THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

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by
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In this thesis I will attempt to demonstrate how Adrianne Heathcote's 2006 essay "Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem" may be seen as an example of a contemporary epistemologist who is striving to define exactly what knowledge is. There is much debate concerning the exact definition of knowledge. After explaining where the debate currently stands I will suggest that Heathcote may want to consider the insights of the later Wittgenstein. He may come to realize that he has perhaps overlooked the relationship between language and philosophy.
CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read The Limits of Language by Paul Kemp, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Philosophy at San Francisco State University.

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I would like to acknowledge Professor Joseph White of Santa Barbara City College whose insightful and entertaining lectures inspired me to pursue a degree in philosophy.
For my father.
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Introduction

In this thesis I will attempt to demonstrate how Adrianne Heathcote’s 2006 essay “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem” is an example of a contemporary epistemologist who is striving to define exactly what knowledge is. In “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem” Heathcote’s ultimate goal seems to be to prove that the traditional theory of knowledge can be successfully augmented by adding new criteria so that it can account for the unusual circumstances famously raised by Edmund Gettier in “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” Although Heathcote’s project to further refine the traditional theory of knowledge is very compelling I will demonstrate how his fellow epistemologist Chad Vance has recently raised counter arguments that show why Heathcote’s proposed formula might ultimately fail. Rather than trying to defend Heathcote’s ambitious project of attempting to refine the traditional theory of knowledge I will instead conclude this thesis by suggesting that Heathcote may want to consider some of the insights offered in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s later work. Wittgenstein makes some crucial observations about the relationship between language and philosophy that Heathcote seems to overlook. Wittgenstein explains how, unlike logic or mathematics, language is a fluid and dynamic entity and that words ultimately derive their meaning from the way in which they are used in a given context. As we will see Wittgenstein believes that philosophers sometimes get into trouble when they remove a word away from any natural context and instead examine it in complete isolation in an attempt to formulate a precise definition. I assert that Heathcote’s “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem” is just such a case. It is a case in which a
philosopher is essentially removing the term ‘knowledge’

from any ordinary context and attempting to formulate a precise definition. Given that Heathcote is actively involved in the ongoing epistemological debate concerning what it means to know something I simply suggest that he might want to better consider the later Wittgenstein’s observations concerning language as he tries to defend his proposed specific criteria for knowledge as presented in “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem”. In the end Heathcote may find it best to adopt a new alternative approach to defining knowledge.
The Traditional Theory of Knowledge

In order to better understand Heathcote's motivations for augmenting the traditional theory of knowledge it may be quite useful to first briefly review what the traditional theory of knowledge is and why Heathcote believes that it needs to be revamped.

The traditional theory of knowledge was originally put forth by Plato in the *Theaetetus*. In this ancient dialogue the characters of Theaetetus and Socrates are discussing the nature of knowledge. They are trying to find a satisfactory answer to the question “What is knowledge?” (Plato, *Theaetetus* 143d-145e). At first Theaetetus offers that there are various instances of knowledge. Socrates initially agrees with Theaetetus but reminds him that what they wish to discover by the end of their discussion is not simply what various kinds of knowledge there are but rather what knowledge is *itself*.

**Socrates**

But the question, Theaetetus, was not to what knowledge belongs, nor how many the forms of knowledge are; for we did not wish to number them, but to find out what knowledge itself really is. Or is there nothing in what I say?

**Theaetetus**

Nay, you are quite right.

**Socrates**
Take this example. If anyone should ask us about some common everyday thing, for instance, what clay is, and we should reply that it is the potters' clay and the oven makers' clay and the brickmakers' clay, should we not be ridiculous? (Plato, *Theaetetus* 146e)

In passages like these we can see how Plato is not interested in the myriad ways in which we use the term ‘knowledge’ but rather Plato would like to find a universal definition of knowledge that can hold up in *every* case. Passages like these imply that Plato believes that there must be some essential characteristics of knowledge that remain constant and unchanged throughout particular instances of knowledge. Plato seems to be of the opinion that it doesn’t make very much sense for the word ‘knowledge’ to have several different meanings. He believes that there must be something common to each instance of knowledge which allows all of those various instances to all be collectively grouped under the same surname.

After much deliberation with Theaetetus Socrates finally offers that when “anyone forms the true opinion of anything without rational explanation, you may say that his mind is truly exercised, but has no knowledge; for he who cannot give and receive a reason for a thing, has no knowledge of that thing; but when he adds rational explanation, then, he is perfected in knowledge.” (Plato, *Theaetetus*) With this conclusion Socrates has essentially given what has become known as the “traditional theory of knowledge”. The theory claims that a person only has knowledge if they have a justified true belief. That is, K-JTB for knowledge equals a justified true belief. According to Plato’s proposed theory in order for a person to have knowledge she must meet all three of the following criteria:
1. She must believe that something is true,

2. That thing must actually be true,

3. She must have justification for believing that it is true.
Gettier's Counterexamples

Since the time of the ancient Greeks Plato's traditional theory of knowledge seems to have been more or less generally accepted. Although Socrates himself rejects this theory at the end of the *Theaetetus* it has nonetheless become the standard theory of knowledge that has dominated popular culture for many years. This general acceptance may be due to the fact that in many ordinary everyday cases the traditional justified true belief theory seems to hold up with little controversy. There are many ordinary everyday cases in which Plato's three part criteria seems to successfully satisfy our basic intuitions for what it means to know something.

However, in 1963 Edmund Gettier published a brief but remarkable paper titled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" in which he presents intriguing counterexamples that are meant to show that Plato's classic justified true belief theory may *not* sufficiently define knowledge after all. Gettier started his now famous paper by observing that "various attempts have been made in recent years to state necessary and sufficient conditions for someone's knowing a given proposition. The attempts have often been such that they can be stated in a form similar to the following:

(a) S knows that P IFF (i.e., if and only if)

(i) P is true,

(ii) S believes that P, and

(iii) S is justified in believing that P." (Gettier p.1)
We will likely recognize the formula Gettier presents as the very formula that Plato proposed in the *Theatetus*. This is precisely the theory of knowledge that Gettier intends to call into question in his essay. Gettier plans to discredit Plato’s classic theory by offering his own brief but fascinating counterexamples that are meant to show that the traditional theory of knowledge may actually be inadequate. Gettier explains that he “shall argue that (Plato’s theory) is false in that the conditions stated therein do not constitute a sufficient condition for the truth of the proposition that S knows that P.” (Gettier p.1)

In one of Gettier’s well known counterexamples he imagines a hypothetical situation involving the characters Smith, Jones, and their boss. The boss tells Smith that Jones will get a new job. Since Smith knows that Jones has ten coins in his pocket he forms the belief: “The person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.” The next day, as it turns out, Smith’s boss surprisingly ends up giving the new job to Smith, who also happens to have ten coins in his pocket. So, in the end, Smith’s belief that “The person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket” turns out to be true.

In Gettier’s hypothetical situation something does not seem to be quite right. An unsettling element of pure luck seems to be involved that makes us skeptical about whether or not Smith can be said to genuinely possess knowledge about who was going to get the job. The unusual Gettier situation makes us reluctant to say that Smith had any real knowledge about who would get the job.

Throughout "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" the main thing that each of Gettier’s
counterexamples have in common is that they all seem to describe cases in which a person has a justified true belief yet that person *still* lacks knowledge. In each of Gettier’s counterexamples all three conditions of Plato’s traditional theory of knowledge seem to have been sufficiently met yet genuine knowledge does not seem to follow. Although Gettier’s counterexamples may seem far-fetched, or perhaps even outrageous, the important thing to keep in mind is that they are merely meant to serve as revealing thought experiments that speak to the fact that the traditional theory of knowledge as it stands may be insufficient.
Disjoint States of Affairs

Heathcote is a contemporary epistemologist who believes that Gettier’s paper has effectively demonstrated that the three part traditional theory of knowledge is inadequate and that we are therefore left with the new task of figuring out what it lacks and correcting for that deficiency. In the abstract of his essay “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem” Heathcote claims that the Gettier counterexamples are “taken by Gettier to show that the two conditions of a belief being both true and justified could not jointly be sufficient for knowledge, that something more was required.” (Heathcote, Truthmaking 1) Rather than abandoning the quest to define exactly what knowledge is Heathcote instead takes it upon himself to try to augment the traditional theory of knowledge so that it will be able account for unusual Gettier style counterexamples.

After closely examining Gettier’s counterexamples Heathcote argues that the traditional theory of knowledge needs to be augmented by adding a new fourth condition. As we will see the fourth condition he argues for concerns the relationship between truth, justification and the state of affairs.

Heathcote first explains that “under normal circumstances a person’s belief gets formed in such a way that the state of affairs that makes their belief true—i.e. its truthmaker—is the
same as the state of affairs that the chain of justifications is ultimately grounded in.” (Heathcote
Truthmaking 11) He contrasts this description of “normal circumstances” with the unusual circumstances that hold during one of Gettier’s counterexamples. Heathcote argues that “under normal circumstances a person’s belief gets formed in such a way that the state of affairs that makes their belief true— i.e. its truthmaker—is the same as the state of affairs that the chain of justifications is ultimately grounded in.” (Heathcote Truthmaking 11) However, under the unusual circumstances of the Gettier counterexamples Heathcote contends that “there is a split, with two states of affairs, so that one is the truthmaker for the proposition, and the other is the state of affairs that the chain of justifications is grounded in”. (Heathcote Truthmaking 11) From this description it is clear that Heathcote believes that each of the Gettier counterexamples contains what are referred to as “disjoint states of affairs”. That is to say that one state of affairs is the truthmaker for the statement and another, entirely different, state of affairs is the grounds for the justification of the statement. (By “truthmaker” Heathcote and other epistemologists simply mean “x makes it true that p”. That is, there are certain conditions holding that make an individual’s proposition true.)

In order to fix the disjoint issue that he believes is present in Gettier’s counterexamples Heathcote invents a new condition that he wants to add to the traditional theory of knowledge. Heathcote argues that a new Condition K should stipulate that the state of affairs that make a statement true must be the same state of affairs that give rise to the justification for believing that the statement is true. Heathcote argues that his new stipulation would eliminate the disjoint issue and thus finally solve the problems raised by the infamous Gettier counterexamples.
Throughout "Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem" Heathcote spells out his argument for adding his Condition K to the traditional theory of knowledge. As we will see Heathcote’s argument depends on what is known as the truthmaker theory. Heathcote explains to his readers that, “the primary idea of truthmaker theory is that there are facts or states of affairs (or situations, or circumstances, or ways things are) that make propositions true- i.e. are such that if the proposition had not been true the fact could not have been obtained.” (Heathcote Truthmaking 155) Heathcote goes on to define exactly what he means by ‘truthmaker’ for the purposes of his formal argument. He proposes that the definition of ‘truthmaker’ is:

“s is a truthmaker for proposition A, designated s → A, iff it is a necessary truth that if s obtains then A is true.

He follows this definition with a closely related truthmaker axiom:

“For any true proposition A, there is an s such that s → A.

There are no truthmakers for false propositions. (Heathcote, Truthmaking 155)

Once these two basic notions have been laid out Heathcote can then give his argument for adding Condition K to the venerable traditional theory of knowledge. It should be noted that in Heathcote’s argument he specifically references Gettier’s original 1963 counterexamples that I have previously mentioned concerning the characters Smith, Jones, and their boss in a classic case of disjoint states of affairs. With Gettier’s counterexamples in mind we can clearly break down Heathcote’s argument step by step:
Premise 1  S is a truthmaker for proposition A, iff it is a necessary truth that if S obtains then A is true.

Premise 2  For any true proposition A, there is an S such that S is a truthmaker for proposition A. There are no truthmakers for false propositions.

Premise 3  Smith believes that “Jones will get the job and Jones has ten coins in his pocket.”

Premise 4  The state of affairs that the justification for Premise 3 is ultimately grounded in is: Jones with ten coins in his pocket.

Premise 5  It logically follows from Premise 1 that Smith believes that “The person who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.”

Premise 6  The truthmaker for this proposition, however, is Smith himself with ten coins in his own pocket.

Lemma 1  The truthmaker for Smith’s proposition (Premise 6) is disjoint from the state of affairs that the justification is grounded in (Premise 4).

Lemma 2  There must be a new condition added to the Justified True Belief theory of
knowledge that accounts for these Gettier cases of truthmaker/state of affairs disjoint.

**Premise 8** Let Condition K state that: $X$ knows $A$ iff (i) $X$ believes $A$; (ii) $X$ is justified in believing $A$; (iii) $A$ is True; and (iv) the evidence that $X$ has which constitutes the justification is evidence of the very state of affairs that makes $A$ true.

**Conclusion** We can remedy the deficiency in the traditional justified true belief theory of knowledge by adding Condition K so that the new theory states that knowledge equals:

$JTB + \text{Condition K}$

When discussing his newly proposed formula in his essay “A Primer on Knowledge” Heathcote claims that “not only will this solve both the counterexamples that Gettier has given, it will also solve the other Gettier counterexamples that I am aware of.” (Heathcote, Primer 13)

By this Heathcote means that with his new formula in place it will be clear that the Gettier counterexamples will certainly not be cases of genuine knowledge because they will fail to satisfy the criteria of Condition K.

Heathcote claims that “(In Gettier cases) we have disjoint states of affairs, one of which is the truth-maker for the statement, the other of which is the state of affairs which is the ground for the justification. … [W]e can remedy the deficiency in the JTB definition of knowledge simply by insisting on the identity of the two states of affairs…” (Heathcote Truthmaking 13)
Admittedly this four part definition of knowledge may seem quite appealing upon first blush because it seems to satisfy our basic intuitions about knowledge. For many people it certainly seems like there ought to be some kind of correlation between the truth and how things actually are in the world. By adding his Condition K to the traditional theory of knowledge Heathcote appeals to this basic notion of correlation.

Vance’s Objection

After reading Heathcote’s proposal for adding a new fourth condition to the traditional theory of knowledge contemporary epistemologist Chad Vance responded with a paper in 2014 boldly titled “Truthmaker Theory Does Not Solve The Gettier Problem”. In this critical paper Vance argues that “while a satisfactory account could be forthcoming, the prospect of truthmaker theory rescuing our analysis of knowledge from the problem identified by Gettier cases does not look particularly promising.” (Vance 291) Vance asserts that although Heathcote’s argument may be appealing at first it ultimately fails because it eliminates many cases that we strongly take to be common sense incidences of knowledge. Vance allows that Heathcote’s truthmaker theory might work for cases of perceptual knowledge but argues that it certainly will not work in cases of knowledge based on memory or testimony. To demonstrate this failing in Heathcote’s truthmaker theory Vance offers this simple counterexample consisting of a reliable friend named Buddy who you have asked to borrow a book from:

“You have asked him to lend you a book. ‘I put the book in your box,’ he tells you. Holly (another reliable friend) chimes in as she walks by, ‘It’s true,’ she says. ‘I saw him put it there a
minute ago.’ So, you form the belief, <The book is in my box>; and indeed it is in your box.”
(Vance, Truthmaker 291)

Vance goes on to explain “that you have knowledge in this case seems uncontroversial
enough. But, if (Heathcote’s condition K argument) is correct, then apparently you do not, since
the fourth criterion for knowledge proposed above is not met. Consider: The state of affairs
which

makes the believed proposition, <The book is in my box> true is the book’s actually being in
your box. Meanwhile, the state of affairs which justifies your belief is your friends’ telling you so
(i.e., Buddy and Holly’s testimony). Since your justmaker (the state of affairs that justify the
subject’s belief) and the believed proposition’s truthmaker (the state of affairs that ultimately
cause the subject’s belief to be true) are not identical, on the present proposal you do not have
knowledge.” (Vance, Truthmaker 291)

By offering this simple counterexample concerning the borrowing of a book and the
testimony of two reliable friends Vance attempts to show that Heathcote’s amendment to the
traditional theory of knowledge will, unfortunately, exclude many common sense cases of
knowledge based on testimony or memory. Although Heathcote’s proposed conditions may help
to exclude bizarre outlier cases like the famous Gettier counterexamples from constituting
genuine knowledge Vance argues that it would also exclude very ordinary cases of knowledge.
When considering cases like the Buddy and Holly case Vance argues that “since your justmaker
and the believed proposition’s truthmaker are not identical, on the present proposal you do not
have knowledge. The Simple Solution will in fact rule out the possibility of knowledge in all
sorts of common cases, such as knowledge based on testimony, memory, and so on." (Vance, *Truthmaker* 292)

It is not difficult to imagine simple cases, like Vance has, in which we intuitively believe that the subject in question has knowledge based on testimony or memory. For example, suppose a woman places her slippers underneath her bed before falling asleep at night. The next morning she wakes up and remembers that her slippers are under her bed. She then forms the belief "my slippers are under the bed". In this case we could say that the state of affairs that make her belief true is the fact that her slippers really are under the bed. We could also say that what makes her belief justified is her memory of placing the slippers under her bed last night. So in this case it appears as if there may be a disjoint state of affairs between what makes her belief true and what ultimately justifies her belief. If we are to follow Heathcote's new formulation on knowledge then it seems that we must reject the supposition that the woman in this example has knowledge of her slippers being under her bed.

Vance sees exclusions like this as being far too severe. Vance believes that Heathcote's newly proposed fourth criterion concerning truthmaker/justmaker alignment is simply too strict and that it will exclude far too many ordinary common sense cases of knowledge. Heathcote's proposed criteria for knowledge may perhaps be seen as being too limiting and too narrow. Vance is under the impression that he effectively demonstrates that Heathcote's truthmaker theory is an inadequate solution for solving the classic Gettier problem. If Vance's criticism holds then it seems that Heathcote's quest to find an exact definition of knowledge remains
Heathcote’s Response to Vance

Heathcote recently published an article in the January, 2015 issue of Ratio magazine titled “Testimony and Gettier: A Reply to Vance” in which he tries to defend his proposed augmentation of the traditional theory of knowledge from Vance’s criticism. Heathcote insists that his four part criteria for what constitutes knowledge is successful and that Vance has merely misinterpreted his argument. Heathcote takes issue with Vance’s borrowed book example. “So how does my account deal with Vance’s example of the borrowed book? Simple: the evidence you have is Buddy’s saying that the book is in the box and Holly’s confirming it. So your evidence, in both cases, is evidence of the book being in the box, and that is also the truthmaker for your belief <The book is in my box>. There is no problem here at all: the case is dealt with in a perfectly straightforward way.” (Heathcote, Testimony 3) With this statement Heathcote is arguing that Vance has completely misunderstood what has been argued for in “Truthmaking and
"the Gettier Problem". He denies that his formula is flawed and argues that Vance is trying to stir up problems where in reality there are none. Heathcote claims that he never meant for his Condition K to mean that a proposition's evidence is necessarily found in the state of affairs which justifies your belief but rather that evidence is merely of the proposition in question.

In an attempt to clarify this rather confusing technical point Heathcote draws the analogy of a photograph of a lake. He makes the distinction that what the photograph is is something rectangular that you can hold in your hand while what the photograph is of is a lake. So in the case of the borrowed book Heathcote claims that verbal testimony is evidence of the book being in the box and this is enough to satisfy his fourth condition. Heathcote argues that "we are not looking for the 'state of affairs which justifies your belief' - that is not what my condition iv) asks for... Rather, we are looking for the state of affairs that the evidence is of, and it is of the book being in the box. But it is this that Vance wholly ignores in his description of the example." (Heathcote, Testimony 3)

This defense made by Heathcote may not be an extremely strong defense but it may suffice for the moment. The reason I say this is because it seems to rely solely on a technicality that may only get Heathcote out of trouble temporarily. The greater issue here is that Vance's criticism has perhaps hit upon something that will ultimately create insurmountable obstacles for Heathcote's proposed theory. Vance suggests that one of the reason's Heathcote's theory fails is that it is too limiting in scope for what it means to know something. There are certainly other cases in which we take ourselves to know something but which Heathcote's criteria may fail to
capture. Generally speaking we take ourselves to know many things, i.e. "I know how to ride a bicycle", "I know that I love my mother", etc., that seem to fall out of the jurisdiction of Heathcote’s formula.

To this assertion one might simply respond that these propositions are not the kind of propositions that Heathcote had in mind when articulating his formula for knowledge. For example, it can be argued that knowing how to ride a bicycle may be understood as a kind "knowledge how" variety of knowledge that is different from the "knowledge of" variety that Heathcote focuses on. Although that may be the case it seems that if we are to accept this notion of exclusion in Heathcote’s formula then there may ultimately be an element of arbitrariness for what kinds of knowledge are the sorts that Heathcote aims to address i. Wasn’t Heathcote’s objective to solve the Gettier problem once and for all by giving a clear definition of knowledge that holds in all cases? Should there be a fifth condition that specifies precisely which iterations of knowledge fall under the jurisdiction of Heathcote’s theory and which are excluded? In the final sections of this thesis I bring up what I think may ultimately be a deficiency at the root of Heathcote’s project. Perhaps it is the case that Vance’s criticism has inadvertently scratched the surface of what can be understood as fresh new perspective to this age old epistemological debate.
From their heated exchange it is plain to see that Vance does not share Heathcote’s enthusiasm that truthmaker theory is a viable solution to the Gettier problem. As Vance prepares for his latest rebuttal to Heathcote I wish to offer a simple insight that I think Vance may find useful. In doing so I will certainly not claim to have a final solution to the ongoing epistemological debate concerning the precise definition of knowledge. We will recall that the debate has been carrying on since 369 BC when Plato first tried to pin down the exact nature of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. The insight I hope to offer to Vance is one that was originally
proposed by the later Ludwig Wittgenstein in *The Blue and Brown Books* and *Philosophical Investigations* and it concerns the relationship between language and philosophy. It seems that Vance and Heathcote have as yet overlooked the potential impact that Wittgenstein may have on the direction of their contemporary epistemological debate.

First of all we may notice that in writing "*Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem*” Heathcote is arguing for a general theory of knowledge that will hold true in *all* cases. In essence Heathcote believes that his four part criteria for knowledge will amount to a “once and for all” definition of knowledge. By the end of his paper Heathcote is convinced that he has developed a sufficient answer to the question “What is knowledge?” He seems confident that his only remaining task at this point is to defend his favored theory from critics like Vance whom he supposes have merely misinterpreted or misrepresented his sound argument.

It should be made clear that in making his case for implementing a four part theory of knowledge Heathcote is nowhere inquiring about the various ways in which people employ the term ‘knowledge’. Nor is Heathcote exploring what is meant by ‘knowledge’ based on a multitude of various situations (other than a handful of Gettier style counterexamples). Heathcote does not seem to give very much consideration to how the term ‘knowledge’ may be used in vastly different ways at different times and in different contexts.

The later Wittgenstein brings up an interesting point about the nature of language that Heathcote has clearly not addressed in his project so far. Wittgenstein shows us that when we attempt to isolate a single word, such as the word ‘game’, it seems extremely difficult to come up with one all encompassing definition of the word. This is because not all games have
consistent features. Not all games have rules, not all games have multiple players, not all games are the opposite of work, not all games have a winner and a loser, not all games are easy to play, etc. Wittgenstein argues that there is a “tendency to look for something in common to all the entities which we commonly subsume under a general term. -- We are inclined to think that there must be something in common to all games, say, and that this common property is the justification for applying the general term ‘game’ to the various games; whereas games form a family the members of which have family likeness. Some of them have the same nose, others the same eyebrows and others again the same way of walking; and these likenesses overlap. The idea of a general concept being a common property of its particular instances connects up with other primitive, too simple, ideas of the structure of language.” (Wittgenstein, Blue and Brown 17-18)

By this Wittgenstein implies that people will sometimes wrongly assume that just because we are calling a large variety of different activities by the same name it must be the case that all these different activities share one common element that unifies the entire group. In opposition to this unchecked assumption Wittgenstein urges us not to “say: “There must be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’”-but look and see whether there is anything common to all. -For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don’t think, but look!” (Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations 65)

Wittgenstein points out that despite not being able to identify an exact explanation for what it is to be a game it seems that within the context of any ordinary conversation the listener
usually understands what is meant by the speaker's use of the word 'game'. For example, most people seem to understand what we mean when we talk about "kids playing a game of catch in the park" even without the speaker making any explicit reference to necessary and sufficient conditions. This simple example reminds us that we successfully use the word ‘game’ most, if not all, of the time without having an exact definition of what a game is. Wittgenstein contends that this interesting phenomena about the word ‘game’ is the case because words ultimately get their meaning from their use rather than from some permanently fixed essential definition.

Wittgenstein contends that when philosophers remove words away from their grounding in ordinary context and attempt to study them in isolation it is a mistake. He advises us that "when philosophers use a word—"knowledge", "being", "object", "I", "proposition", "name"—and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?— What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use." (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 116) What

Wittgenstein means here is that we successfully use words such as 'knowledge' every day in ordinary situations and only when a philosopher removes the word 'knowledge' away from the context of its natural usage and instead attempts to discover the essence of the word in isolation does it create problems. Perhaps this is akin to what Heathcote is ultimately doing in his project to define once and for all what knowledge is. By implementing his specific four part criteria Heathcote believes that he has zeroed in on exactly what it means for someone to genuinely know something in all possible cases. Unfortunately for Heathcote his ambitious desire to define
exactly what knowledge is by implementing his specific four part criteria may be the very kind of thing that Wittgenstein advises against.

In “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem” Heathcote is basically continuing the project started long ago by Plato. We will recall that in Plato’s dialogue the Theaetetus the character Socrates questions Theaetetus about the nature of expertise, and this leads him to pose the key question of the dialogue: “What is knowledge?” (Plato, Theaetetus 143d-145e). Contemporary scholars have pointed out that many early Socratic dialogues “ask questions of the “What is...?” form and typically fail to find answers: “What is courage?” (Laches), “What is self-control?” (Charmides), “What is justice?” (Alcibiades I; Republic 1), “What is holiness?” (Euthyphro), “What is friendship?” (Lysis), “What is virtue?” (Meno), “What is nobility?” (Hippias Major).” (Chapelle 2013) In each of these examples the character Socrates and his interlocutors discuss the various instances of the particular term in question with the intention of eventually discovering a common element that can define the term. The Theaetetus is no exception to this typical process. It seems to be an instance in which Plato wants to explore the various iterations of knowledge in order to eventually find the common element in all its applications. This point is important to understand because it is ultimately from the Theaetetus that Heathcotes draws the initial framework for his new formulation of knowledge.

In opposition to this Platonic approach Wittgenstein claims that “the idea that in order to get clear about the meaning of a general term one had to find the common element in all its
applications has shackled philosophical investigation; for it has not only led to no result, but also made the philosopher dismiss as irrelevant the concrete cases, which alone could have helped him to understand the usage of the general term. When Socrates asks the question, "what is knowledge?" he does not even regard it as a preliminary answer to enumerate cases of knowledge in order to prevent these unnecessary problems."(Wittgenstein, Blue and Brown Books 20) From passages like this we can draw the conclusion that Wittgenstein believes that Plato’s approach was perhaps misguided from the very outset. Since Heathcote’s current project depends heavily on Plato’s groundwork as its starting point it seems that Heathcote may be in danger of inheriting Wittgenstein’s same biting criticism.

When considering an attempt to precisely define what a game is Wittgenstein implores us: “Don’t say: “There must be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’”-but look and see whether there is anything common to all. -For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all...” (Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations 66) The same warning, I think, should also apply to the word ‘knowledge’. We shouldn’t insist that there must be something common to all instances of knowledge or else they would not be called ‘knowledge’. I argue that the word ‘knowledge’ is a general term in the same way that the word ‘game’ is

general term. Both of these words ultimately derive their meaning from the way they are used in a given context. It would not make very much sense to accept Wittgenstein’s astute observation that we are unable to formulate an essential definition of a game while at the same time accepting Heathcote’s bold assertion that he has discovered a precise definition of knowledge.
Similar to the word ‘game’ there are surely innumerable instances in which people successfully use the word ‘knowledge’ without any particular need to adhere to Heathcote’s specific criteria. Disregarding Wittgenstein’s cautionary warnings Heathcote is essentially examining ‘knowledge’ in a vacuum away from the ordinary ways in which people use the term. He is setting his own specific parameters by removing knowledge from any natural context and focusing only on one highly technical version on the term. Is seems that Heathcote has yet to deal with Wittgenstein’s warning that “when we do philosophy we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the expressions of civilized men, put a false interpretation on them, and then draw the queerest conclusions from it.” (Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations 79)

Much like the word ‘game’ it seems similarly uncontroversial that we use the word ‘knowledge’ successfully in everyday ordinary contexts. With Wittgenstein’s insights in mind I assert that, much like the word ‘game’, the word ‘knowledge’ may not be a candidate for something that can be precisely defined in the way that Heathcote has attempted in “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem”.

Moving The Debate Forward

Although contemporary scholars may interpret Wittgenstein’s later work in various different ways most of them would probably agree that Heathcote’s project to give necessary and
sufficient conditions knowledge is something that Wittgenstein would be opposed to. When considering Wittgenstein’s enlightening observations on language in his 2010 essay *Meaning and Use* P.M.S. Hacker writes: “It was a mistake for philosophers... to take definition in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions of application to be the paradigm for explanations of word-meaning. Rather we must recognize the diversity of the forms of such explanations, and the fluidity of the various forms. We must recognize the legitimacy of ostensive definition, of explanation by paraphrase and contrastive paraphrase, of explanation by citing grounds of application, criteria that warrant application, verifying conditions of a prediction, etc.” (Hacker 148) In this passage we can see that, like Wittgenstein, Hacker realizes that language is much more varied and complex than Plato and Heathcote make it out to be. Words do not get their meaning solely based on necessary and sufficient conditions. Such a description based on necessary and sufficient conditions sounds entirely too narrow to Hacker when he considers the many vastly different ways that language is used. Given that Heathcote may have potentially inadvertently employed a misguided approach while attempting to define knowledge the question now is what new approach might he want to consider as an alternative?

In 2008’s “*Epistemology After Wittgenstein*” contemporary epistemologist Maciej Sain contends “that the most genuine intention behind Wittgenstein’s investigations was to draw attention to the diversity concepts such as cognition, knowledge, truth, etc. Such diversity is not a challenge but a fact which needs to be accounted for in epistemological studies.” (Sain 107) With an appreciation for just how much Wittgenstein’s work may influence the direction on contemporary epistemology Sain implies that epistemological debates are far from over; its just
that their focus may change. When Sain considers Wittgenstein’s assertion in the *Blue and Black Book* that “there is no one exact usage of the term ‘knowledge’; but we can make up several such usages, which will more or less agree with the ways the word is actually used” (Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books* 26) Sain comes to realize that “the most fundamental lesson we learn from this and numerous other examples is that accuracy is not always an asset. Central is the ability to discern differences. This also refers to one of the most vital pursuits of epistemology, that is truth. Instead of chasing the thread of skepticism in Wittgenstein’s theory, we had better check how different concepts of truth apply to such domains as logic, ethics, aesthetics, religion, psychology and mathematics.” (Sain, *Epistemology* 113) What Sain means is that rather than assuming that Wittgenstein’s insights concerning the relationship between language and philosophy inevitably promote a kind of epistemic skepticism where nothing can be known we should instead endeavor to come to terms with the various ways that we can successfully use the word “knowledge” in different domains. Sain concludes his essay by arguing that “accounting for these differences was among the key themes running through Wittgenstein’s philosophy and holding it together and -I do believe- looking at *Philosophical Investigations* from this angle may be much more beneficial for epistemology than exploring the ...alleged skepticism.” (Sain, *Epistemology* 113) Heathcote may want to consider Sain’s proposed new direction as his quest to define knowledge carries on.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have attempted to demonstrate how Adrianne Heathcote’s 2006 essay
“Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem” is an example of a contemporary epistemologist striving to define exactly what knowledge is. I have explained how Heathcote’s ultimate goal in “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem” is to prove that the traditional theory of knowledge can be successfully augmented by adding new criteria to it so that it will be able to account for the unusual circumstances famously raised by Gettier in “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” Although Heathcote’s project to further refine the traditional theory of knowledge may initially be attractive I have shown how his fellow epistemologist Vance has recently raised counter arguments that may sufficiently demonstrate why Heathcote’s proposed formula may ultimately be insufficient. Rather than trying to defend Heathcote’s ambitious project of attempting to refine the traditional theory of knowledge I instead ended this thesis by suggesting that Heathcote may want to consider some of the insights offered by Wittgenstein’s “Philosophical Investigations”. I explained the crucial observations Wittgenstein makes about the relationship between language and philosophy. After doing so I asserted that Heathcote perhaps fails to fully take these relationships into account as he pursues his difficult undertaking of trying to once and for all define exactly what knowledge is. I mentioned how Wittgenstein believes that philosophers sometimes get into trouble when they remove a word away from the grounding of ordinary context and instead place that word in complete isolation in a misguided attempt to formulate a precise definition. Heathcote’s “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem” may prove to be a case in which a philosopher is essentially removing the term ‘knowledge’ from any natural context and attempting to formulate a precise definition. As the debate among contemporary epistemologists carries on I simply
suggest that Heathcote may want to take into greater consideration Wittgenstein’s insightful observations concerning the inherent limits of language as he tries to defend his proposed specific four part criteria for knowledge as presented in “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem”.
In the end Heathcote may want to consider a new alternative direction like the one proposed by Sain that better incorporates Wittgenstein’s work.

References


Heathcote, Adrianne “Truthmaking and the Gettier Problem”


Hacker, P.M.S. “Meaning and Use”
