Knowing the facts, alternative and otherwise

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0. Introduction

Consider two intuitively plausible claims about knowledge and truth. The first is that it's not possible to acquire knowledge unless we reason from true assumptions. Let's call this *the basis restriction*. It says, in effect, that it's not possible for a belief to constitute knowledge unless it's provided with the right kind of basis. The right kind of basis, at least in the inferential case, must consist of truths or true propositions that the subject believes.[1] The second is that our knowledge consists of truths, facts, or true propositions. Let's call this *the object restriction*. It says, in effect, that the things that are known or the objects of propositional knowledge must always be true, veridical, accurate, or constituted by a fact.[2] Putting these ideas together, we might say that propositional knowledge is of truth and from truth. These ideas, in turn, might help explain the value of knowledge. We often speak as if we value the truth. We seem to have a strong aversion to a life detached from reality even if that life is filled with pleasure (Lynch, 2004). What we really seem to want, however, is not that some propositions (e.g., the ones we happen to believe) are true, but that we *have* the truth. Being in touch with the truth or having the truth might require more than having a belief that happens to be true. Arguably, it's only through knowledge that we gain contact with these truths or facts (Littlejohn, 2017). We undermine our best explanation of the value of knowledge if we abandon the object restriction.

While these two claims about knowledge and truth might seem initially quite plausible, they have been challenged quite recently.[3] We'll look at the role that cases of approximations play in this discussion.[4] Before we get to the details, I wanted to note one thing. Some of the cases used to cast doubt on the object restriction are quite similar to cases that have been used to cast doubt on the basis restriction. We can imagine someone trying to defend the basis restriction by appeal to the general principle that in the case of inferential knowledge, knowledge

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[1] One problem with this argument is that it's not clear why the inferential case is special. Must all knowledge be based on accurate representations and only accurate representations? I hope not. There are good reasons to be sceptical of the idea that every piece of non-inferential knowledge rests on such a basis. In turn, we need a story about how *these* beliefs can constitute knowledge without being supported by accurate representational states. Perhaps a basis can be *safe* without being *accurate* (e.g., an experience without content might nevertheless dispose us to believe things in such a way that we couldn't easily be mistaken). Once we countenance this possibility, it's less obvious that our inferential beliefs couldn't similarly constitute knowledge by virtue of the fact that it, too, has a safe basis that might not be accurate. For arguments that our visual beliefs won't be based on mental states or events that have representational contents of the sort that our beliefs have, see Brewer (2011), McGinn (2012), Millar (2000), and Travis, 2013). For arguments that knowledge of our own minds and actions won't be based on accuracy evaluable non-doxastic states, see Anscombe (1962). For further discussion of the epistemological significance of these views, see Littlejohn (2017).

[2] I'm bracketing difficult questions about the relationship between facts and true propositions.

[3] For discussion of the basis restriction, see Borges (2020), Fitelson (2010), Lee (2021), Murphy (2017), Schnee (2015), Turri (2019), Warfield (2005). For discussions of the object restriction, see Bricker (2022), Buckwalter and Turri (2020), and Shaffer (2015).

[4] For discussions of these cases for debates about evidence, see Shaffer (2015, 2019) for arguments that claims that something only needs to be approximately true to constitute evidence. For arguments that evidence must be true, see Littlejohn (2013), Littlejohn and Dutant (forthcoming), and Williamson (2000).

can only be begotten by more knowledge.[5] This counter-closure principle, if correct, might seem to support the basis restriction, but strictly speaking, it does so only if we also assume that everything we can know is true. Without this assumption, the claim that only knowledge can give us inferential knowledge wouldn't support the claim that the inferential basis that provides us with knowledge must consist of truths. If we don't assume the object restriction, the counter-closure principle that says that only knowledge of supporting premises can provide us with inferential knowledge wouldn't support the basis restriction. Owing to the importance of the object restriction in these debates about the connections between knowledge and truth and to debates about the value of knowledge, it makes sense to focus on that restriction here.

[5] For a helpful discussion of counter-closure, see Luzzi (2010, 2019).

1. False knowledge and a sceptical challenge

To start our discussion, let's consider Buckwalter and Turri's (2020) challenge to the object restriction. They first offer us this sceptical argument:

The sceptical argument

P1. A representation is known only if it is true.

P2. Approximations are not true.

C1. Therefore, approximations are not known.

P3. Many of our representations are mere approximations.

C2. Thus, many of our representations are not known.[6]

The default assumption in contemporary epistemology seems to be that valid sceptical arguments contain some mistaken premise. They propose that the best non-sceptical response to this argument is to deny the object restriction.

Buckwalter and Turri think that the approximations at issue are 'ubiquitous'.[7] Their solution to this sceptical problem is to embrace the possibility that we have knowledge in cases where our beliefs are only approximately true. (They suggest that pragmatic factors might help us decide whether a belief is sufficiently close to the truth to constitute knowledge.). This move might enable them to say that our intuitive sense of how successful our knowledge attributions are isn't wildly off the mark (thus undercutting the sceptical argument by rejecting (P1)), but the cost, if it is one, is rejecting the object restriction by allowing that some falsehoods might be known.

Let's consider the kinds of approximations that they're concerned with. Buckwalter and Turri observe:

> We approximate what temperature the coffee is safe to drink at, or the time needed to arrive at work, for example, to avoid becoming scalded or fired. Scientists and engineers rely on approximation when computing significant figures such as the decimals of pi to calculate accurate distances (2020: 1).

Here are some examples:

1. France is a hexagon;

Fact: there is no hexagon that contains all and only the parts of France within it.

2. Maria arrived at 3:00;

Fact: she arrived at 3:03.

3. There were three hundred philosophers at the conference;

Fact: there were 299 philosophers at the conference.

A speaker might assert (1), (2), or (3) in situations where the italicised facts obtain. We might think that there's nothing wrong with the speaker's asserting such things. We might note, for example, that (1) is a perfectly fine thing to say when enriching (1) with the further claim, 'but it is not a hexagon' turns this into something infelicitous.

Can we say that we know things like (1)-(3) in the situations envisaged? Buckwalter and Turri suggest that we can even though none of these claims seems to express a true proposition in the situations envisaged. Their defence of this unorthodox idea seems to be (roughly) that the best non-sceptical response to the above would be to deny (P1) and so allow for 'false knowledge'. Alternative responses, they claim, face difficult questions that their proposal does not.

In place of the seemingly traditional view that knowledge is restricted to truths, they offer the alternative suggestion that we think of knowledge as a kind of 'adequate' representation

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[6] I modified the argument slightly by dropping the word 'strictly'. As we'll see below, this change won't matter if we agree that something is true iff it is strictly true. There are good reasons to think that this is so.

[7] Though see Bricker (2022) for a discussion of whether the beliefs in question are merely approximately true or concern approximations and are thus strictly true. We shall briefly touch upon this issue in a moment.

of truth where something can be adequate in this regard even if not true. What would it mean for something to serve as an adequate representation of some truth if it's not itself true? They write:

> Although there are potentially many ways that approximations could be adequate, one way is for them to serve our purposes well enough to facilitate action and help us to achieve our goals in a particular circumstance. For example, 3.14 might be adequate, and hence known, as the value of pi in the grade school classroom but inadequate, and hence not known, as the value of pi in the lab engineering a global positioning system (2020: 97).

Even if the details of some account of adequacy are sketchy or unclear, the case for abandoning the object restriction might be compelling, so I don't propose to put too much pressure on the positive proposal that they offer. Instead, I would like to consider in detail some responses to the sceptical argument that, in my view, deserve further consideration.

2. What's so

Let's consider an initial line of response that might seem to undercut their argument for the possibility of false knowledge. We only have an argument for recognising the possibility of false knowledge if we assume that (1)-(3) are known but not true. (If they were either not known or true, they wouldn't support the argument against the object restriction.) Why shouldn't we think that (1)-(3) might be true in the situations envisaged? Just to put the fans of false knowledge on the defensive, these claims don't sound very good:

> 1'. France is a hexagon, as James knows, but it's not.
>
> 1". James knows France is a hexagon. Not only that, France is a hexagon.

Don't the fans of false knowledge accept something in the neighbourhood of (1')? Isn't their proposal that James knows that France is a hexagon even though it's not?

The fans of false knowledge need to explain the badness of (1'). One explanation of the badness of (1') is that the content that follows the conjunction is just flatly inconsistent with the content that precedes it. If this is the best explanation of the infelicity of (1'), we have our argument that knowledge is factive. Similarly, (1") seems infelicitous. The fans of false knowledge need to explain that, too. It's common ground that (1") might be true. If the best explanation of the infelicity of (1") is that the information contained in the second part (i.e., 'Not only that…') is redundant given what's said prior to it, that's an indication that the second part is *entailed* by the first part.

We'll see in a moment if the fans of false knowledge have anything helpful to say about such cases. The first thing they'll say, however, is that we need to tease apart two different issues. One issue is about knowledge ascriptions and the felicity of ascribing knowledge whilst asserting things about the truth or falsity of the target proposition. The second issue is whether the propositions in (1)-(3) might be false but known. Let's focus on their falsity first.

A natural thought is that propositions like the ones expressed by (1)-(3) might be true in the circumstances imagined. How might this work? We might think that there's a kind of slack or looseness here that lets us speak the truth. The details of the positive proposal might vary, but we could imagine a kind of contextualist view on which a sentence's meaning along with features of context (e.g., which of potentially many different standards for determining whether something belongs to a category is operative) determine which proposition the sentence expresses so that (1)-(3) might, in the circumstances envisaged, express a true proposition. To take an example from a different context:

> Handing you a packet from the butcher's I say, 'Here's the meat I bought for dinner'. You open it and find the kidneys. 'I don't call that meat', you say. 'Meat, for me, is muscle'. 'Well, I do', I say helpfully. Again one of us may be demonstrably wrong. Lamb's kidneys are no more meat than wool is, to one who knows what meat is. But perhaps not. In fact, there are various under- standings one might have of being meat, consistent with what being meat is as such. In that sense, being meat admits of understandings. We sometimes distinguish (such as in good markets) between meat and offal. Then if the kidneys wound up in the meat section they are in the wrong place. On the other hand, one would not (usually) serve kidneys to a vegetarian with the remark, 'I made sure there would be no meat at dinner'. Similarly, brains or spinal column, however delicious fried, gristle, however tasty stewed, would count as meat on some occasions for so counting, but not on others. There are various ways being meat admits of being thought of (Travis, 2013).

The variable eligible understandings of what might be meat (or described as 'meat') would need to be cut down to understand how, say, someone might be wrong or right in saying that the kidneys were or were not meat. And it seems obvious to me that in some contexts it would be right to say that the dish contains meat (e.g., when vegetarians are seated) and some in which it's wrong to say that it does (e.g., when picky omnivores ask about an item on a menu). If the one

sentence (e.g., 'We will serve meat tonight') can express a truth or express a falsehood when we keep the dish fixed but toggle the facts about the conversational interests of participants, it seems we get some evidence that there's a kind of contextually variable standard that determines whether it might be true or false that this kidney containing dish contains meat.[8] Could similar contextually variable standards determine whether something counts as hexagonal, as being at 3:00, etc?

If we wanted to develop this contextualist view, we could say something like this. A sentence of the form 'a is F' might, without changing meaning, express different propositions with distinct truth-conditions depending upon the standards for something to be counted as falling under '… is F' operative in a given context. In any context in which it's felicitous to assertively utter 'a is F' or 'So and so knows that a is F', the contextual standards governing the application of '… is F' (which can vary without changing the meaning of 'a is F') are ones according to which the individual designated by 'a' belongs to the class of things that fall under '… is F'. This might be a way of developing the idea that (1), for example, expresses nothing stronger than the proposition that France is nearly or approximately hexagonal. We might then generalise this account to handle cases like (2) and (3) (e.g., that times near enough to a precise temporal point count as '3:00', that numbers of philosophers close enough to 300 count as 'being 300 in number', etc.). The important point is that if such things are true, the things we felicitously say in the relevant cases of loose talk are, in fact, true. If such things are true, the argument for false knowledge is undercut.

One virtue of this view is that it might make similar predictions to Buckwalter and Turri's proposal when it comes to the felicity of knowledge ascriptions. On their view, a kind of practical adequacy is sufficient for knowledge and warranted assertion without ensuring the truth of what's said. On this view, practical adequacy is part of what determines what's said and so what's true.

Unfortunately, fans of the object restriction should recognise that this isn't a very popular strategy amongst philosophers of language working on loose talk. Let's focus on (2). It might be thought that (2) differs from (2') in terms of the proposition expressed:

2'. Maria arrived at 3:00 on the dot.

One problem we face if we hold that (2) differs from (2') in that (2) might be true if Maria arrived near enough to 3:00 is that it seems quite obviously wrong to append things like, 'When she arrived a few minutes after 3:00, we were able to begin the meeting'. It's obvious why it would be wrong to append that to (2'). If (2) expressed the proposition that Maria arrived during some interval of time (e.g., between 2:45 and 3:15), we wouldn't speak falsely if we added that she arrived a few minutes after 3:00.[9]

As for the challenge of explaining our observations about (1') and (1"), fans of false knowledge wouldn't find it too terribly difficult to make sense of our intuitions about these examples. The fans of false knowledge might want to say that (1') might be true but nevertheless infelicitous. In any context in which it's good enough for our conversational purposes to say that France is hexagonal, there wouldn't be good reason to deny that it is. Similarly, in any conversational setting in which it's good enough for our conversational purposes to say that someone knows, it's good enough for those purposes to assert what's known. The additional utterance adds nothing useful for the conversational purpose and that might explain the feeling of redundancy. For these reasons, I don't want my response to build on some controversial claims

[8] For further discussion of this kind of contextualist view, see also Hansen (2011) and Huang (2017).

[9] For further discussion, see Carter (2017, 2021) and Lasersohn (1999). In fairness to the contextualist view, it might be argued that appending such things changes the context, but my aim here isn't to defend the view that what we felicitously say in such cases is true. I don't want to tie my defence of the object restriction to any particularly contentious positions in the philosophy of language because I think that if we abandon the contextualist view (rightly or wrongly), we'll still have ways of defending the object restriction and responding to the sceptical worry introduced above.

about the meaning and content of sentences like (1)-(3). We can acknowledge that each of (1)-(3) would be true only if strictly true and try to find a way to block the argument for false knowledge without having to get entangled in debates in the philosophy of language.

3. What's known

We shall assume that (1)-(3) are true only if strictly true and assume that they aren't strictly true. The question we want to ask is whether they might be known. It's here that I think the defenders of the object restriction are on stronger ground.

I don't think I've seen this noted elsewhere in the literature, so let me begin by observing something that I find somewhat surprising. Consider the following:

> 1t It is true that France is a hexagon.
> *Fact: there is no hexagon that contains all and only the parts of France within it.*
> 2t Maria arrived at 3:00, so it is not true that she did not arrive at 3:00.
> *Fact: she arrived at 3:03.*
> 3t There were three hundred philosophers at the conference, so it is true that there were three hundred philosophers at the conference.
> *Fact: there were 299 philosophers at the conference.*

The line that the fans of false knowledge take when it comes to (1)-(3) might be felicitous but false where they're felicitous because, in part, the things that make them false aren't relevant to the conversational and/or practical purposes. The little differences between France's shape and the shape of any hexagon might not matter when choosing between the available shaped blocks to represent France. The differences between Maria's time of arrival and 3:00 might not matter for the purposes of determining whether our colleagues are conscientious about attending meetings. So far, so good. Let that be common ground. How should we think of (1t)-(3t)? My gut instinct is to say that (1) is true iff (1t) is, that (2) is true iff (2t) is, and that (3) is true iff (3t) is. My gut also tells me that (1) can be felicitously asserted iff (1t) can, (2) can be felicitously asserted iff (2t) can, and that (3) can be felicitously asserted iff (3t) can. If that's right, I think this is important for our debate about knowledge ascriptions.

My approach to (1t)-(3t) seems to fit with the standard line on loose talk—that something that is strictly false might be felicitously asserted if it suits the conversational purposes sufficiently. My hunch is that there will not be interesting differences in most conversational settings between asserting (1) and asserting (1t). If it serves our conversational interests sufficiently well to be told that France is a hexagon, it will not serve our conversational interests insufficiently to be told that it is true that France is a hexagon. What serves those interests in both cases is strictly false, but that's no reason to think that what's asserted is asserted felicitously.

I think it's also worth considering one further data point. Consider:

> 1w. She knows that France is a hexagon and that hexagons have straight sides, but I wonder if France has straight sides.
> 2w. Maria knew that she arrived at 3:00 but wondered whether she might have arrived at 2:58.
> 3w. We knew there were three hundred philosophers at the conference, but we wondered whether there would be an even number.

Each of these claims strikes me as rather strange. If it's possible to ascribe knowledge to a subject of a false proposition when (e.g.) the falsehood is sufficiently close to the truth given the relevant purposes, it should make sense to wonder, say, whether the strict truth might deviate from the thing we've said is known. Compare (1w)-(3w) with:

> 1n. France is at least roughly hexagonal, but I wonder if it has straight sides.
> 2n. Maria arrived in the neighbourhood of 3:00 but I wonder whether she arrived at 2:58.
> 3n. The number of philosophers were in the neighbourhood of three hundred, but I wonder whether it was an even number.

Each of these claims seem perfectly fine and that makes me think that it might be better to think of the relevant knowledge ascriptions as strictly false. If they are strictly false, however, the cases don't support the view that *knowledge* can be false, because the case for false knowledge is

supposed to be built on cases where we have true knowledge *ascriptions* where the object of knowledge is a falsehood.

Bearing this in mind, let's imagine a debate between two fictional philosophers. They offer different theories of why it's felicitous to assert (1)-(3):

> *Theory 1*: Because we can felicitously assert (1)-(3) and (1t)-(3t) when it's clear that the former are false, we should conclude that 'It is true that…' is not factive.
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> *Theory 2*: Although we can felicitously assert (1)-(3) and (1t)-(3t) when it's clear that the former are false, we should conclude that the latter are false but felicitously assertable.

I'm inclined to say that the proponents of Theory 2 win this debate. We should draw precisely zero lessons about the truth-conditions of sentences that involve a truth predicate or truth operator. Both sides agree that the false can be felicitously asserted and agree that there are entailments that hold between (1) and (1t) and so on. There are no grounds for taking the felicity facts to be grounds for challenging the entailment facts in this instance.

This debate about 'It is true that…' and '… is true' isn't our primary concern, but it's instructive. We have to choose again between two approaches to the case of knowledge ascriptions like this:

> 1k. We know that France is a hexagon;
>
> 2k. We know that Maria arrived at 3:00;
>
> 3k. We know that there were three hundred philosophers at the conference;

Here's what we agree on. We agree that (1)-(3) are false. We agree that they are nevertheless things we might assert felicitously. We also agree that (1k)-(3k) are things we can assert felicitously. We now have to choose between two options:

> *Theory 1*: In addition to saying that (1)-(3) are false and that (1k)-(3k) are felicitous, we want to say that (1k)-(3k) are *true*, so that we deny that 'S knows that *p*' is true only if *p* is true.
>
> *Theory 2*: In addition to saying that (1)-(3) are false and that (1k)-(3k) are felicitous, we want to say that (1k)-(3k) are false, so that we don't have to deny that 'S knows that *p*' is true only if *p* is true.

In line with the first theory, fans of false knowledge might say, in keeping with Buckwalter and Turri's suggestion, that knowledge needs only to be adequate:

> Call this *the approximation account* of knowledge. On this view, representations need not be true in order to count as knowledge. Instead, they only need to adequately represent the truth. Although there are potentially many ways that approximations could be adequate, one way is for them to serve our purposes well enough to facilitate action and help us to achieve our goals in a particular circumstance. For example, 3.14 might be adequate, and hence known, as the value of pi in the grade school classroom but inadequate, and hence not known, as the value of pi in the lab engineering a global positioning system (2020: 97).

One virtue of this proposal (in addition to making sense of the intuitions we might have about the felicity of the relevant claims) is that it seems to give us an alternative explanation as to why we value knowledge. If an adequate representation is genuinely adequate, it's not clear that we'd value this any less than we'd value a strictly true representation when the difference between the merely adequate and the strictly true is, by hypothesis, not one that matters for, say, our practical purposes.[10] If such a difference did matter, the account predicts that we couldn't know the false target proposition.

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[10] It might be worth thinking about whether such false knowledge that's (arguably) suitable for practical purposes is suitable for other purposes such as the satisfaction of curiosity. Convinced by Whitcomb (2010) that our curiosity is satisfied only when we know, you might wonder whether the relevant falsehoods (e.g., that France is a hexagon) satisfy our curiosity. If it doesn't

While one could embrace Theory 1 and seek some non-traditional account of knowledge along the lines of the approximation account, I have concerns about non-traditional accounts that have this shape. (I'll discuss these in the next section.) Moreover, I don't think that our intuitions significantly challenge Theory 2. But Theory 2 is compatible with the orthodox view that upholds the object restriction. Dialectically, I think that the proponents of Theory 1 will have a hard time overturning Theory 2 for reasons we'll touch upon in the next section.

I won't wade here into the debates about whether the linguistic evidence supports the widely held view that 'knows' is factive. My aim has been to try to show that there's a way of accommodating the observations about loose talk without abandoning the view that we can only know what's true or what's strictly true and thus maintain the object restriction. But doesn't this force us to accept the conclusion of the sceptical argument? As someone who isn't sympathetic to scepticism and thinks that knowledge is cheap and plentiful, I would prefer not to be forced into accepting any sort of sceptical view. In the next section, I shall sketch a response to the sceptical argument that I hope is satisfying.

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we either need to see the satisfaction of curiosity as irrelevant to practical adequacy or we have further pressure towards accepting the object restriction that comes from the idea that beliefs that are adequate representations should be classified as knowledge.

4. What's Scepticism?

Recall the sceptical argument:

P1. A representation is known only if it is true.
P2. Approximations are not true.
C1. Therefore, approximations are not known.
P3. Many of our representations are mere approximations.
C2. Thus, many of our representations are not known.

I would be happy to grant (P3). I've suggested that there's good evidence for thinking that, in a sense, (P2) is true. When we review claims like (1)-(3), they don't say explicitly that France is nearly hexagonal or that Maria arrived on or near 3:00 and I don't think it's a winning strategy to insist that these hedged or weaker claims are invariably the ones that capture the content of what we assert or believe. I've also suggested that whilst what's not strictly true isn't true, we might retain the idea that knowledge is factive and say that the knowledge ascriptions that we use are also not strictly true. Thus, we can retain (P1) in the face of the cases that have convinced some philosophers to embrace false knowledge. This, in turn, seems to leave us with a problem. If we don't reject one of the argument's premises, aren't we committing ourselves to scepticism? Isn't that bad?

In a few words, 'Possibly' and 'Probably not'. In arguing that there is the potential for a sceptical problem having to do with approximations, Buckwalter and Turri seem to assume that there would be a sceptical problem here if many of our routine knowledge ascriptions are false. Fair enough, I suppose. If I were to try to represent myself as having an anti-sceptical outlook, I probably wouldn't stress or emphasise that I thought that many or most of our ordinary knowledge ascriptions were false. Still, I feel that if someone were to say that many or most of our knowledge ascriptions were false, I'd be open to the idea that their grounds for thinking that they were false might show that their position didn't support the sceptical view as we ordinarily think of it.

As I normally think of them, sceptical challenges normally have one or more of these features. They are supposed to point towards possibilities that are, from the point of view of unenlightened 'common sense', surprising and possibly disturbing. They are supposed to call for us to rethink our connection to reality. Think here about the possibility that it's all a dream, that we're brains in vats, etc. Knowledge is, after all, valued in part because we supposedly value being in touch with reality and it's hard to see that we could be tethered to reality if we lacked knowledge. Sceptical challenges are supposed to challenge the rational authority for our beliefs. Even if there is some subjective sense in which it might be appropriate to believe what is not known, it might seem that whether our beliefs are truly fitting responses to the world depends upon whether they might constitute knowledge. Finally, sceptical challenges are supposed to show us things that we don't already know and, possibly, would struggle to reconcile with our current practice or outlook. They should be difficult to cope with insofar as we aspire to continue to inquire and seek to know things in some domain. The challenge before us doesn't have these features, as I hope to show.

The most familiar sceptical arguments purport to tell us something that is, for most, disturbing. If we think of knowledge in terms of the relation we bear to parts of reality when we're in touch with it or attuned to it, the thought that we might lack knowledge would seem to be disturbing because it suggests that we might be cut off from things we care about. Think, for example, about the intuitions that convince people that they wouldn't or shouldn't plug into Nozick's (1974) experience machine. We think there's something undesirable about life in the machine that's distinct from the pleasurable experiences it promises and a kind of world-connectedness that we seem to have iff we have knowledge of things external to us seems to be an important part of our explanation as to why there's something missing from a life where appearance and reality diverge so radically.

In contrast to, say, arguments that ask to us to consider the possibility of demonic deception or the possibility of brains in vats, the sceptical argument being offered here seems not at all threatening. Perhaps this is for two reasons. The first is that we're already aware of the kinds of limits to our discriminatory powers or our ability to measure that this argument appeals to.

The second is that we know all too well how to cope with these limits. Indeed, this seems to be something that's assumed by the approximation account of knowledge. According to the approximation account of knowledge, the reason why it's felicitous to assert (1k)-(3k) in the situations envisaged is that it's evident to the relevant parties that the representations are both strictly false and false in ways that wouldn't matter for our interests. Thus, in some sense, the view assumes that the difference between a life in which the things known are true (or strictly true) and the life in which the things believed are strictly false but adequate is really nothing to be concerned by.

Perhaps it's not essential to a sceptical argument that it supports a disturbing conclusion, but it does highlight one key difference between the most familiar sceptical arguments and the sceptical problem that the approximation account is introduced to address. The thing that I'd note, though, is that the defenders of the approximation account seem to be committed to the idea that the implications of their account and the more traditional accounts of knowledge that uphold the object restriction is practically irrelevant. Presumably this is because we can reliably control for the falsity of our representations because the falsity of these representations in the cases that matter (i.e., those that the approximation view says are cases of false knowledge) doesn't matter given our practical interests. Part of the explanation here as to how we control for this is that we are all *fully* aware that the relevant representations are false and *fully* aware that we're not far off from the truth. This, to my mind, seems to assume that the sceptical threat that we'd be saddled with differs significantly from more familiar sceptical challenges. If we concede that it's just acknowledged that it's true that the real values of various variables are not far off from the values our representations indicate these variables take, the approximation theorist has to concede that we would (by traditional standards) know quite a lot about the domains we're thinking about even if many of our representations were false. That, to my mind, is not a worrying form of scepticism. If, say, the external world sceptic conceded that many things we believed were mistaken but then added that many of our beliefs about approximations were strictly true and known (by traditional standards) to be true, they would have just conceded the falsity of external world scepticism.

Are there grounds for choosing between the approximation view and the more traditional view that upholds the object restriction that doesn't appeal to highly contentious claims that philosophers of language will need to sort out? Perhaps. The approximation account seems to share something in common with epistemic contextualist views that I think is worth highlighting. Some of us believe that knowledge has a kind of normative significance for belief and speech, so that there are norms of roughly the following sort:

> KA: If you aren't in a position to know that *p*, you shouldn't assert that *p*.
> KB: If you aren't in a position to know that *p*, you shouldn't believe that *p* (DeRose, 2002; Littlejohn, 2013b; Sutton, 2005; Williamson, 2000).

Contextualists about knowledge ascriptions might say that the set of things known by some indicated subject depends upon the conversational interests of the speaker attributing knowledge. It's an important part of this view that the target of the attribution and the speaker might be located in different contexts so that, say, relative to the standards in the speaker's context, it's correct to say, 'So and so does not know that *p*' even if there is some other context in which it's correct to say, 'So and so does know that *p*'.

Williamson (2005) noted that there's a potential problem here for contextualists about knowledge ascription. Suppose some individual believes, say, that there's some meat in this dish and isn't sure whether it could be served to the guests. According to KB, if this individual doesn't know this proposition, they shouldn't believe it. According to the contextualist, there can be one context in which a speaker says correctly this individual does know (we'll say that this individual does know$_1$) and another in which a speaker says correctly this individual does not know (we'll say that this individual does not know$_2$). Suppose this individual wants to know whether it's okay to continue to believe this or whether in fact they shouldn't believe this. It doesn't seem right to say this: well, I have good news and bad news. Since you know$_1$, it's fine for you to believe it.

That's the good news. Since you don't know$_2$, you shouldn't believe it. This individual, quite reasonably, would want to know whether they should or shouldn't believe, but it seems that the contextualist, if they accept KB, must answer that they should (or, perhaps, may) and shouldn't. It seems a system of norms isn't very good if it issues these kinds of conflicting directives.

This points to a tension between the contextualist's attitude towards knowledge ascriptions (i.e., that the propositions expressed have truth-conditions set by the interests of attributors as opposed to targets) and an independently attractive view about the normative significance of knowledge.[11] If knowledge is normatively significant, it's presumably because there's some knowledge relation (e.g., knowing$_1$, knowing$_2$, etc.) that determines whether some individual may believe or should instead not believe.

One feels that the same sort of problem would arise for the approximation account. Recall the remark, "3.14 might be adequate, and hence known, as the value of pi in the grade school classroom but inadequate, and hence not known, as the value of pi in the lab engineering a global positioning system" (2020: 97). If this is what the approximation theorist thinks, we can easily imagine a scenario in which Tim believes pi is 3.14 where there's one context in which this is correctly described as a case of knowledge and a second context in which this is correctly described as a case of non-knowledge. To avoid any sort of contradiction, we might want to embrace a kind of contextualism according to which Tim bears the knows$_1$ relation to a proposition without being the knows$_2$ relation to it, but then we're either stuck denying KB or saying that there are some propositions that Tim shouldn't believe even though it's fine for him to believe them. This sort of problem won't arise if we impose the object restriction and take practical adequacy to be, at best, a necessary condition for knowing without committing to any view on which an adequate representation might be known if not true.

Conclusion

I have argued that the argument for rejecting the object restriction isn't decisive. The challenge to the factivity of knowledge seems to generalise in problematic ways. It seems that the considerations that support this challenge support a challenge to the idea that 'It is true that...' or 'It is a fact that...' is factive. So long as we allow that the knowledge ascriptions themselves are false but felicitous, we can retain the object restriction. This leaves us with the problem that many of our ordinary knowledge ascriptions are false, strictly speaking. It's not clear, however, that this forces us to confront a very serious sceptical problem. Unlike more familiar sceptical problems, we already how to cope with it and that its existence doesn't undermine our confidence that we're properly connected to reality.

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[11] For a response, however, see Blome-Tillmann (2013). See Russell (2022) for an explanation as to why the contextualist might take this response seriously.

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