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Pritchard on Knowledge, Safety, and Cognitive Achievements

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Abstract. This paper argues that Pritchard's response to my argument that knowledge does not require safe belief is unsuccessful.

I. PRITCHARD'S RESPONSE TO 'KNOWLEDGE AND SAFETY'

In a paper that also appears in this volume I argue against a view that has enjoyed a considerable degree of popularity in recent epistemology—*viz.* that knowledge requires safe belief. At the heart of my argument is a case in which a subject intuitively knows a proposition while his corresponding belief is unsafe. In short, the case features a powerful demon who has set his mind to getting the hero of the story to believe that it is 8.22. He is prepared to set the clock to 8.22 the very moment before our hero looks at it unless our hero looks at it at 8.22 of his own accord. As it so happens, the hero of the story happens to look at the clock precisely at 8.22 and the demon remains inactive. The clock is reliable and accurate, it reads 8.22, our hero exercises his ability to read the clock and, through the exercise of this ability, hits upon the truth about the time. Intuitively, our hero's belief that it is 8.22 qualifies as knowledge. However, his belief is unsafe. There are many nearby possible worlds—some of them very close to the actual world—at which our hero looks at the clock a minute earlier or later. At those worlds the demon sets the clock to 8.22 anyways and our hero, whilst continuing to form his belief in the same way as in the actual world, ends up with a false belief. In this way, the example suggests that knowledge does not require safe belief.

In "Safety-Based Epistemology: Whither Now?" Duncan Pritchard responds to my argument. The crucial move Pritchard makes in his response is to distinguish between knowledge and cognitive achievement. In a nutshell, Pritchard argues that, while the notions of knowledge and cognitive achievement are closely connected, they come apart. In particular, he provides reason to believe that one can attain a cognitive achievement that falls short of knowledge and argues that this is exactly what happens to the hero of the above story. In this way, Pritchard attempts to hold on to the idea that our hero lacks knowledge, whilst, at the same time, explaining away our intuition to the contrary: Since the notions of knowledge and cognitive achievement are so closely related they are also easily confused by intuitive judgment.

II. WHY PRITCHARD'S RESPONSE IS UNSUCCESSFUL

In what follows, I will briefly outline a problem that Pritchard's response to my argument faces. True, the problem is generated by a further assumption. However, since the assumption enjoys independent plausibility, I take the following line of thought to exert strong pressure on Pritchard's response to my argument. Moreover, since Pritchard endorses the assumption, at the very least it will be shown that his response to my argument is not available to Pritchard himself.

The assumption that is needed to generate the problem is the following: Knowledge does not require cognitive achievement, and, more specifically, in certain cases of testimonial knowledge the subject does not attain a cognitive achievement. This assumption can be made plausible by cases due to Jennifer Lackey (2007) who uses them to make the closely related point that subjects do not always deserve credit for what they know. In fact, however, Pritchard himself (2007 and *forthcoming*) uses such cases to argue specifically that one can know without having attained a cognitive achievement. In Pritchard's version of the case, the heroine of the story arrives at the train station in an unfamiliar city and asks for directions to a famous landmark. Her knowledgeable informant gives her accurate directions on the basis of which our heroine forms a true belief as to where the landmark is. Intuitively, her belief qualifies as knowledge. At the same time, argues Pritchard, our heroine does not attain a cognitive achievement when she forms her belief about the location of the landmark. After all, achievements require that the success involved in the achievement be *creditable* to the achiever. In the present case, however, our heroine's success—her hitting upon the truth—is not creditable to her. Rather, the credit goes to the knowledgeable informant. So, our heroine knows, via testimony, where the landmark is despite having failed to secure a cognitive achievement.

If Pritchard's case works in the way envisaged, then there is reason to believe, first, that knowledge does not require attainment of a cognitive achievement, and, second, that

there are cases of testimonial knowledge in which the subject acquires knowledge but fails to attain a cognitive achievement. Now, why is that result problematic for Pritchard's response to my argument against the safety condition on knowledge? The reason is that we can easily construct cases parallel in the relevant respects to both Pritchard's case of knowledge without cognitive achievement and to my case of knowledge without safe belief. Thus consider the following variation of my original case: Suppose our hero of the first case is in the same city as our heroine of the second case. He wants to know what time it is, and thus decides to ask the next passer-by, who happens to be our heroine. Our heroine looks at her watch, which is reliable and accurate as always, sees that it reads exactly twelve o'clock and tells our hero that it is exactly twelve o'clock. On the basis of this testimony, our hero forms a belief that it is exactly twelve o'clock. Intuitively, his belief qualifies as knowledge. But now suppose that, just as in the original case, a powerful demon, who had set his mind to getting our hero to believe that it is exactly twelve o'clock, was lurking in the background. The demon would have manipulated our hero's informant's watch if our hero had not happened to ask his informant at exactly twelve o'clock of his own accord. Since there is a wide range of nearby and very close nearby possible worlds at which our hero asks his informant a minute earlier or later, there is a wide range of nearby and very close nearby possible worlds at which he acquires a false belief via testimony from his informant. Hence, his belief is not safe. Importantly, given that Pritchard's analysis of testimony cases is correct, there is reason to believe that, in the present case, our hero does not attain a cognitive achievement when he acquires a true belief about the time. Recall that, according to Pritchard's analysis, achievements require that the success involved in the achievement be creditable to the achiever. However, in the present case, our hero's success—his hitting upon the truth about the time—is not creditable to him. Rather, it is creditable to our heroine who does all the relevant cognitive work. In consequence, our hero does not attain a cognitive achievement when he forms a belief about the time. Given that this is so, it can easily be seen that

Pritchard's response will not be successful against my argument that knowledge does not require safe belief. After all, we now have a case in which, intuitively, the subject knows, while, at the same time, her belief is unsafe and she does not attain a cognitive achievement. Our intuition that the subject knows can no longer be explained away by claiming, first, that the subject attains a cognitive achievement that falls short of knowledge and, second, that since the notions of knowledge and cognitive achievement are so closely related they are also easily confused by intuitive judgment.

Again, my argument depends on the assumption that Pritchard's claim that, in the relevant testimony cases, the subjects know without having attained a cognitive achievement is correct. However, to the extent that Pritchard's analysis of these cases is plausible, we have independent reason to believe that it is. In consequence, the argument presented in this paper provides reason to believe that Pritchard's response to my argument against the safety condition is unsuccessful. At the very least, however, it shows that his response to my argument against safety is not available to Pritchard himself.

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