

ON THE GETTIER PROBLEM AND YORÙBÁ ‘EPISTEMOLOGY’: ANALYTIC FORAYS INTO
ETHNO-PHILOSOPHY.

BY

EMMANUEL OFUASIA

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, OLABISI ONABANJO UNIVERSITY,
AGO-IWOYE, OGUN. NIGERIA. OFUASIA.EMMA@GMAIL.COM

&

OLUWASEYI GRACE OJO

DEPARTMENT OF YORUBA AND COMMUNICATION ARTS,
UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, IBADAN. NIGERIA. OLUWASEYIOJ@GMAIL.COM

Abstract: The Gettier Problem may be summarily articulated that whereas one may fulfil the requisite for knowledge justification, it does not spare one, the prize of ignorance. Plato (1973); Ayer (1956); and Chisholm (1957) have endorsed the model for propositional knowledge as Justified True Belief (JTB). However, in 1963, Gettier (1963) provided two instances that *seemingly* fulfilled the JTB canon but still leaves the subject ignorant. In reaction, there have been various attempts to ‘fix’ the JTB. This essay departs from attempts to reconstruct the quandary generated by Gettier as it forays analytically into traditional Yorùbá ‘epistemology’ to promulgate two theses: Firstly, that the Gettier counter-instances are not knowledge cases and would be alien to the traditional Yorùbá. Secondly, that the Gettier Problem does not bother the Yorùbá as their ‘epistemology’ foresees and overlaps the pitfalls of the JTB.

Keywords: Gettier Problem, JTB, Ethno-Philosophy, Yorùbá, Knowledge.

Introduction

What does it require to know ‘so and so’? How can one be sure s/he knows? How can one prove beyond doubt what s/he knows? Epistemology beams limelight when questions are so posed. And consequently, there have been several answers, rejoinders and responses to such questions. The essence of this research is not to engage with the intellectual submissions in that mould. No! For that would be a cumbersome task in the face of space-time limitation and the pertinence for succinctness. This is why this research narrows to the Gettier Problem vis-à-vis traditional Yorùbá world-view on

knowledge acquisition and certainty. What exactly is the Gettier Problem? What does it say about the certainty of knowledge? Are there any parallels between the Western notions of knowledge, belief and truth on the one hand and how the Yorùbá, originally from South-West Nigeria employ these terms? Does the Gettier Problem extend to the Yorùbá way of coming to know about 'so and so'? If it does, how is this possible? If it does not, why is it the case? These are some of the questions that this paper examines. Through the employment of the analytic method of Ordinary Language Philosophy, this essay explicates the view that the counter-instances exploited by Edmund Gettier¹ are not for the Yorùbá, knowledge cases. This approach reveals how the Yorùbá use the words: *ìmò* (knowledge), *òtító* (truth) and *ìgbàbó* (belief) to argue that the Gettier problem would not bother the Yorùbá in any way whatsoever. This is deduced from the perception that the Yorùbá manner of coming to possess knowledge provides no lapses vis-à-vis the instances Gettier employs. That the Gettier counter-arguments are not instances of knowledge had hitherto been echoed by Michael Clark² and Robert Nozick.³ This essay agrees with these scholars as their views received attention in the latter part of this study. But the main occupation of this study is to explicate an ethno-philosophical perspective to the discourse using the Yorùbá understanding of knowledge as canon. To realize this feat, this essay has four parts, the first being this introduction. In the section that follows, this paper engages with the praxis for what constitutes knowledge as handed down by Plato and then championed in the preceding century by Alfred Jules Ayer⁴ and Roderick Chisholm.⁵ The section continues by enunciating the 'Gettier Problem' as well as the implications therein but we shall not, concern with the torrents of responses to the Gettier Problem. The third part of this essay focuses on the subject matter of Ordinary Language Analysis (OLA for short) as applied to the Yorùbá language. This is followed by the justificatory explanation for why, from the Yorùbá perspective, the Gettier counter-instances are not cases of knowledge. The Yorùbá ethno-philosophical perspective, as it would be argued, seems to be in consonance with Clark (1963) and Nozick (1973). This may be expanded to

¹Gettier, E. (1963). "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 121-3

²Clark, M. (1963). "Knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier's Paper". *Analysis* (24) 46-8.

³Nozick, R. (1981). "Knowledge" in *Philosophical Explanations*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁴Ayer, A.J. (1956). "Knowledge as Having the Right to be Sure" *The Problem of Knowledge*. London: Macmillan.

⁵Chisholm, R.M. (1957). *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* New York: Cornell University Press.

demonstrate that the lack of logic and critical thinking on the part of aboriginal Africans is an error in reasoning. The fourth part of this essay is the conclusion.

Epistemology, Knowledge and the Gettier Problem: An Overview

Knowledge, its acquisition and certainty, among other discourses, is the subject matter of Epistemology. It has been a major concern for scholars from the ancient era to the contemporary period.⁶ It should be stated from the outset that when epistemologists talk about knowledge, they are concerned about propositional knowledge. In other words, granted that there are various uses of the word 'know', it is important to distinguish how epistemologists construe this term as opposed to how it is conceived in other contexts. In the words of Michael Huemer: "Analyzing the concept of knowledge has commonly been taken to be one of the central tasks, if not the central task, of epistemology."⁷ It is in the process of analysis that both the implicit and explicit implications of terms are exhumed. In this connection, Huemer expatiates:

There are several different uses of "know" (as in "I know John," "I know how to drive," and "I know your phone number"), but the sense that epistemologists have focused on is the sense that refers to *propositional knowledge*, or factual knowledge. This is the sense involved in "I know that $2 + 2 = 4$ " and "Does John know that the game has been delayed?"⁸

The real question, then, is this: under what conditions does a subject, *S*, know that *p* (where *p* is some proposition)? There is a general agreement among epistemologists on two basic conditions, with disagreements on what further conditions are required. The core of agreement is that in order for a person to count as knowing that *p*, the person must at least believe that *p*, and it must be true that *p*.⁹ That a subject has a belief and the belief is true are not enough to pass as knowledge. The third condition requires that the subject is justified for believing that *p* is true. How one acquires this justification is

⁶See Hospers, J. (1999). *Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, London: Routledge; Omeregbe, J.I. (1995). *A Simplified History of Western Philosophy*. Lagos: JOJA Publications; and Stumpf, S.E. (1979). *Elements of Philosophy: An Introduction*. New York: McGraw Hill Book.

⁷Huemer, M. (ed.) (2002). *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*. London: Routledge p. 435

⁸Ibid, p. 435

⁹Ichkawa, J.J., Steup, M. (2012). "The Analysis of Knowledge" <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/> 11/12/2016.

a subject of debate. However, these three conditions have come to be called Justified True Belief (JTB for short). In the traditional account derived from Socrates and Plato, S knows that p (when p could be any proposition) if and only if:

S believes that p ;
 p is true; and
S is justified in believing that p .

In the 20th century, two prominent and renowned epistemologists: Roderick Chisholm and A.J. Ayer have retained the above traditional construct on the subject of knowledge in somewhat newer dimensions that does not betray the spirit of Socrates and Plato (1973).

Ayer interpreted the traditional definition of knowledge as handed by Plato to be knowledge as 'having the right to be sure'. In his own words:

The answers which we have found for the questions we have so far been discussing have not yet put us in a position to give a complete account of what it is to know that something is the case. The first requirement is that what is known should be true, but this is not sufficient; not even if we add to it the further condition that one must be completely sure of what one knows. For it is possible to be completely sure of something which is in fact true, but yet not to know it. The circumstances may be such that one is not entitled to be sure. For instance, a superstitious person who had inadvertently walked under a ladder might be convinced as a result that he was about to suffer some misfortune; and he might in fact be right. But it would not be correct to say that he knew that this was going to be so. He arrived at his belief by a process of reasoning which would not be generally reliable; so, although his prediction came true, it was not a case of knowledge. Again, if someone were fully persuaded of a mathematical proposition by a proof which could be shown to be invalid, he

would not, without further evidence, be said to know the proposition, even though it was true.”¹⁰

In the foregoing, Ayer made the effort to distance chance beliefs passing as knowledge on the one hand from real knowledge on the other hand. Consequently, he submits that *S* knows that *p* if and only if:

p is true;
S is sure that *p* is true; and
S has the right to be sure that *p* is true.¹¹

In a related development, Roderick Chisholm also subscribes to the traditional definition of knowledge as he opines that *S* knows that *p* if and only if:

S accepts that *p*;
S has adequate evidence for *p*; and
p is true.¹²

In his model, Chisholm merely substitutes “justified in believing that *p*” for “has adequate evidence for *p*”. There is not much difference as Edmund Gettier rightly points out.

Thus far, we were concerned with revealing the factors that engendered the praxis for what will and will not pass as knowledge in Epistemology. What are the problems that besiege this canon? Socrates though liberal enough to relay that knowledge as such defined is not flawless, did not explicitly identify the erroneous tendency concealed therein. This is where Mr. Edmund Gettier enters the fray.

Gettier squelches that if “has a right to be sure”¹³ and “has evidence for”¹⁴ can be equally substituted for ‘justified in believing’, it could be shown that someone may

¹⁰Op. Cit, Ayer (1956) p. 34

¹¹Ibid, p. 34

¹²Op. Cit, Chisholm (1957) p. 16

¹³Op Cit, Ayer (1956) p. 34

¹⁴Op Cit, Chisholm (1957) p. 16

fulfill the set criterion and still not really know. This suspicion is termed the ‘Gettier Problem’.

The ‘Gettier Problem’, simply put, means the problem raised by Edmund Gettier in 1963 to the fact that though, the traditional definition of knowledge is necessary, it is simultaneously insufficient to pass muster. In his own words, Gettier explains:

I shall begin by noting two points. First, in that sense of “justified” in which S’s being justified in believing P is a necessary condition of S’s knowing that P, it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false. Secondly, for any proposition P, if S is justified in believing P, and P entails Q, and S deduces Q from P and accepts Q as a result of this deduction, then S is justified in believing Q. Keeping these two points in mind, I shall now present two cases in which the conditions stated in (a) are true for some proposition, though it is at the same time false that the person in question knows that proposition.¹⁵

Two counter-instances were employed by Edmund Gettier to hit the hammer on the nail. We shall consider each of them very briskly.

Smith and Jones were at the interview of a particular job for which they both applied. Smith, however through the company president was informed that Jones will get the job. Meanwhile, Smith had earlier counted that Jones has ten coins in his pocket. From this numeration of coins and information from the company president, Smith makes the following inference:

The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

At the end of the interview, Smith himself ended up getting the job. In this case, it was discovered that Smith also had ten coins in his own pocket – a fact that Smith was unaware of all along. Gettier reasons that the above statement (The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket) is true, Smith believes the statement and Smith is justified in believing it. Gettier, however counters that it is equally clear that Smith does not know the proposition is true. Smith does not know he, himself has ten coins

¹⁵Op. Cit Gettier (1963) p. 121

in his own pocket. His belief rests on the number of coins in Jones's pocket but not his. Gettier seems to be asking: Did Smith really have the knowledge of who will get the job? Obviously that is not the case. Let us consider the second counter-instance.

In this instance, Gettier implores us to imagine a particular Smith who has strong evidence that:

Jones has a Ford car.

It could be that Smith makes this inference because as far as his memory can recall, he had seen Jones drive a Ford car. Perhaps, Jones may have given driven him a lift at least once, in this Ford car. Gettier implores that we imagine again that Smith has another friend, Brown, whose whereabouts he (Smith) does not know. Smith selects three places at random to construct the following Disjunctive Syllogism:

Either Jones has a Ford car or Brown is in Boston.

Either Jones as a Ford car or Brown is in Barcelona.

Either Jones has a Ford car or Brown is in Brest-Litovsk.

From the above, it seems clear that Smith has inferred correctly. Let us however, imagine that Jones does not actually own a Ford car. Perhaps the Ford car was even rented. Let us also imagine that, by sheer coincidence, Brown is actually in Barcelona. Gettier wants us to realize that even though the second disjunct above (Either Jones has a Ford car or Brown is in Barcelona) is true and Smith accepts this belief and is equally justified, Smith does not really know. This is because Jones does not really own a Ford car while the other part of the disjunct (Brown is in Barcelona) was sheer coincidence or luck.

With these instances, Gettier counters successfully that the JTB, though necessary is not a sufficient foundation for knowledge. Hence, it is not the opposite of the truth that the Gettier Problem still haunts Western-styled Epistemology, despite several attempts from scholars to amend the grouse discovered by Gettier. This study hereby disengages from that inquiry and proceeds to an exposition of Yorùbá Epistemology relying on the method of analysis. This is line with the crux of the paper which portends that the Gettier cases as articulated above does not concern the average Yorùbá.

Ordinary Language Analysis and Yorùbá Epistemology

The Ordinary Language Analysis (OLA) was first applied by Barry Hallen and the late John Olubi Sodipo to the Yorùbá language. This is calculated to exhume some ideas and the values they represent in that language. Ideas and values, which are autochthonous to the Yorùbá but to be passed on as a philosophy. Given that “the analysis of how concepts are used in ordinary language is an essential methodology of analytic philosophy”¹⁶ in the Western parlance, Barry Hallen¹⁷ holds that Africans have the “prerogatives to describe, analyse and define issues of rationality generally as they relate to Africa’s intellectual heritage”, and the products of utilizing these prerogatives are, in their own rights, philosophy. There are so many benefits in these as description is given more priority rather than criticism.

OLA consists primarily in employing the method of analytic philosophy to assess the ways words and concepts are understood and used in any setting. A brief overview of the inner kernel of OLA is pertinent before unfolding its implications for some of the Yorùbá concepts that this research concerns with.

According to Barry Hallen, ordinary language analysis or philosophy places “emphasis upon ordinary, common and collective uses of language.”¹⁸ Greater importance being attached to description and to analysis rather than to criticism. It is pertinent to note as Gbenga Fasiku rightly opines that there are some uses of language that are not ordinary, common and collective. Fasiku amplifies that “in this sense, usage of language follows some regimented or strictly controlled pattern. Any strange use of language that is contrary to this technical and strict sense of language is considered primitive, illogical and unreasonable. What the ordinary language philosophy suggests is that this strict and technical use of language,

¹⁶Fasiku, G. (2008). “African Philosophy and the Method of Ordinary Language Philosophy”. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*. Vol 2. (4) p. 3

¹⁷See Hallen, B. (2004). “Yoruba Moral Epistemology” in K. Wiredu (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*. New York: Blackwell Publishing Ltd; Hallen, B. (2002). *A Short History of African Philosophy*. Indiana: Indiana University Press; Hallen, B., Sodipo, J.O (1997). *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; Hallen, B. (1996). “Does it Matter Whether Linguistic Philosophy Intersects Ethnophilo?” *APA Newsletters*, 96:(1); Hallen, B. (1998). “Academic Philosophy and African Intellectual Liberation”. *African Philo*, 11: (2).

¹⁸Ibid, Hallen (1996)

which is the feature of the mainstream philosophy, is not the only way of doing philosophy.”¹⁹

In essence, the crux of the foregoing is that there are some senses in which language may be employed. Senses that are generally accepted by a group of people but may be deemed faulty or wanting upon critical assessment from the perspective of mainstream Western-styled thinking. This is why upon a perusal of some concepts or words in the Yorùbá linguistic framework it is quite startling that a direct interpretation or translation into the English language would yield little or no comprehension. The ordinary language philosophy as so articulated has semblance with Ludwig Wittgenstein’s ‘use theory’ of meaning.²⁰ For Wittgenstein “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.”²¹ Elsewhere, he writes: “philosophy, as we use the word, is a fight against the fascination which forms of expression exert on us.”²² For Wittgenstein, language is very important and a proper grasp and usage of it can make the philosophical enterprise highly profitable. In this connection, he takes his cue from Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis and compares his system with a therapy or the treatment of an illness.²³ This is well captured in the words of Anthony Kenny thus:

The philosopher, like a psychoanalyst, encourages us to express doubts and puzzlement which we have been taught to repress; he cures us of the confusions we nurture in our minds by encouraging us to bring them out to the light of day, turning latent nonsense into patent nonsense.²⁴

¹⁹Op. Cit, Fasiku (2008) p. 87

²⁰Wittgenstein, L. (1963). *Philosophical Investigations*. G.E.M., Anscombe and R.Rhees, (eds.) Oxford: Blackwell.

²¹Ibid, p. 109

²²Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Blackwell p. 27

²³Op. Cit, Wittgenstein (1963) p. 254

²⁴Kenny, A. (2006). *An Illustrated Brief History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Blackwell Publishing Ltd p. 371

Hence, for Wittgenstein “we may not advance any kind of theory”.²⁵ He continues that “we must do away with all explanation and description alone must take place.”²⁶ He submits that “philosophy neither explains nor deduced anything.”²⁷ Wittgenstein’s admonition to withdraw from advancing any theory and allowance for description to take place is where the symmetry with ordinary language analysis resides.

An overview of some Yorùbá concepts, Yorùbá maxim, proverbs, riddles, folktales, reveal much more about the unique way with which the Yorùbá people use words and concepts. In the same manner, “utilizing source materials derived primarily from oral literature – proverbs, myth, folktales, songs, Ifá Corpus and the likes – philosophers, situated for the most part in Africa, set out to analyze the meaning of a concept that occurs in an African language and that they believe to be of philosophical prepossession and interest.”²⁸ For instance, there are several arrays of notions that have yielded dialogues which span metaphysics, logic, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, to name a few.²⁹ Barry Hallen and John Olubi Sodipo have made commendable efforts highlighting how the ordinary language analysis suits and helps African aboriginal thoughts gets closer to what passes muster as philosophy. We now turn to the Yorùbá on the subject of knowledge, relying on the studies of Hallen and Sodipo.

Hallen and Sodipo submit that the English word “know” does not translate unproblematically into Yorùbá, since “mò,” the nearest Yorùbá approximation, still

²⁵Op. Wittgenstein (1963) p. 109

²⁶Ibid, p. 109

²⁷Ibid, p. 112

²⁸Op Cit, Hallen (1998)

²⁹See Ekanola, A.B. (2006). “A Naturalistic Interpretation of the Yoruba Concepts of Ori” *Philosophia Africana* Vol. 9. No. 1 pp 41-52; Gbadegesin, S. (1998a). "Eniyan: The Yoruba Concept of a Person," in P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux, eds., *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings*. Johannesburg: International Thomson publishers; Gbadegesin, S. (1998b). “Yoruba Philosophy: Individuality, Community, and the Moral Order” in Emmanuel C. *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. New York: Blackwell Publishers Ltd; Balogun, A.B. (2007). “The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft-Deterministic Interpretation” in *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16(1) pp. 116-130; Oduwole, E. (1996). “The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny” in *Journal of Philosophy and Development*, Vol 1 Nos. 1 & 2.

requires eyewitness acquaintance. This implies that the degree of value attached to eyewitness cognition is variable among cultures.³⁰

Hallen notes that:

Much of (Western) analytic philosophy is rightly identified with the analysis of language. This may involve the clarification of the meaning(s) of individual concepts that are of particular philosophical interest, such as “knowledge,” “belief,” “truth,” and so forth. It may involve as well studying the kinds of justification given to prove, for example, that a certain piece of information is worthy of being described or classified as “knowledge,” etc. One very remarkable oddity about the analytic tradition as practiced within the academy is that virtually the only language that it has been used to analyze is the English language. The most obvious explanation for this is that analytic philosophy is a product of English-language culture. But was this really sufficient to explain why its method and techniques had never been applied in even an experimental manner to any non-Western language? Was there not here also evidence, albeit implicit, of a tacit judgment on the part of the Western academy that such endeavours were likely not to be philosophically rewarding?³¹

Barry Hallen demarcates between knowledge derived from second-hand source(s) and the other which is characterised as first-hand experience. He articulates thus: “When one reflects upon what a member of Western society may “learn” in the course of a lifetime, it becomes clear that most people’s “knowledge” consists of information they will never ever be in a position to confirm in a first-hand or direct manner. What they “find out” from a history book, “see” via the evening news on television, or “confirm” about a natural law on the basis of one elementary experiment in a high school physics laboratory – all could be (and sometimes are!) subject to error, distortion, or outright

³⁰Wiredu, K., (2004). “Introduction African Philosophy in our Time” in K. Wiredu (ed.) *A Companion to African Philosophy*. New York: Blackwell Publishing Ltd p. 14

³¹Op. Cit Hallen (2004) p. 297

fabrication.”³² The knowledge derived from this source is what he terms propositional knowledge. He opines that “Propositional knowledge is therefore generally characterized as second-hand, as information that cannot be tested or proven in a decisive manner by most people and therefore has to be accepted as true because it “agrees” with common sense or because it “corresponds” to or “coheres” with the very limited amount of information that people are able to test and confirm in a first-hand or direct manner. Exactly how this coherence or correspondence is to be defined and ascertained is still a subject of endless debate in (Western) epistemological theory.”³³ Upon this showing, Hallen proceeds to expatiate that the Yorùbá criterion for what constitute knowledge (*ìmò*), is not to be conceived in the Western sense.

The distinction made in Yorùbá language and culture between *ìmò* (putative “knowledge”) and *ìgbàgbò* (putative “belief”) reflects a similar concern about the evidential status of first-hand versus second-hand information. Persons are said to *mò* (to “know”) or to have *ìmò* (“knowledge”) only of something they have witnessed in a first-hand or personal manner. The example most frequently cited by discussants, virtually as a paradigm, is visual perception of a scene or an event as it is taking place. *Ìmò* is said to apply to sensory perception generally, even if what may be experienced directly by touch is more limited than is the case with perception. *Ìmò* implies a good deal more than mere sensation, of course. Perception implies cognition as well, meaning that the persons concerned must comprehend that which they are experiencing. The term “*òtító*” is associated with “*ìmò*” in certain respects that parallel the manner in which “true” and “truth” are paired with “know”/“knowledge” in the English language. In the English language “truth” is principally a property of propositional knowledge, of statements human beings make about things, while in Yorùbá, *òtító* may be a property of both propositions and certain forms of experience.³⁴ Now, it needs to be stated at this point that *ìgbàgbò*, is not belief in the Western sense. Barry Hallen in this connection amplifies that:

What makes it different from the English language “believe”/“belief” is that *ìgbàgbò* applies to everything that may be construed as second-hand information. This would

³²Ibid, p. 297-8

³³Ibid, p. 298

³⁴ Ibid, p. 298

apply to most of what in English-language culture is regarded as propositional knowledge: the things one is taught in the course of a formal education, what one learns from books, from other people, and, of particular interest in the special case of the Yorùbá, from oral traditions. While English-language culture decrees that some propositional or second-hand information, since classified as “knowledge,” should be accepted as true, Yorùbá usage is equally insistent that, since classified as *ìgbàgbọ* (putative “belief”), it can only be accepted as a possible (*ó ẹ́ẹ́sẹ*) truth.³⁵

What then is the connection between *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ/gbàbọ*? In explicit terms, Hallen clarifies:

The criteria that define the respective extents of and the interrelations between *ìmọ* and *ìgbàgbọ* stipulate that any experience or information, which is not first-hand, personal, and direct, must by definition fall under the heading of *ìgbàgbọ*. The sense of *ìgbàgbọ* may therefore be paraphrased as “comprehending, and deciding to accept as possible (as ‘possibly true’ rather than as ‘true’), information that one receives in a second-hand manner.” *ìmọ* (first-hand experience) and *ìgbàgbọ* (information gained on the basis of second-hand experience) together exhaust all of the information that human beings have at their disposal. If and when my *ìmọ* is challenged by other persons who have not undergone a similar first-hand experience and who therefore doubt what I say I actually saw happen, the best way to convince them would be to arrange for some kind of test whereby they will be able to see the thing happen for themselves. If I cannot arrange for this kind of direct testing, the next best I can do is to ask any others who may have

³⁵ Ibid, p. 298

personally witnessed my own or a similar experience to come forward and testify. In this case my first-hand experience cannot become the challengers' own (*imò*), but if they are influenced by the combined testimony they may decide to "believe" me and accept the information on a second-hand basis, as *ìgbàgbó*.³⁶

The application of the ordinary language analysis to the unique way(s) the Yorùbá utilize concepts in knowledge-relate state of affairs births a profound implication. This, in every inch overlaps that of mainstream Western epistemology. In this mould Kwasi Wiredu harps that:

One of the most remarkable results of the investigation under discussion is the finding that Yorùbá discourse lays down more stringent conditions for knowledge (or more strictly, what corresponds to knowledge in the Yorùbá language) than is apparent in English or, generally, Anglo-American speech. In English-speaking philosophy, it seems to be generally accepted that somebody may be said to know something, provided that she believes it, and it is true, and the belief is justified in some appropriate way. By the way, the need for not just a justification, but also one of an appropriate type, was pressed upon the attention of contemporary Anglo-American epistemologists by Edmund Gettier, in a three-page article entitled "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (1963). The control that those three pages have exercised on recent epistemology has been, to say the least, tremendous.³⁷

He continues that "On the showing of Hallen and Sodipo and their traditional Yorùbá colleagues, a further condition would seem to be indicated, namely, that the prospective knower must have an eye-witness acquaintance with what is claimed to be

³⁶ Ibid, p. 299

³⁷Op. Cit, Wiredu (2004) p. 7

known.”³⁸ From the exposition, it is not an error to suppose that the Gettier Problem would not have bothered the traditional Yorùbá. To then say that *S* knows that *p*, in traditional Yorùbá parlance, would be the case if and only if:

S learns about a belief *p*;
S confirms *p* first hand; and
p becomes true

Now in the counter-instances employed by Edmund Gettier, Smith’s justification that Jones will get the job is mistaken. Traditional Yorùbá epistemology, as espoused herein, would maintain that there is a large gulf between ‘the person who will get the job’ and ‘the one who has ten coins in his pocket’. To bridge the gulf, each of these propositions would require separate first-hand confirmation to pass gamut as *òtító* and possibly *ìmò*, if the conditions are fair enough. The Yorùbá may demand that we frisk the pockets of all the job applicants for this belief to graduate further. Since Smith is also an applicant, it would be epistemically disastrous, the Yorùbá would insist, to exclude him from the frisking exercise. Hence, if the search is carried out, Smith’s utterance could graduate from *ìgbàgbò* to *òtító* and then, *ìmò*. As it would be discovered that at least, two job applicants (Smith and Jones) each has ten coins in their pockets, whereas the knowledge of who will get the job, the main impetus of the proposition has been left unscathed. Smith’s implicit belief that Jones will get the job is based on a tip off. This tip off from the company president, no doubt encouraged Smith to think that Jones is the man for the job. This clearly leaves the information made available to Smith to be taken as *ìgbàgbò* but nothing more. In a nutshell, the analysis would only admit that Smith’s *ìgbàgbò* evolved into *òtító* and consequently *ìmò* regarding Jones’ possession of coins but lacking in *ìmò* as to who eventually gets the job. It is therefore not fallacious if the Yorùbá insists that this Gettier instance is not a case of *ìmò*. In other words, the proposition (The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket) articulated by Smith has Jones in mind, and in the Yorùbá canon is merely *ìgbàgbò*.

The Ford car scenario is not even an improvement. The Yorùbá could also argue that there is no symmetry between the location of Brown on the one hand and whether or not Jones has a Ford Car on the other hand. Each of the disjuncts would be subject to

³⁸Ibid, p. 7

confirmation and would only graduate to the level of truth/knowledge afterwards. When Formal Logic insists that a disjunction is true if and only if at least one of the disjuncts is true, the Yorùbá epistemic criteria takes the truth and first-hand confirmation of each disjunct seriously. This is especially why this study maintains that the Gettier problem does not concern the Yorùbá. Furthermore, they are not cases of knowledge as well.

That the Gettier counter-instances are not cases of knowledge had hitherto been articulated by Michael Clark and Robert Nozick. Michael Clark begins by stating that “Mr. Gettier provides two counter-examples which show that it need not be. In each case a proposition which is in fact true is believed on grounds which are in fact false. Since the grounding proposition in each case entails the proposition it justifies (the conclusion), and the grounding proposition, although false, is justifiably believed, the conclusion is also justifiably believed.”³⁹ Just like the traditional Yorùbá, Michael Clark demands for the grounds which instigated the beliefs as espoused in Gettier’s counter-instances. The counter-instances are replete with beliefs which ended up true but whose reason(s) for acceptance is/are questionable. This is why Clark insists on the urgency to look further. Clark insists that “Very often we can go on for quite a long time asking why, asking for the grounds, for the grounds for these second-order grounds, and so on, but eventually the question will become logically odd.”⁴⁰ He itemizes some plausible interrogations that would show that the grounds for holding beliefs in the Gettier counter-instances are questionable. For example,

“What are your grounds for saying Jones owns a Ford?”

“Brown told me he always has owned one.”

“What are your grounds for claiming Brown knows this?”

“He is generally reliable and honest.”

“What are your grounds for saying Brown is reliable and honest?”

“I am nearly always with him and I seem to remember no unreliable or dishonest act on his part.”⁴¹

The above showings are some of the posers a traditional Yorùbá would probe in an attempt for *ìgbàgbọ* to graduate to *òtító* and then branded as *ìmọ*. Robert Nozick (1981)

³⁹Op. Cit, Clarke (1963) p. 46

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 47

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 47

on the one hand, seems fully convinced that the Gettier counter-instances are not knowledge cases. Nozick seems to be sure that the JTB criterion needs to be replaced with his own model. Nozick argues that “knowledge tracks the truth.”⁴² Hence, for Robert Nozick, *S* knows that *p* if and only if:

S believes that *p*;

p is true;

if *p* were false, *S* would not believe that *p*; and

if *p* were true, *S* would believe that *p*.

For Robert Nozick, above conditions overcome and also explain why the Gettier cases are not cases of knowledge. In the “Jones owns a Ford” example, if the proposition “Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona” were false, Smith would likely still believe it. Why? Precisely because if the proposition were false, it would be false because of Brown not being in Barcelona. But if Brown were not in Barcelona, Smith would still have believed “Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona,” since Smith’s belief was caused purely by his belief in the first disjunct. Smith did not have any idea where Brown was in the first place, so moving Brown around would not have any effect on Smith’s belief. In this case, Smith’s belief fails to track the truth; specifically, it fails to satisfy the condition.⁴³

Whereas Western Epistemology has not recovered from the Gettier Problem, despite the showings of Robert Nozick and Michael Clark, the traditional Yorùbá does not even bother about such instances as they are clearly not instances of knowledge.

Conclusion

The torrent of literatures on the criterion for knowledge since the Gettier counter-instances reveals, among many things that the mainstream and dominant Western philosophic tradition, to borrow Michael Clark’s phraseology, parades an Epistemology that is not “fully grounded”. Yet, this is a tradition that vehemently described Africans (the Yorùbá included) as deficient, in the knowledge of art and logic. Homer, Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Baron de Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant,

⁴² Op. Cit, Nozick (1980)

⁴³Op. Cit, Huemer (2002) p. 438

Thomas Jefferson, to name a few⁴⁴ are some of the Western intellectual giants that denigrated the cerebral abilities of the man of colour. The tinkering of the traditional Yorùbá on the subject of what passes muster as knowledge is worthy of adulation. This study implores the requisite to desist from the outlook that primitive Africans lacked the intellectual capacity for critical thought. All Western literatures that had hitherto argued in the following manner: “Africans...were invariably and expressionless, their minds characterized by a dead and blank uniformity. They had not originated a single discovery...not promulgated a single thought...not established a single invention”⁴⁵ contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. Hence, they, in the Humean spirit, should be committed to the flames.

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⁴⁴See Oluwole, S. A, (2006) “Africa: This is how far we have come” in *New African*, October, 2006, No. 455 pp. 10-1.

⁴⁵Davidson, B., (1969) *The African Genius*, Boston: Little Brown & Co.

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