
Plantinga (1993a, 4) takes warrant to be that “normative, possibly complex quantity that comes in degrees, enough of which is what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief”. Roughly, a belief has warrant for someone just when it is produced and maintained by cognitive faculties functioning properly in a suitable environment according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth. At the very least, an adequate epistemological theory should yield the right results for paradigm cases of knowledge (or lack thereof), and Plantinga thinks his theory can handle them. Yet some philosophers, citing certain Gettier-style examples, have argued that Plantinga’s canonical theory in WPF implies that some warranted true beliefs count as knowledge when knowledge is clearly absent.

Consider three Gettier-style counterexamples used to putatively undermine Plantinga’s account. First, an example predating Gettier: Bertrand Russell’s stopped clock case. You glance at an analogue clock that reads 2:00. You believe it is 2:00, and your belief is true. However, the clock just happened to stop exactly twenty-four hours ago. So your belief is accidentally true from a cognitive point of view. Thus you have a justified true belief that does not count as knowledge. You do not know it is 2:00, since the clock could just as well have stopped at some other time. You have a true belief only by sheer epistemic fortuitousness. Second, Carl Ginet’s barn case: you’re driving through Wisconsin. For every real barn in a particular region of Wisconsin, the locals have erected three fake barns to appear more prosperous. You drive through this area, see one of the real barns, and form the belief ‘That’s a fine barn’. Your belief is true and justified but does not constitute knowledge since your belief is only
coincidentally true given that there are so many barn facades in the vicinity. You could just as well have formed the belief by looking at a fake barn.

Third, the identical twin case: you glance across the street and see your good friend Paul leaving someone’s house. You believe the proposition ‘There’s Paul’. However, Paul’s identical twin brother, Peter, happens to be visiting Paul for the weekend. Peter is still in the house, putting on his coat. Furthermore, you are not even aware Paul has a sibling – Peter lives in Paris. So, you have a true justified belief that you see Paul. However, you do not know that Paul is the person you see, since it is only a cognitive coincidence that you see Paul instead of Peter. If Peter had emerged first, then you still would have believed the proposition ‘There’s Paul’.

Critics would argue that in each of these cases Plantinga’s theory mistakenly implies that you do know, since you have a true belief produced by faculties functioning properly in an environment presumably suitable for those faculties according to a design plan successfully aimed at truth. They reason along the following lines. Consider the nearest possible worlds where the clock works just fine, where there are no fake barns bordering the roadway, or where Paul’s identical twin is nowhere in the vicinity. You possess knowledge in all of these close worlds, yet Plantinga’s theory does not capture the relevant difference between your actual situation and the possible situations. For example, in the nearest worlds where the clock does not stop, your belief that it is 2:00 is presumably produced by the same exercise of cognitive powers as it is in the actual world. Furthermore, the environment and design plan appears the same. However, in the actual case you do not know that it is 2:00, while in the nearest worlds you do. Similarly, for either the fake barn or identical twin case, your exercises of cognitive power, your environments, and your design plans appear the same in the nearest worlds where there are no fake barns or where Peter is nowhere nearby, respectively. Plantinga (1996, 312) recapitulates the objection, saying, “The same bit of the cognitive system, governed by the same bit of the design plan produces the same belief in the two situations [e.g., in the actual Gettier situation and in any one of the situations in the nearby worlds]: if the process in question is governed by a bit of the design plan aimed directly at the truth in the one case, the same goes in the other”.

In response, Plantinga claims that the environment in each of these cases – where the subject does not know – is misleading or unfavorable with respect to the subject’s exercise of cognitive powers. For true beliefs to possess enough warrant for knowledge, the environment must be favorable for their production. In *WPF* Plantinga thought of a suitable cognitive environment (mostly) as one very much like the one we humans enjoy here on earth: devoid of evil demons, of experimenting Alpha Centaurians, of