

In Gettier's "Is Justified Belief Knowledge," the question of what we can call "knowledge" is posed through an examination of the Justified True Belief account of knowledge. In some ways, Gettier's argument is similar to Descartes' argument in his first meditation that we must cast doubt on all things that we know. In Descartes' first meditation, Descartes casts doubt on all things he believes so as to not believe those things which are false in order to create solid foundations of knowledge. Descartes argues that one may not believe those things which have reason to be doubted. Through this, we must remove our conviction that we have knowledge until we are certain that we find no reason to doubt that knowledge. Descartes does so by attacking the fundamental tenets and premises that give rise to his opinions. The things that Descartes has learned through his senses should be doubted since he has been deceived. And, since it is possible that our concepts of things that do not rely on the senses (such as mathematics) may be deceptions, we must even cast doubt on those things. If one cannot find any reason to doubt something, that something is knowledge. This thorough examination of our beliefs shakes our conviction that we have any knowledge since it is possible that we are completely deceived and we don't know anything at all.

In Gettier's first case, Gettier argues that it is not sufficient, for a person to know p , that (i) p is true, (ii) that person believes p is true, and (iii) that person is justified in believing p is true. Gettier lays out a scenario in which Smith and Jones have applied for a job, and that Smith has strong evidence (presumably from an employer) to believe that Jones, a man with ten coins in his pocket, will get a job. From this information, Smith believes (e) "The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket", and, since he has a strong reason to do so, he is justified in this belief. However, Smith does not know that he himself will get the job, and Smith also doesn't know that he himself has ten coins in his pocket. According to Gettier's argument, (e) is true, and Smith believes (e), and Smith is justified in believing (e) (albeit, from the false premise "Jones will get the job"), but Smith does not know (e) is true. In Gettier's second case, Smith has a justified belief that "Jones owns a Ford." By disjunction introduction, Smith may introduce a disjunction with a statement whose truth value he doesn't know. Smith introduces "Brown is in Barcelona," and concludes "Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona." However, Jones does not own a Ford, and Brown is in Barcelona. In this case, the statement "Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona" is (i) true, (ii) believed by Smith, and (iii) justified in belief, yet it is not knowledge. Though Gettier argues that our definition of what constitutes as knowledge is faulty, Gettier does not argue that maybe we don't know anything at all the same way that Descartes does. Rather, Gettier's argument that we have a faulty definition of knowledge questions whether or not statements that are true for invalid reasons constitute as knowledge. For example, one might argue that, in Gettier's cases, Smith's justification in believing p is due to luck. Though Gettier's argument brings into doubt what we can define as knowledge, he does not shake out conviction that we have any knowledge at all.