the issues surrounding knowledge definition and attribution. By responding effectively to philosophical skepticism while preserving our everyday knowledge claims, contextualism holds significant theoretical value. It offers a framework that bridges the gap between the way knowledge is used in daily life and how it is assessed in philosophical discourse, making it a promising approach for addressing the complexities introduced by the Gettier problem.

4. A Contextualist Analysis of the Gettier Problem

4.1 Contextualism's Solution to the Gettier Problem

The Gettier problem plays a pivotal role in epistemological debates by revealing that the traditional definition of knowledge as Justified True Belief (JTB) is not sufficient to fully account for what constitutes knowledge (Gettier, 1963). According to the JTB definition, if a belief is true and justified, it should be considered knowledge. However, Gettier's cases show that there can be instances where a justified true belief is true merely by accident, thereby challenging the notion that such beliefs can be considered knowledge. For example, if Smith holds the belief "Jones is the person with the job" based on strong evidence, and yet, due to unforeseen circumstances, Smith himself ends up getting the job, then his belief is true, but only by chance. In this case, Smith's belief is considered justified and true, yet it lacks the necessary direct causal connection between justification and truth, preventing it from being considered genuine knowledge (Gettier, 1963).

To address this issue, contextualism emphasizes that the standards for knowledge are not absolute but vary depending on the context (DeRose, 1992; Lewis, 1996). Contextualism asserts that in certain scenarios, a belief with lower standards of justification might be considered knowledge, while in other scenarios, higher standards are required, making mere justification insufficient to qualify as knowledge. Thus, contextualism offers a framework to resolve the problem of accidental truth in Gettier cases by adjusting the standards of justification based on contextual requirements. This approach acknowledges that the justification of knowledge is not absolute and can shift according to situational demands, thereby providing a flexible solution to the core issues raised by the Gettier problem. David Lewis, in developing the contextualist approach, introduced the concepts of "ignorable possibilities" and "non-ignorable possibilities" (Lewis, 1996). According to Lewis, whether a belief can be considered knowledge depends on which possibilities can be ignored in a given context. For instance, consider the case where Smith believes "Jones has the job." Smith's evidence might justify this belief under normal circumstances. However, if Smith fails to account for the possibility that he, himself, might get the job, then his belief is accidentally true. According to Lewis's theory, a belief can be regarded as knowledge only if it cannot be easily undermined by possibilities that should not be ignored in that context. If Smith's belief that "Jones has the job" could be challenged by the overlooked possibility that he might get the job, then his belief cannot be regarded as knowledge.

To further clarify, Lewis suggests that the standards for knowledge attribution must consider the epistemic awareness and context of the evaluator. In other words, whether a belief is recognized as knowledge depends on both the situational context and the epistemic state of the evaluator. For example, when Smith believes that "Jones will get the job," and the evaluator is aware that Smith is not considering the possibility of himself getting the job, the belief cannot be considered knowledge. However, if the evaluator deems that Smith was justifiably unaware of this possibility, then the belief might still be attributed as knowledge (Lewis, 1996). Similarly, Keith DeRose proposed incorporating the "sensitivity condition" into contextualism to establish a stricter standard for knowledge attribution (DeRose, 1995). The sensitivity condition states that for a belief to qualify as knowledge, it must be the case that, if the proposition were false, the subject would not hold that belief. Applying this to Smith's case, if Smith would still believe "Jones has the job" even when Jones does not, then Smith's belief fails the sensitivity condition and cannot be considered knowledge. This condition is designed to prevent beliefs from being accidentally true, as in Gettier cases, by ensuring that the justification of a belief must not only match the truth but also be sensitive to changes in the truth value of the proposition. The sensitivity condition also interacts with other contextualist elements to demonstrate how the standards of justification can shift depending on the evaluator and situation. For example, in everyday contexts, relatively low sensitivity standards may apply, making it easier for a belief to count as knowledge. In contrast, in contexts requiring higher standards, such as legal or scientific discussions, more rigorous sensitivity conditions are imposed, making it harder for certain beliefs to be attributed as knowledge. This flexibility in adjusting the criteria for knowledge enables contextualism to address the Gettier problem more effectively by aligning the standards of justification with the

demands of the specific situation. Lastly, contextualism explains how the standards for knowledge can vary across different versions of Gettier-like scenarios. Consider the example of a farm with fake and real animals interspersed. Suppose B believes that "All the animals in the field are real" (Lehrer, 1965). If B is unaware of the presence of fake animals, his belief may be considered justified knowledge in an everyday context. However, in a context demanding high standards, such as a court of law or scientific investigation, B's belief would not qualify as knowledge due to the possibility of fake animals that cannot be ignored. This demonstrates that contextualism's capacity to modulate the standards of knowledge according to situational requirements can be effectively applied to resolve the Gettier problem. Contextualism seeks to address the Gettier problem by adjusting the standards of justification based on the situational context and incorporating the sensitivity condition to prevent justified true beliefs from being accidentally true. By doing so, contextualism offers a more flexible and comprehensive framework for understanding the nature of knowledge and provides the potential to clarify the relationship between justification and truth. Thus, contextualism presents itself as a promising philosophical approach with significant theoretical implications for resolving the Gettier problem.

4.2 Case Analysis: The Effectiveness and Limitations of Contextualism

Contextualism emphasizes that the standards for knowledge can vary depending on the situation and the epistemic awareness of the evaluator (Lewis, 1996). This approach suggests that by adjusting the standards for knowledge according to the context, contextualism can resolve the issue of accidentally true beliefs that the traditional definition of knowledge could not adequately address. However, when analyzed through various case studies, it becomes apparent that contextualism does not perfectly resolve all Gettier cases and reveals several significant limitations. This section aims to evaluate the effectiveness of contextualism in addressing the Gettier problem and discuss its strengths and weaknesses in elucidating the nature of knowledge through specific examples. One of the frequently cited cases is the "Hank's Sheep Case." In this scenario, Hank believes he is looking at a sheep on a hill based on sufficient visual evidence, making his belief seemingly justified. However, the object that Hank is observing is actually a sheep-shaped rock, and coincidentally, there is a real sheep behind it. In this situation, Hank's belief is true, but only due to a fortunate coincidence, thus failing to qualify as knowledge under the traditional JTB definition. From a contextualist perspective, the key factor in determining whether Hank's belief constitutes knowledge is how much the evaluator knows about the situation. If the evaluator is unaware that Hank is looking at a sheep-shaped rock, his belief could be considered knowledge. However, if the evaluator is aware that Hank is not observing a real sheep, then the belief is merely accidentally true and cannot be considered knowledge (Lewis, 1996). This approach demonstrates that the standards for knowledge can vary depending on the evaluator's epistemic position, effectively addressing specific aspects of the Gettier problem. However, Cohen (1999) argues that this flexibility undermines the consistency of knowledge attribution. For example, in Hank's case, Dick might attribute knowledge to Hank, believing that he is seeing a real sheep, while Tom, suspecting that Hank is looking at a rock, might deny the same belief as knowledge. The potential for differing conclusions in identical situations based on the evaluator's awareness suggests that contextualism could compromise the objectivity of knowledge. Thus, while contextualism has the strength of providing flexible standards for knowledge, this flexibility can sometimes lead to conflicting results, thereby undermining the consistency and objectivity of knowledge (Cohen, 1999). Another prominent example is the "Fake Barns Case" (Lehrer, 1965). In this case, B visits a friend's farm and sees various animals, believing that they are all real. However, unbeknownst to B, the farm owner has replaced some of the animals with highly realistic fake ones. Coincidentally, all the animals B observes happen to be real, making B's belief a justified true belief. However, under the traditional definition, B's belief cannot be considered knowledge because it is true merely by chance. According to the contextualist approach, B's belief may be considered knowledge if the evaluator believes that B is unaware of the presence of fake animals and thus cannot be expected to question their authenticity. However, if the evaluator believes that B should have considered the possibility of

fake animals, then B's belief cannot be regarded as knowledge (Lehrer, 1965). This case illustrates that while contextualism can adjust the standards for knowledge according to situational context, it does not always produce consistent outcomes. For instance, B's belief may be regarded as knowledge in the context of a casual visit to the farm, but if the same belief were used as evidence in a courtroom, where stricter standards are required, it would not qualify as knowledge. This variation suggests that although contextualism is effective in explaining everyday knowledge attribution, it struggles to provide reliable standards in situations requiring higher scrutiny. The third example is the "Fake Rock Case" (Goldman, 1976). Suppose A, while hiking in the mountains, sees what he believes is a real rock from a distance. However, what A actually sees is a well-crafted fake rock, behind which coincidentally exists a real rock. Although A's belief is true, it is true by chance and thus not considered knowledge under the traditional definition. From a contextualist standpoint, if the evaluator is unaware of the possibility of fake rocks in the area, A's belief may be attributed as knowledge. However, if the evaluator deems that A should have considered the possibility of fake rocks, then his belief cannot be considered knowledge (Goldman, 1976). This case reveals that while contextualism can flexibly adjust the standards for knowledge attribution, it also demonstrates that the reliability of knowledge can be compromised depending on the evaluator's awareness and context. Specifically, A's belief might be regarded as knowledge in casual conversations but not in scientific or legal contexts, where higher standards are applied. This indicates that although contextualism offers a useful approach for resolving the Gettier problem by adjusting the standards based on context, it may struggle to ensure the reliability of knowledge attribution when the standards are not consistent. In conclusion, contextualism addresses the Gettier problem by proposing a flexible approach that adjusts the standards of justification based on the situational context and reflects the epistemic position of the evaluator. This method helps resolve the issue of accidentally true beliefs in Gettier cases and enhances the practicality of knowledge attribution in everyday scenarios. However, as the case analyses show, the flexible nature of contextualism can lead to inconsistent knowledge attributions and risks undermining the objectivity of knowledge. Therefore, while contextualism provides valuable insights for resolving the Gettier problem, it also reveals theoretical limitations that require further refinement and discussion to enhance its robustness and applicability.

5. Conclusion and Future Research

The Gettier problem has significantly influenced epistemology by demonstrating that the traditional definition of knowledge—Justified True Belief (JTB)—is not a sufficient condition for knowledge (Gettier, 1963). This realization led philosophers to recognize the need for new definitions and approaches that could adequately address scenarios where beliefs meet all three conditions—justification, truth, and belief—yet still fail to constitute genuine knowledge. This issue has served as a pivotal turning point in philosophical discussions, prompting a variety of theoretical approaches to redefine and supplement the concept of knowledge. This study, focusing specifically on contextualism as one such approach, explored how contextualism attempts to resolve the Gettier problem and examined its theoretical strengths and limitations. Contextualism posits that the conditions for the justification of knowledge are not based on fixed, absolute standards but can change according to the context of conversation or situational factors (Lewis, 1996; DeRose, 1995). By acknowledging that the concept of knowledge used in everyday contexts may differ from that used in philosophical skepticism, contextualism allows for a more flexible understanding of knowledge. For instance, in a typical context, the claim "I have hands right now" can be easily accepted as justified knowledge without much scrutiny. However, in a philosophical context, this statement can be easily challenged by hypotheses such as "What if we are brains in vats receiving electrical stimulation?" (DeRose, 1992). In such a scenario, the standard for justification rises significantly, and the same belief that was previously regarded as knowledge can no longer be considered so.

Contextualism effectively addresses the variability in knowledge standards across different contexts and offers a promising solution to the Gettier problem by reflecting these changes.

However, while emphasizing the flexibility of knowledge, contextualism also reveals several limitations. First, when the standards for knowledge vary excessively depending on the context, there is a risk that the objectivity and consistency of knowledge might be undermined (Cohen, 1997). The possibility that the same belief might be considered knowledge in one context but not in another raises doubts about the stability and reliability of knowledge evaluation. For example, a witness's testimony that is considered knowledge in everyday conversation might not meet the stricter standards of a courtroom, thereby calling into question the relative nature of knowledge standards. This relativity is particularly problematic in contexts that require objective and stable knowledge, such as scientific research or legal judgment (Goldman, 1979). Second, contextualism does not provide a complete solution to skeptical hypotheses. While it claims that skeptical possibilities can be dismissed in some contexts, it concedes that such possibilities cannot be ignored in situations requiring a higher standard of knowledge, such as philosophical discussions (Lewis, 1996). This ultimately results in the invalidation of almost all knowledge claims in philosophical contexts. For example, the reason we cannot claim to know "I have hands" in the context of philosophical skepticism is that the belief is always vulnerable to being challenged by the hypothesis, "I am simply a brain in a vat with simulated experiences." In such cases, contextualism fails to effectively counteract skeptical arguments and only explains the shifting standards of knowledge, rather than providing a robust solution to the problem (Stone, 2000). Third, contextualism can be criticized for its reliance on the ignorance of the evaluator. If an evaluator does not recognize certain possibilities, those possibilities can be excluded from the evaluation of knowledge. This suggests that knowledge evaluations may be determined more by the evaluator's epistemic position rather than objective standards, leading to potential subjectivity (Cohen, 1999). For instance, in the Hank's sheep case, if one evaluator is unaware that Hank is looking at a sheep-shaped rock, they might attribute knowledge to Hank. However, if another evaluator knows about the presence of the rock, they will deny that Hank's belief constitutes knowledge. This disparity based on the evaluator's ignorance implies that the evaluation of knowledge is overly dependent on subjective perspectives, thereby threatening the objectivity of knowledge.

This study concludes that contextualism provides a valid approach to solving the Gettier problem, but also requires theoretical refinement to address its limitations. Future research should focus on overcoming these limitations in several ways. First, when the standards for knowledge change, it is necessary to clearly define the criteria and scope of these changes to ensure the stability of knowledge. This will provide a more theoretically sophisticated model that maintains consistency across various contexts while retaining the flexibility of contextualism. Second, a more refined response to philosophical skepticism is needed. Rather than merely raising the standards for knowledge to evade skeptical hypotheses, further research should aim to identify justification conditions that can effectively eliminate such possibilities. Lastly, concrete studies should be conducted on how to set the standards of knowledge justification in legal, scientific, and educational contexts and apply them practically. By doing so, contextualism could offer not only a solution to the Gettier problem but also a comprehensive and consistent framework for addressing various epistemological challenges in modern philosophy. In summary, while contextualism makes significant contributions to addressing the Gettier problem by proposing a flexible model that adjusts knowledge standards based on context, it still faces the challenge of maintaining consistency and objectivity. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for establishing contextualism as a robust solution not only for the Gettier problem but also for broader epistemological issues.

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