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# Knowledge: The Safe-Apt View

## Abstract

According to virtue epistemology, knowledge involves cognitive success that is due to cognitive competence. This paper explores the prospects of a virtue theory of knowledge that, so far, has no takers in the literature. It combines features from a couple of different virtue theories: like Pritchard's (2010; *Forthcoming*) view, it qualifies as what I call an "impure" version of virtue epistemology, according to which the competence condition is supplemented by an additional (safety) condition; like Sosa's (2007; *Forthcoming*) view, it construes the because relation at issue in the competence condition in terms of competence manifestation. I argue that this virtue epistemology can steer clear of a number of old and new problems that arise for its rivals on both sides.

**Keywords:** Knowledge; virtue epistemology; safety

## 1 Introduction

The core thesis of virtue epistemology is that knowledge involves cognitive success that is due to cognitive competence. More specifically, according to virtue epistemology:

*VE.* One knows that  $p$  only if one believes  $p$  and the acquisition and/or retention of one's true belief that  $p$  is (sufficiently) due to cognitive competence or ability.

VE is a promising view that has a number of prominent supporters including Ernest Sosa (e.g. 2007; *Forthcoming*), John Greco (e.g. 2003; 2010), and Duncan Pritchard (e.g. 2010; *Forthcoming*). However, champions of VE disagree on how to best spell out the view in detail. To begin with there is the question of the nature the cognitive competences or abilities at issue in VE. However, I do not want to discuss this question in any detail here. Instead, I will assume, in line with the major champions of VE, that cognitive competences/abilities are dispositions to form beliefs that, at least in certain circumstances, are bound (or highly likely) to be true.

Another question, and one that will be of importance in this paper, concerns how to spell out the because or due to relation at issue in VE. As far as I am aware, virtue epistemologists are divided into two main camps on this question. On the one hand there are those who think that the because relation is spelled out in terms of *explanatory salience* or *creditability* (Greco, Pritchard) and those who prefer an

account in terms of the *manifestation* of competence (Sosa).<sup>1</sup>

Finally, it may be asked whether knowledge requires satisfaction of further conditions besides VE's competence condition. Here we can distinguish between *pure* virtue epistemologists (Greco and Sosa) who answer this question in the negative and their competitors, whom I will call *impure* virtue epistemologists (such as Pritchard) who think that we need to place additional conditions on knowledge (in the case of Pritchard a safety condition).

Here, then, is a table with the options and their most prominent takers:

	credibility/ explanatory salience	competence manifestation
pure	Greco	Sosa
impure	Pritchard	

The aim of this paper is to explore the prospects for the view that falls in the unoccupied field. More specifically, I want to suggest that combining an impure virtue epistemology that, like Pritchard's, features an additional safety condition with a Sosa-style competence-manifestation account of the because relation can avoid a number of problems that beset its competitors. But in order to get there, some

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<sup>1</sup> The question remains, how exactly these accounts spell out the because relation and how they relate to each other. I will get back to this in due course.

work needs to be done first.

## 2 Pure creditability virtue epistemology

### 2.1 ...in outline

Let's start with *pure creditability virtue epistemology* (PC). Obviously, for the competence condition to stand any chance of passing the right verdicts in Gettier cases, believing the truth must be strongly creditable to agent competence. Following Pritchard (2010: 27), I will for now assume that it must be *primarily* so creditable. Accordingly, we get:

*PC.* One knows that  $p$  just in case one truly believes that  $p$  and the acquisition and/or retention of one's true belief that  $p$  is primarily creditable to one's competence or ability.

### 2.2 ...in trouble

Pritchard (2010; *Forthcoming*) and Jennifer Lackey (2007; 2009) have argued that PC faces a serious problem. I will here follow Pritchard's presentation, partly because I want to argue that Pritchard's own view eventually falls prey to the very same problem. To see how it arises consider first the following two cases:

*Fake Barns.* Grover drives through the countryside, sees a barn in the field to the right and comes to believe, truly, that he is facing a barn. Unbeknownst to Grover, he is looking at the only real barn in a field otherwise full of barn façades that are so

cleverly constructed as to be indistinguishable from real barns from Grover's position on the road.

*Landmark.* Rosita arrives at the train station in an unfamiliar city and asks the first passer-by how to get to a famous landmark. Her interlocutor is a knowledgeable resident of the city who provides her with impeccable directions and Rosita forms the corresponding true beliefs.

Regarding *Fake Barns*, Pritchard observes that, intuitively, Grover's belief doesn't qualify as knowledge. At the same time, argues Pritchard, Grover's belief is primarily creditable to his barn-spotting competence. If Pritchard is right about this, we have a case in which, intuitively, the agent doesn't know but satisfies PC's competence condition on knowledge. PC threatens to be too weak.<sup>2</sup> As opposed to that, regarding *Landmark*, intuition has it that the testimony-based beliefs about the directions to the landmark Rosita forms in this situation qualify as knowledge. However, Pritchard argues that the truth of Rosita's beliefs is not primarily creditable to her competences—if anything it's primarily creditable to the competences of the knowledgeable resident. If Pritchard is right, we also have a case in which, intuitively, the agent knows but doesn't satisfy PC's competence condition. PC threatens to be too strong.<sup>3</sup>

With the two problem cases for PC in play, Pritchard states what I will call "the core problem" for PC in the following passage:

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<sup>2</sup> For details see Pritchard *et al.* (2010: ch.2.5). For reservations about the intuition of ignorance in *Fake Barns* see Millikan (1984).

<sup>3</sup> For details see Pritchard *et al.* (2010: ch.2.6). For reservations about the cogency of the *Landmark*-based argument against PC see Riggs (2009).

[T]he [Rosita] and [Grover] cases collectively pose a quite formidable difficulty. For notice that while the [Grover] case puts pressure on the proponent of [PC] to strengthen her account of knowledge so that it excludes knowledge in this case, the [Rosita] case puts pressure on the proponent of [PC] to weaken her account. Thus, the two types of case pull this account of knowledge in two opposing directions, with the potential of collectively pulling the view asunder. For if you strengthen the view in order to deal with the [Grover] case then you face an even tougher problem when it comes to the [Rosita] case; and if you weaken the view in order to deal with the [Rosita] case then you face an even tougher problem when it comes to the [Grover] case. (Pritchard Forthcoming: 18)

Crucially, the core problem does not arise from *Fake Barns* or *Landmark* considered *individually*. Pritchard effectively concedes that champions of PC can get either case right (that is, if they are prepared to construe the view in sufficiently strong or weak a manner). Instead, the problem arises from the two cases considered *in conjunction*. The point is that while PC may be able to handle either of the two cases, it cannot get both of them right.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lackey (e.g. 2009: 33-34) makes in essence the same point.

### 3 Impure creditability virtue epistemology

#### 3.1 ...in outline

Pritchard thinks that his preferred view, a version of *impure creditability* virtue epistemology that, in addition, places a safety condition on knowledge (IC+S), can avoid this problem. In order to see how, let's first take a closer look at how Pritchard states his view:

*IC+S*. Knowledge is safe belief that arises out of the reliable cognitive traits that make up one's cognitive character [i.e., in my terminology, that arises out of competence or ability], such that one's cognitive success is to a significant degree creditable to [i.e., in my terminology, sufficiently due to] one's cognitive character.<sup>5</sup>

By placing an additional safety condition on knowledge, Pritchard gives up on pure virtue epistemology in favour of an impure alternative. In principle, this is just the kind of move that promises to avoid the problem he charged PC with. If the safety condition can be made to handle *Fake Barns*, the competence condition can be construed weakly enough to allow that Rosita satisfies it. Unsurprisingly, this is exactly what Pritchard aims for. The safety condition rules against error at nearby possible worlds. It is violated in *Fake Barns*. After all, at some nearby worlds Grover looks at a barn façade. Since the façades are so cleverly constructed as to be indistinguishable from real barns from Grover's position on the road, at those

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<sup>5</sup> Pritchard *et al.* (2010: 54). For Pritchard's argument why knowledge should have this hybrid structure, see Pritchard (Forthcoming: sect. 5). For an alternative see section 6.



worlds, Grover still comes to believe, but now falsely, that he is facing a barn. Grover's belief is thus unsafe. Hence, IC+S passes the right verdict in *Fake Barns*.

At the same time, compared to PC, Pritchard weakens the competence condition on knowledge. Recall that, according to PC, knowledge requires that the truth of one's belief be *primarily creditable* to one's competence. As opposed to that, IC+S's competence condition requires creditability to a lesser degree: to satisfy IC+S's competence condition, truth need not be *primarily* creditable to competence. Rather, all that is needed is that truth be *to a significant degree* creditable to the agent's competences.

Moreover, Pritchard argues that Rosita satisfies the competence condition so understood:

[I]t is of some credit to [Rosita] that she has a true belief in this case. It is, after all, a person that she asks for directions, and not, say, a lamp-post or a dog. Moreover, the person she asks is not a small child, or someone who one might reasonably expect to be unreliable on this score (e.g. someone who is clearly a tourist). In addition, if the testimony which [Rosita] received were obviously false, then we would expect her to be sensitive to this fact. If, for example, the informant told her that she should get back on the train and go home to New York, then we would expect her to treat these directions as entirely spurious. (Pritchard *et al.* 2010: 41).

It becomes clear that Rosita's cognitive competences make some contribution to her cognitive success. While, given the involvement of the knowledgeable resident, the contribution may not be enough to render her cognitive success primarily creditable to her competences, the thought is that it is enough to render it to a significant degree so creditable. As a result, Rosita satisfies IC+S's competence condition on knowledge.

### 3.2 ... in trouble

It may thus appear plausible that IC+S can avoid the problem PC encounters. Unfortunately, as I am about to argue, closer scrutiny reveals that appearances are misleading. In fact, the very same problem reappears for IC+S. In order to see this, I would first like to look at the kind of case Pritchard takes to motivate the competence component of IC+S:

*Broken Thermometer.* Elmo forms beliefs about the temperature in his room by reading the thermometer on the wall. Unbeknownst to Elmo, (a) the thermometer is actually broken and fluctuating randomly within a certain range, while (b) there is someone in the room next door who would adjust the reading to the actual room temperature were Elmo to consult it.

Pritchard rightly points out that Elmo's beliefs about the temperature are safe. (The fact that the person in the room next door *would* adjust the temperature in the right way *were* Elmo to consult the thermometer ensures this.) At the same time, intuitively, Elmo's beliefs about

the temperature don't qualify as knowledge. Pritchard's diagnosis is that Elmo's cognitive success, his true belief, has too little to do with his cognitive agency to count as knowing. More specifically, Pritchard claims that Elmo's "cognitive success is in no way a product of his cognitive abilities" (Pritchard *et al.* 2010: 49), that it "has nothing to do with the exercise of his cognitive abilities" (Pritchard *Forthcoming*: 13). Given that Pritchard's diagnosis is correct, adding a competence condition to one's account of knowledge appears to be exactly what is needed.

Is it really correct that Elmo's cognitive success is *in no way* a product of his cognitive competence, that it has *nothing to do* with the exercise of his cognitive abilities? Or, to be more precise, is it correct that in any version of the case in which the intuition that Elmo lacks knowledge is preserved, Elmo's cognitive success is in no way a product of his cognitive competence? I don't think so. After all, we may suppose that

Elmo consulted a thermometer in order to acquire a belief about the temperature, not a lamp-post or a dog. We may also suppose that he also wouldn't have consulted a thermometer that is clearly labelled as out of order or malfunctioning. In addition, we may suppose that if the reading had been obviously false, he would have been sensitive to this fact. For instance, if the thermometer had read minus twenty, then he would have treated the reading as spurious.

Nonetheless, given that the other features of the case are held fixed (the thermometer is broken and suitably adjusted by a helper in the room next door), the intuition that Elmo doesn't know lingers.

Notice that the contribution of Elmo's cognitive competences to his cognitive success parallels the contribution of Rosita's competences to her success almost exactly. As a result, the core problem reappears for IC+S: Either the contribution of Rosita's competences is substantive enough to render her success to a significant degree creditable to competence, but then so is the contribution of Elmo's competences. Or, alternatively, the contribution of Elmo's competences isn't substantive enough to render his success to a significant degree creditable to competence, but then neither is the contribution of Rosita's competences. While Pritchard can handle either case, he cannot get both cases right. The core problem for PC arises for IC+S just the same.

This is not even the end of the problems for IC+S. In his *Forthcoming* paper, Sosa raises a couple of further problem cases that affect accounts of knowledge that, like IC+S, countenance a safety condition in general. Since both of Sosa's cases receive the same treatment by his and my account (sections 4 and 5 below), I will here focus on one case only:

*Dreaming.* Oscar is currently sitting at his desk and truly believes this to be so. However, he might easily have been lying down in bed dreaming that he is sitting at his desk.

Intuitively, Oscar's belief qualifies as knowledge. The threat arises that the closeness of dreaming scenarios renders Oscar's belief unsafe. At nearby worlds at which Oscar is lying in bed dreaming that he is sitting at his desk, he would believe falsely that he is sitting at his desk. If Oscar's belief is unsafe, by the lights of IC+S, it does not qualify as knowledge. By incorporating a safety condition in his account of knowledge, Pritchard threatens to make his account implausibly demanding.

## **4 Pure competence manifestation virtue epistemology**

### **4.1 ...in outline**

Sosa thinks his view, a *pure competence manifestation virtue epistemology* (PCM), can get us out of this pickle. Here is how: Sosa first observes that performances with an aim can be evaluated in terms of accuracy, whether they are successful, adroitness, whether they are competent, and aptness, whether they are accurate because adroit, successful because competent.

Competences, according to Sosa, are dispositions to perform well in certain conditions and situations. More specifically, Sosa distinguishes between three components of competences: constitution (CO), inner (IN) and situation (SI). In the case of archery competence, at least the kind we are most familiar with, the constitution component includes, I presume, certain basic cognitive and motor skills and the ability to coordinate them, the inner component includes his being awake and sober, and the situation component includes there being

enough light and normal winds.<sup>6</sup>

The three components of competences place different constraints on performances. An agent who doesn't satisfy CO doesn't even have the competence. For instance, blind people don't have archery competences, at least not the kind we are most familiar with. Suppose an agent satisfies CO. In a situation in which he doesn't satisfy IN, the agent isn't in a position to perform competently; or, in other words, he isn't in a position to exercise his competence. When too drunk archer *A* is no longer in a position to fire competent shots. An agent who satisfies CO and IN may perform competently. He may do so even if SI is not in place. *B*'s shot may be competent even if it is diverted off target by strong winds. Sosa's core idea is that a performance is apt, its success manifests competence, only if in addition to CO and IN, SI is satisfied. Thus, *B*'s shot won't be apt even though it is competent and successful (suppose *B* has a helper who is using a wind machine to get his shot back on target) because SI is not satisfied: winds are not normal. As opposed to that, when *C*'s competent shot hits the target in a case in which SI is in place, it may be apt.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sosa (Forthcoming: 1), for a precursor see Sosa (2007: 86-7). In addition, Sosa distinguishes between three corresponding levels of competence: the *constitutional* competence, the seat of the skill, the *inner* competence, which combines the constitutional and inner components, and the *complete* competence, which additionally includes the situation component. Since, for the purposes of this paper at least, the additional technical terminology is of little consequence and has the tendency to obscure the differences with creditability accounts of the because relation, I will try to avoid it whenever possible.

<sup>7</sup> It is not hard to see how Sosa's account of the because relation differs from Pritchard's. A success may be to a significant degree creditable to the exercise of competence even though SI is not in place. For instance, this will be the case when the person with the wind machine will assist only competently fired shots. Sosa argues that his competence manifestation account of the because relation differs

Sosa suggests to view beliefs as performances, performances that aim at truth. As a result, they too can be evaluated in terms of accuracy, adroitness and aptness. According to Sosa,

*PCM.* Knowledge is apt belief, belief the truth of which manifests competence.

Arguably, Sosa can get *Landmark* and *Broken Thermometer* right. Consider *Landmark*. Rosita presumably has a disposition to acquire true testimonial beliefs when awake, sober, sufficiently attentive etc. (= IN) and the testifier doesn't attempt to deceive her etc. (= SI). Hence, by Sosa's lights, she has a competence enabling her to receive testimony. Moreover, presumably, (IN) and (SI) are satisfied in *Landmark*. As a result, when Rosita acquires a true belief on the basis of testimony, her cognitive success plausibly manifests this competence. That is to say, however, that Rosita's belief is apt.

Contrast *Broken Thermometer*. Elmo's has a disposition to acquire true beliefs about the temperature by looking at thermometers when awake, sober, sufficiently attentive etc. (= IN) and the thermometer is functioning properly etc. (= SI). However, in *Broken Thermometer*, the thermometer is not functioning properly. SI is not satisfied. Hence, while Elmo's true belief is competently formed (CO and IN are in place), it does not manifest competence. His belief is not apt. So, there is reason to think that Sosa can avoid the version of the core problem IC+S encountered.

But now recall that there is still the original version of the prob-  

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from the primary creditability account in Sosa (2007: 86-7).

lem, which arose from *Fake Barns* and *Landmark*. One might think that Sosa can simply give the same account of *Fake Barns* as of *Broken Thermometer*. He could achieve this by maintaining that the situational component of Grover's barn-spotting competence involves that there be no indistinguishable fake barns in the area. However, Sosa thinks that taking this route would be a mistake, or perhaps more accurately, that he would make life unjustifiably easy for himself. After all, Sosa points out, we have no similar requirements for other performances. For instance, the fact that an archer might so easily have been shooting in high winds doesn't mean that his shots aren't apt, in which case SI must be satisfied, now that he is shooting in normal winds. The thing to say here is that SI is satisfied but only *fragilely*, in that it might easily not have been satisfied, not that it fails to be satisfied. And the same goes for Grover's barn-spotting competence. (Forthcoming: 6)

So Sosa wants to grant that in *Fake Barns* SI is satisfied. But then, since very plausibly Grover also satisfies IN, doesn't the truth of his belief manifest Grover's competence? And if so, doesn't Sosa fall prey to the original problem for PC (according to which VE cannot get both *Fake Barns* and *Landmark* right)? Sosa's answers to these questions are, respectively, "yes" and "no". That is to say, Sosa acknowledges that Grover's true belief manifests competence. However, he still thinks that he can avoid the problem. His crucial move is to explain away the intuition of ignorance here. He countenances a distinction between animal knowledge (first-order knowledge or first-order apt belief) and reflective knowledge (second-order knowl-



edge or meta-apt belief) and argues that while beliefs of agents like Grover constitute animal knowledge, they fail to qualify as reflective knowledge.

Let's shelve the details for a moment and look at the problem of dreaming scepticism instead. Sosa needs to show that, in *Dreaming*, Oscar's perceptual beliefs qualify as knowledge. Notice, that it won't be enough to show that Oscar has animal knowledge but lacks reflective knowledge. After all, as Sosa is well aware, doing so means jeopardising a wide range of our reflective knowledge and that is too significant a concession to the sceptic. What Sosa needs to show is that, in *Fake Barns*, Grover has animal knowledge but lacks reflective knowledge, while, in *Dreaming*, Oscar has both animal and reflective knowledge. Here is how he ventures to achieve this:

[When asleep,] we lose an essential inner component in any case. Once asleep, we are in bad shape epistemically, with a consequent loss of competence. But here's the important point: *[Oscar's] incompetence when asleep is of no relevance to whether he has the complete second-order competence when awake and alert.* So, this is how [Oscar] is more fortunate than [Grover]. This is why he attains a level of knowledge denied to [Grover].<sup>8</sup>

Sosa seems to offer a fairly plausible view. It gets *Landmark, Broken*

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<sup>8</sup> (Sosa Forthcoming: 13). It may be worth noting that Sosa also considers another way of arguing that Oscar but not Grover has the complete second-order competence. However, the alternative rests on the highly controversial claim that dreaming experiences have a special quality that distinguishes them from waking experiences. Moreover, for present purposes, it suffices that Sosa has thinks this explanation will do the trick.

*Thermometer*, and *Dreaming* right. While he cannot give a fully charitable account of our intuition in *Fake Barns*, he can give what appears to be a plausible alternative explanation of the intuition: Grover has first-order or animal knowledge, but lacks second-order or reflective knowledge.

#### 4.2 ... in trouble

Unfortunately, there are problems for Sosa as well. To see this consider the following two cases:

*Minimalist Art.* Ernie is standing in front of a piece from a series of ten monochrome paintings that are currently being exhibited at the local art gallery and comes to believe that the canvass he is looking at is red.

*Conceptual Art.* Bert is standing in front of a piece from a series of ten monochrome paintings that are currently being exhibited at the local art gallery and comes to believe that the canvass he is looking at is red. Unbeknownst to Bert, he is looking at the only red monochrome in a series of otherwise white monochromes cleverly illuminated to look like red monochromes.

Here are my intuitions about the cases: Ernie's belief qualifies as knowledge but Bert's doesn't. How can Sosa explain this difference in intuitions? Before answering this question, notice that *Conceptual Art* has the same structure as *Fake Barns*. Accordingly, Sosa will want to explain the intuition of ignorance in *Conceptual Art* in the same way as in *Fake Barns*: Bert has first-order knowledge but lacks

second-order knowledge. Since, by Sosa's lights, Ernie also has first-order knowledge, the obvious way for him to explain the difference in intuitions between the two cases is that, unlike Bert, who has first-order knowledge but lacks second-order knowledge, Ernie not only has first-order knowledge but also second-order knowledge.

Unfortunately, there is reason to think that this won't work for Sosa. To see this, notice that *both* Ernie and Bert may lack second-order knowledge for independent reasons. This may be the case if, for instance, both Ernie and Bert have been given a drug that degrades specifically their reflective competences; or if they lack second-order knowledge on anti-luminosity grounds<sup>9</sup>; or, perhaps, Ernie and Bert are small children who have not developed the relevant reflective competences yet or animals who are simply not sufficiently cognitively sophisticated to have the relevant reflective competences. In any of these cases Ernie and Bert both lack second-order knowledge. However, intuitively, Ernie does have (first-order) knowledge, while Bert lacks it. So, the obvious way of explaining the difference in intuition won't work for Sosa.

In fact, things are worse for Sosa in at least two respects: first, there appears to be no alternative explanation of the difference in intuition available to Sosa. In particular, on pain of jeopardising his explanation of the intuition of ignorance in *Fake Barns*, he cannot appeal to an explanation in terms of a difference in *first-order* knowledge. Second, it strikes me as highly plausible that whatever explains the difference in intuitions here will also serve to explain the intuition

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<sup>9</sup> For more on luminosity see Williamson (2000: chs. 4,5).

that Bert lacks knowledge. If that's right, then Sosa's explanation of this intuition in terms of his distinction between animal and reflective knowledge can no longer be expected to be correct either.<sup>10</sup>

## 5 Impure competence manifestation virtue epistemology

Although Pritchard's account and especially Sosa's account come close to the mark, there remain problems for both of them so that neither account is ultimately satisfactory. Fortunately, along the way, we have gathered the ingredients for a view that steers clear of the problems on both sides. The view combines an *impure* version of virtue epistemology with a *competence manifestation* account of the because relation. Moreover, like Pritchard, it places an additional safety requirement on knowledge (ICM+S). Roughly, according to this this view,

ICM+S. Knowledge is safe, apt belief.

To begin with notice that this view (henceforth also "the safe-apt view") can claim the advantages of competence manifestation views over explanatory salience views: Since knowledge requires *apt* belief, that is, belief the truth of which manifests competence, just like Sosa's view, it gives the right predictions in *Landmark* and *Broken Thermometer* (see section 4.1). Since it countenances a separate safety condition,

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<sup>10</sup> Notice that even if you don't find these particular cases compelling, there is reason to think that the problem remains. All that I need to generate it is a case in which the agent has non-gettierised first-order knowledge, whilst lacking second-order knowledge. The problem can then be generated by construing another case that is in all respects like the first one except that the agent is also gettierised on the first order (in, as it were, "the fake barn way").

just like Pritchard's view, it passes the right verdict in *Fake Barns* (see section 3.1). It can also explain the difference in intuitions between *Minimalist Art* and *Conceptual Art* (see section 4.2). Ernie's first-order belief is not only apt but also safe: in his situation there are no white canvasses illuminated to look red around. As a result, it is not as if he could easily have believed falsely. As opposed to that, thanks to the presence of the colourfully illuminated white canvasses, Bert's first-order belief, while apt, is unsafe. So, Ernie but not Bert has first-order knowledge. Moreover, the view can, of course, allow that both Ernie and Bert lack second-order knowledge for independent reasons.

What about *Dreaming*? Doesn't the safe-apt view face the same problem here as Pritchard's IC+S did? It does. However, in his treatment of the problem, Sosa has given us all we need to solve it. To see this, recall Sosa's argument that Oscar's belief qualifies as reflective knowledge:

[When asleep,] we lose an essential inner component in any case. Once asleep, we are in bad shape epistemically, with a consequent loss of competence. But here's the important point: *[Oscar's] incompetence when asleep is of no relevance to whether he has the complete second-order competence when awake and alert*. So, this is how [Oscar] is more fortunate than [Grover]. This is why he attains a level of knowledge denied to [Grover]. (Sosa Forthcoming: 13)

Now, notice first that Sosa claims that dreaming results in loss of competence. What Sosa means here is that dreaming results in loss of

what he calls *inner* competence (see n.6). Since I have avoided Sosa's technical terminology so far, I will try to continue to do so now. A more intuitive way of describing what happens when asleep (and a way that fits nicely with my statement of Sosa's account competence manifestation in section 4.1) is that Grover is no longer in a position to perform competently; or, in other words, he is no longer in a position to exercise his competence.

Crucially this point about not being positioned to exercise one's competence when asleep holds not only for the second-order competences Sosa focuses on, but also for first-order perceptual competences. Once asleep, it is not just our reflective competences that we are no longer in a position to exercise, our perceptual competences are afflicted too. This point finds further support from Sosa's own description of the structure of perceptual competence. Here is what he has to say about colour vision: "Here again the same structure is found: a constitution component, including rods and cones; a condition [= inner] component, including being *awake* and sober; and a situation component, including adequate light." (Sosa *Forthcoming*: 3, *my emphasis*) Sosa observes, correctly I believe, that being awake is part of the inner component of colour vision competence. Moreover there is no reason to think that colour vision is special among perceptual competences in this respect. On the contrary, it is highly plausible that being awake features in the inner components of perceptual competences in general. As a result, when asleep we are no longer in a position to exercise our perceptual competences.

At this point we are very close to establishing that the safe-apt view can avoid the threat of dreaming scepticism. Recall that the safety requirement rules against error at nearby possible worlds. Safety is thus a modal condition on knowledge. Ever since Nozick (1981), champions of modal conditions in general are very clear that the relevant conditions afford a further index to *methods of belief formation*. In the case of safety, it is very plausible that safety requires not avoidance of error at all nearby possible worlds but only at those nearby possible worlds at which the agent acquires her belief via the same method as in the actual world.<sup>11</sup> Now, we only need to equate the methods of the safety condition with (exercises of) the competences of the competence condition and, voilà, our perceptual beliefs while awake can be safe in the relevant sense required for knowledge even if we might easily have been asleep and dreaming instead.<sup>12</sup> After all, as we have seen, at worlds at which we are asleep we are in no position to exercise our perceptual competences. As a result, we do not use the same method of belief formation in those worlds. The fact that we believe falsely at those worlds does not impugn the safety of our beliefs in the actual world.

## 6 Diagnosis

There is thus reason to believe that the safe-apt view can accommodate all intuitions in the above cases, whereas its main competitors—

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<sup>11</sup> Pritchard also advocates such an index to methods e.g. in Pritchard (2005: ch. 6.2).

<sup>12</sup> This result can also be secured with Sosa's technical terminology in place. In this case the methods of the safety condition need to be equated with Sosa's inner competences.

PC, IC+S and PCM—struggle to accommodate at least some of them. At the same time, one might think that the safe-apt view is at a disadvantage vis-à-vis pure versions of VE. The safe apt view postulates two conditions on knowledge where pure versions of VE postulate only one. Thus the safe-apt view is more complex and less elegant than pure versions of VE. In view of the fact that some of the relevant cases are fairly *recherché*, one might argue that it is not clear that the intuitive advantage should clinch it for the safe apt view.

Of course, the additional complexity would not count against the safe-apt view if we had independent reason to believe that it should be there, i.e. if we had independent reason to believe that the concept of knowledge should feature both a safety and a competence condition. On the contrary, any such reason would provide further confirmation that the analysis of the cases offered by the safe-apt view is correct.

Pritchard offers an argument to this effect that appeals to the function of the concept of knowledge. As I argue elsewhere (Author 2012) in more detail, Pritchard's specific argument fails. At the same time, I do believe that the general strategy is promising and, in said paper, I offer an alternative to Pritchard's argument, which I will here briefly rehearse.

The thesis about the function of the concept of knowledge from which the argument starts is that that the concept of knowledge serves to mark when a given agent is entitled to inquire no further into a given question.<sup>13</sup> Now notice that we sometimes want to say

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<sup>13</sup> I defend this thesis against its main competitor (due to Edward Craig (1990)



that an agent is entitled to inquire no further when we when we ourselves do not know the truth about the question. This may happen in cases like the following: *D* is interested in the question whether the surface *E* is currently looking at is red but does not himself have a belief on the issue. In this situation *D* may want point out that *E* is entitled to inquire no further into the issue. By the present hypothesis, the concept of knowledge will allow him to achieve this. And so it does: *D* can attribute to *E* knowledge whether the surface is red.

Let's now ask ourselves what sorts of conditions would govern a concept that serves this function and is applicable when we ourselves don't know the truth about the question.

To begin with, we would expect it to respect a modal condition: Were we to find out that the attributee might so easily have been mistaken, we could not attribute to him an entitlement to inquire no further into the issue. Were *D* to be informed that nearly all of the surfaces in the environment that appear red are in fact non-red (i.e. *E* = Bert in *Conceptual Art*), *D* would have to withdraw his attribution of entitlement to *E* to pursue the issue no further. What's more, if *D* knew that *E*'s answer to the question of the colour of the surface is based only on *E*'s taking appearances at face value, *D* would have to deny that *E* is entitled to pursue the question no further. *D* would have to say that *E* doesn't know whether the surface is red.

At the same time, we would also expect a concept with the envisaged function to respect a competence condition: Were we to find out that the attributee does not have the relevant cognitive competence, and appealed to by Pritchard in his unsuccessful argument) in Author (2011).

we could not attribute to him an entitlement to inquire no further. Were *D* to be informed that *E* is red-green colour blind (i.e. *E* = a colour-blind version of Ernie in *Minimalist Art*), *D* would have to withdraw his attribution of entitlement to *E* to pursue the issue no further. What's more, if *D* knew that *E*'s answer to the question of the colour of the surface is based only on exercising his competence to discern colours, *D* would have to deny that *E* is entitled to pursue the question no further. *D* would have to say that *E* doesn't know whether the surface is red.

It is not hard to see that these two conditions are independent of one another. In the first case *D* would have to withdraw his attribution of knowledge/deny *E* knowledge even when *E* exercises a highly reliable competence to tell colours apart. In the second case, *D* would have to withdraw his attribution of knowledge/deny *E* knowledge even when the surface *E* is looking at could not have been any colour other than red. If this is correct, then we have independent reason to think that the concept of knowledge should feature both conditions the safe-apt view countenances. The additional complexity the safe apt view countenances does not count against the view and the analysis of the cases offered receives further confirmation.

## 7 Conclusion

There is thus reason to think that the safe-apt view can secure the benefits, whilst avoiding the costs of all of PC, IC+S and PCM. By countenancing a separate safety condition, it can avoid the core problem as it arose for PC and successfully explain the difference in intu-

itions in the cases of Ernie and Bert. By construing the because relation of the virtue component in terms of competence manifestation, it avoids the version of the core problem that arose for Pritchard's IC+S. By acknowledging the need for an index to methods in the safety condition and by identifying the methods with (exercises of) the competences of the virtue component, it can accommodate the intuition in *Dreamer*. Finally, a plausible thesis about the function of the concept of knowledge can be used to provide independent reason to believe that the concept of knowledge should have the structure the safe-apt view claims it to have. We have before us, I submit, a promising view of the nature of knowledge.

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