

## knowledge is belief for sufficient (objective and subjective) reason

[W]hen the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient both subjectively and objectively, it is *knowledge*.  
– Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A822/B850

This paper defends a simple thesis: that knowledge is belief for reasons that are both objectively and subjectively sufficient. I take a dogmatic approach, devoting the bulk of the paper to an explanation of what this means, and of why it explains both what knowledge is like, and why it is important; the theory is justified by its fruits. I go on to illustrate, by appeal to my main thesis, how knowledge comes to play some of the key roles that it does, including looking at Williamson's arguments that knowledge is *primo* and for its distinctive explanatory role, as well as why my account explains and predicts the complicated behavior of knowledge in cases involving defeaters, defeated defeaters, and defeaters whose defeaters are defeated, as well as the different possible kinds of defeat – the primary source of complications in the Gettier literature. These facts are easily explained by the central thesis of the paper, without either giving up on the analysis of knowledge or resorting to arbitrary or *ad hoc* measures. Since the last five decades of literature might lead one to find it fairly audacious to propose an analysis of knowledge, a final section addresses the putative inductive grounds for general pessimism about the Gettierological project.

### I objective and subjective reasons

It is important to distinguish between objective and subjective reasons. If Max is smiling, that is reason to believe that he is happy. But if no one realizes that Max is smiling, no one *has* that reason to believe that Max is happy. I'll call the sense in which the fact that Max is smiling is a reason to believe that he is happy, even if no one knows about it, the *objective* sense of 'reason', and I'll call the sense in which in this case no one has a reason to believe that Max is happy the *subjective* sense of reason. Objective reasons, then, are facts or true propositions, and subjective reasons are propositions to which agents have some sort of

epistemic access – the kind of access, whatever it is, that is lacked, when no one has the reason to believe that Max is happy.

Some people believe that subjective reasons, so understood, must themselves be objective reasons. They believe that talk about whether someone *has* the reason to believe that Max is happy may be taken literally, as talk about some sort of possession relation which agents might bear to things that are reasons to believe that Max is happy.<sup>1</sup> I call this view the *Factoring Account*, and my view is that it is wrong. I believe that the ‘has’ in ‘Caroline has a reason to believe that Max is happy’ is pleonastic, as in ‘Caroline has a golf partner’. The latter does not mean that there is someone who is a golf partner and whom, moreover, Caroline has; it just means that there is someone who is Caroline’s golf partner. Similarly, on my view, talk about the (subjective) reasons that someone has is just talk about the things which are reasons for her (in the subjective sense of ‘reason’). I have argued extensively against the Factoring Account elsewhere (Schroeder [2008]); in this paper I will simply assume that this theory is wrong, and that subjective reasons need not themselves be objective reasons – someone may have a subjective reason without there being any corresponding objective reason.

Other people – well, some of them are the same people – believe that having a subjective reason requires having a justified belief in that proposition, or even knowing it.<sup>2</sup> I believe that this theory is also wrong; on my preferred view, having a subjective reason requires only having a belief – or a perceptual state with a propositional object (perhaps intellectual seemings will also do the trick). Having a reason does not require that the belief (or the perceptual state or intellectual seeming) be justified, though I do hold that when a belief is *un*justified, the subjective reason which the agent thereby has is guaranteed to be defeated, so it is not possible to ‘bootstrap’ yourself into having *good* reasons to believe something, simply by having unjustified beliefs which support it. Again, I have argued for these views elsewhere at length (Schroeder [forthcoming a]). Here I will simply assume that we do not need to appeal to the concepts of rationality, justification, or knowledge in understanding what it is for someone to have a subjective reason. This is important, because this allows us to *use* the concept of having a reason in order to analyze rationality, justification, and knowledge – which would not otherwise be possible, without circularity.

Both objective and subjective reasons need to be contrasted with the reasons *for which* someone believes something. The reasons for which someone believes something are usually called ‘motivating

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<sup>1</sup> In Schroeder [2008] I make the case that there is much circumstantial evidence that this thesis has been widely accepted by epistemologists. Errol Lord [forthcoming] defends it explicitly, in responding to Schroeder [2008].

<sup>2</sup> Compare, for example, Feldman [1988, 227]: ‘If I believe, for no good reason, that P and I infer (correctly) from this that Q, I don’t think we want to say that I ‘have’ P as evidence for Q. Only things that I believe (or could believe) rationally, or perhaps, with justification, count as part of the evidence that I have. It seems to me that this is a good reason to include an epistemic acceptability constraint on evidence possessed...’

reasons' outside of epistemology, and I will follow that terminology here, without presuming to judge on whether believing something for a reason deserves to be called 'being motivated' in any robust sense of the term. And motivating reasons need to be distinguished, in turn, from *explanatory* reasons – the things which explain why it is the case that someone has a certain belief. Not all explanations of why someone believes something are the reasons for which she believes it; but rather than get distracted by trying to articulate what the difference is, I will simply rely on an intuitive understanding of this distinction, since it is a distinction that I take it everyone needs to be able to make sense of, independently of their account of knowledge. I'll have more to say in the final sections of the paper about the detrimental effects in the epistemological literature of premature attempts to analyze important concepts like this one.

I will take it that at least in normal cases and possibly in all cases, the reasons for which someone believes something are themselves subjective reasons for her to believe it. I will further take it that in at least some cases, the reasons for which someone believes something are themselves objective reasons to believe it – this happens, I take it, when the reasons for which someone believes something are true.<sup>3</sup> My own view is that what makes it possible for someone's motivating reasons for belief to be both subjective reasons to believe and objective reasons to believe, is that the same kind of thing plays all three roles: propositions are objective reasons when true, subjective reasons when believed, and motivating reasons when by being believed, they play a certain role in bringing about another belief or in maintaining that other belief. But nothing in what follows will turn on that – so long as your conceptual framework can make sense of what it means for the reason for which someone believes something to be a good objective reason to believe it, you will have allowed for everything that I need.

Before going on, it is important to emphasize that these concepts – of objective and subjective reasons for belief, and of the motivating reason for which someone believes something – are not special inventions created for the purpose of understanding knowledge, or even for the purpose of epistemology. The very same concepts are central in the study of practical reason – moral philosophers make the same distinctions between objective and subjective reasons for action and for attitudes other than belief, and distinguish both from the motivating reasons for which someone acts or for which they hold a certain attitude. Indeed, my own previously-mentioned arguments against the 'Factoring Account' are based on the practical case. Moreover, it should not be surprising that belief is subject to at least some of the same

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<sup>3</sup> Compare Dancy [2000].

categories that we use in trying to understand action and other attitudes, nor that ‘reason’ should turn out to be unambiguous in ‘reason for action’, ‘reason for belief’, and ‘reason for intending’.<sup>4</sup>

## 2 sufficiency

With respect to both objective and subjective reasons, we may distinguish *sufficient* reasons from *insufficient* ones. On the view that I will employ here, a set of reasons for something is sufficient just in case it is at least as weighty as the set of reasons in favor of any alternative. Since I will take it that the alternatives to believing  $p$  consist in believing  $\sim p$  and withholding belief with respect to  $p$ , it follows that the reasons to believe  $p$  are sufficient just in case they are at least as weighty as the set of reasons to believe  $\sim p$  and at least as weighty as the set of reasons to withhold belief with respect to  $p$ .

We may apply the concept of sufficiency to both objective and subjective reasons. The balance of subjective reasons is associated, I take it, with a subjective dimension of evaluation – that of rationality. It is rational to believe something just in case your subjective reasons to believe it are at least as weighty as your subjective reasons to believe its contradictory, and at least as weighty as your subjective reasons to withhold belief. In such a case, it is what it is rational for you to believe; otherwise not. Though I take it that rationality is a *permissive* concept, and so it is associated with reasons that are *at least as* weighty as the alternatives, there is also a stronger normative concept in the neighborhood, which is associated with reasons that are strictly *weightier than* the alternatives. This concept, I take it, is associated with a ‘subjective’ sense of ‘ought’. The balance of objective reasons is associated, I take it, with an objective dimension of evaluation – the dimension of correctness. It is correct to believe that  $p$  just in case your objective reasons to believe it are at least as weighty as your objective reasons to believe its contradictory, and at least as weighty as your objective reasons to withhold belief. In such a case, it is what it is correct for you to believe; otherwise not. Again, though I take it that correctness is a permissive concept, and associated with reasons that are *at least as* weighty as the alternatives, there is also a stronger normative concept in the

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<sup>4</sup> It is sometimes said that ‘reason’ cannot be unambiguous across ‘reason for action’ and ‘reason for belief’, or at least that reasons for action and reasons for belief are very different kinds of thing, because reasons for action must be believed, and reasons for action must only be true. The foregoing distinction between objective and subjective reasons should make clear, however, that this allegation compares subjective reasons for belief with objective reasons for action – which *do* behave differently, because they are on opposite sides of the objective/subjective distinction. It is perfectly understandable, moreover, why we are more interested in objective reasons in ethics and more interested in subjective reasons in epistemology – after all, in epistemology it is widely agreed that what we objectively ought to do, is to believe the truth – the whole problem is how to accomplish that. So we know what the objective reasons support – they support the truth; the problem is getting there. Whereas in moral philosophy, one of the main issues at stake is what action is supported by the facts, even if we know what those facts are – and consequently we do, in fact, spend more time discussing objective reasons in moral philosophy. The fact that discussions in epistemology focus mostly on subjective reasons and discussions in ethics focus mostly on objective reasons is therefore easy to understand, and should not confuse us into thinking that reasons for action and reasons for belief are fundamentally different topics.

neighborhood, associated with reasons that are strictly *weightier than* the reasons for the alternatives. This is the ‘objective’ sense of ‘ought’.

Many people hold that in the objective sense of ‘ought’, what you ought to believe is just what is true. I agree with this thesis, but I don’t hold that the objective sense of ‘ought’ simply *means* ‘is true’, when applied to beliefs. On the contrary, since ‘ought’ has both an objective sense and a subjective sense in both epistemology and ethics, it is only natural to operate on the assumption that it means the same thing in both domains but – since actions are not correct just in case they are true – to seek to explain why beliefs are correct just in case they are true by appeal to plausible further assumptions about the nature of reasons for belief. Indeed, it is not hard to do this, if we assume that if true,  $\sim p$  is always a conclusive objective reason – and the very best sort of objective reason possible – not to believe  $p$ . By appeal to an assumption like this, we can explain why the balance of all objective reasons will always support believing the truth, and hence why it is correct to believe that  $p$  only if  $p$  is true. I do make this assumption, and will rely on it again.

As I have just noted, when an agent has sufficient subjective reason to believe that  $p$ , believing that  $p$  is what it is rational for her to do. This is what is sometimes known in epistemology as having a *propositional justification* to believe that  $p$ . But we can also use the concept of sufficiency to help us understand the notion of *doxastic justification* – what it is for someone to be justified *in* believing something. To be doxastically justified in believing something is to *believe it rationally* – that is, it is for the reasons *for which* one believes it to include sufficient subjective reasons to believe it – that is, one’s motivating reasons for the belief must include subjective reasons to believe  $p$  which outweigh all of one’s subjective reasons for the alternatives – namely, believing  $\sim p$  and withholding with respect to  $p$ .

The concept of doxastic justification does not require that the reasons for which an agent believes  $p$  include all of her subjective reasons to believe  $p$ . Nor does it require that all of the agent’s reasons for believing  $p$  are really subjective reasons for her to believe  $p$ . It only requires that the reasons for which she does believe  $p$  include among them sufficiently good subjective reasons to believe  $p$  to outweigh all of her subjective reasons to believe  $\sim p$  and to outweigh all of her subjective reasons to withhold with respect to  $p$ . We can intuitively, though with some loss of accuracy, gloss this by saying that the reasons for which she believes  $p$  need only be good enough that it would be rational for her to believe  $p$  even if she did not have

the other subjective reasons to believe  $p$ .<sup>5</sup> That is what we get by requiring that the reasons *for which* she believes  $p$  be themselves sufficient subjective reasons to believe it.

In parallel to looking at whether the reasons for which an agent believes  $p$  are sufficient subjective reasons for her to believe  $p$ , we might also look at whether the reasons for which she believes that  $p$  are sufficient *objective* reasons for her to believe  $p$  – that is, at whether among them are included objective reasons of sufficient weight to outweigh all of the objective reasons for the alternatives – that is, for either believing  $\sim p$  or withholding with respect to  $p$ . As Aristotle might have said, there is no name for the state of having a belief for reasons which are objectively sufficient. But there is a name for the state of having a belief for reasons which are both objectively sufficient and subjectively sufficient. It is what we call *knowledge*.

Someone whose reasons for believing  $p$  are both subjectively sufficient and objectively sufficient has an important feature: her doxastic justification for believing  $p$  is robust in a certain way in the face of new (true) information.<sup>6</sup> This is a central observation about the consequences of the foregoing analysis of knowledge, and I will return to it later and spell it out in more detail. For now, I'll simply observe that I've so far explained what I mean by saying that knowledge is belief for reasons which are both objectively and subjectively sufficient, but that I haven't yet explained why this account captures important features of knowledge. In the next section, I'll turn to this task by explaining how the account of this paper deals with a range of phenomena having to do with *defeat*, including the standard types of counterexamples to theories of knowledge.

### 3 defeat

Knowledge can be defeated in many different ways. It is easy to describe cases in which it sounds at first like someone knows something, but by adding extra details to the case, we can elicit the intuition that she doesn't know it after all. The extra details are what we generally call 'defeaters' – they are further details that we can add to a case in which someone would otherwise know, which turn it into a case in which she doesn't know after all. The general structure of the defeater dialectic – of cases in which it seems that

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<sup>5</sup> This conditional formulation is intended to be a helpful gloss, not the official view. Conditional formulations like this one end up being extensionally inaccurate for reasons associated with the conditional fallacy. My official view is that when conditional formulations like this one are correct, they are correct because of the facts about weight (which might change in the nearest worlds in which the antecedent of the conditional is satisfied – hence the fallacy) – not that facts about weight consist in conditionals like this one.

<sup>6</sup> Importantly, it is not robust in the face of just *any* new information. Knowledge is compatible with the existence of misleading information – evidence that  $\sim p$  which is itself defeated, but whose defeater the agent is unaware of. Were the agent to find out about this misleading information without finding out about its defeater, then it would cease to be rational for her to believe that  $p$ , and she would cease to know that  $p$  – even though the fact that it is defeated allows the agent to know, as things stand.

someone knows, but additional details reveal that she does not, and perhaps yet further details reveal that she does, after all, even though this itself can turn out to be defeated by yet further considerations – is a familiar one from moral philosophy; it is also easy to describe cases in which it seems that someone ought to do something, but further details reveal that it is not the case that she ought to do it, and perhaps even further details reveal that she ought to do it after all. As we will see, the situation for knowledge is a little bit more complicated than the situation of what someone ought to do, but one of the things that I will be arguing is that the most powerful explanatory theory of why defeaters work in this way for what someone *ought* to do leads directly to powerful and illuminating predictions about the structure of defeaters for *knowledge*.

In section 2, I identified what someone ought to do, in the objective sense, with the action that is favored by weightier objective reasons than any of its alternatives. This makes facts to the effect that someone ought to do A *holistic*, in that their truth depends not just on particular facts about the situation, but on the *totality* of all facts. No matter how much of the situation we describe, if we haven't established that those are *all* of the facts, it remains possible that one of the remaining facts will turn out to be a reason for the agent to do some alternative to A, of sufficient weight to tip the balance, and make that what she ought to do, instead. The thesis that objective *ought* facts are just facts about the balance of the objective reasons therefore predicts and explains *why* it is that any scenario that we describe in which it seems that someone ought to do something can be supplemented by further details which reveal that it is not the case that she ought to do it, after all. This, I think, is an enlightening way of capturing the main insight of W.D. Ross in *The Right and the Good*.<sup>7</sup>

The kind of defeat mentioned in the last paragraph is what is known as *outweighing* or *countervailing* defeat. The claim that someone ought to do something suffers from countervailing defeat, if further facts turn out to be countervailing reasons – reasons which count against the action, or in favor of one of its alternatives. But claims that someone ought to do something can also suffer from what is known as *undercutting* or *undermining* defeat. Such a claim suffers from *undercutting* defeat, if the further facts reveal that one of the reasons for the agent to do A is not as weighty as it otherwise would have seemed.<sup>8</sup> Just as it can

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<sup>7</sup> See, in particular, my arguments in Schroeder [forthcoming b].

<sup>8</sup> It is sometimes said – for example, by Pollock and Cruz [1999, 37], that undercutting defeaters turn something that would otherwise be a reason into no reason at all. But as Dancy [2004] emphasizes and I've argued elsewhere (for example in Schroeder [forthcoming b], at best such 'total' undercutters are a special case of a more general phenomenon which includes 'attenuators' – considerations which merely lower the weight of a reason without eliminating it entirely. I've also argued elsewhere that 'total' undercutters are best thought of as a special limiting case of 'partial' undercutters, and that many examples of 'total' undercutters from the literature are really only cases of partial undercutters. For extended discussion, see especially Schroeder [forthcoming b].

seem that no matter how much we describe of a situation, we can add further details which make it turn out that it is not the case that the agent ought to do A after all, it can seem that no matter how much we describe of a situation, we can add further details which make it turn out that some particular reason for the agent to do A is not so weighty, after all. The same considerations which motivate the view that *ought* facts are holistic facts about the balance of reasons therefore also motivate the view that facts about reasons' *weights* are holistic facts which can be affected in a similar kind of way.

Elsewhere I have developed and defended a theory about the weight of reasons which predicts and explains the behavior of undercutting defeaters (Schroeder [2007], [forthcoming b]); for my purposes here I will not need that theory, but only the observation that undercutting defeaters are further considerations which work by affecting the weight of other reasons. The main idea of the more general theory is that undercutters work by being themselves *reasons to place less weight* on other reasons, and that they work because the weight of a reason is essentially the weight that it is *correct* to place on it, and correctness is itself a matter of the balance of reasons.<sup>9</sup> That hypothesis explains why undercutting defeaters are subject to both countervailing and undercutting defeat – in the very same way as any other sort of reason. And this prediction is one of the main virtues of the account, since it is precisely the hierarchy of defeaters, defeaters for defeaters, and defeaters for defeater-defeaters which gives rise to the familiarly convoluted examples downstream in the Gettier literature.<sup>10</sup>

It not my objective to defend my theory of the weight of reasons here, but merely to show that if we understand defeaters as considerations which affect the weight of reasons, then we can *delegate* the problem of accounting for many features of how defeaters work to the details of our account of reasons' weight – whatever that account turns out to be. If our account of reasons' weight fails to make the right predictions about the way that defeaters work, that won't be a problem with our account of *knowledge, per se* – for it will be an independent problem with our account of reasons' weight.

Since, as I have claimed in section 2, claims about what someone subjectively ought to do are parallel in structure to claims about what someone objectively ought to do, we should expect that parallel defeater phenomena should arise for subjective oughts as for objective oughts. This prediction is a good one. Subjective 'ought' claims – as well as claims about what it is rational for someone to do – suffer from both countervailing and undercutting defeat. The difference is that when we are looking at what it is correct for someone to do, we start with a characterization of her objective situation – the situation that

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<sup>9</sup> Officially, since the view sketched in the main text is circular, the official view is that the weight of reasons is given a *recursive* analysis, and the thesis that the weight of a reason is the weight that it is correct to place on it is a derived theorem. See chapter 7 of Schroeder [2007], where I develop just one way of trying to make good on this idea.

<sup>10</sup> See particularly Shope [1983] for a range of such examples.



she really is in – and then by adding further details, we can reveal that it is not the case that it is correct for her to do it after all. Whereas when we are looking at what it is rational for someone to do, we start with a characterization of her subjective situation – her beliefs and perceptions about her situation – and then by adding further details about her beliefs or perceptions about her situation, we can reveal that it is not the case that it is rational for her ought to do it, after all.

Subjective defeaters, moreover, may be countervailing or undermining; if you start by noting that Sheila believes that saying  $p$  would be a lie, it may seem like the rational thing for her to do is to not say  $p$ . But if you add that she believes that her best friend will be killed unless she says  $p$ , then it seems that saying  $p$  is the rational thing for her to do after all. This is a case of countervailing defeat, because in believing that her friend will be killed unless she says  $p$ , she has a subjective reason to say  $p$  that she would otherwise not have had. Alternatively, we may add to the case that she believes that she is playing the game Diplomacy, one of whose points is to allow for deception between players. That doesn't give her a subjective reason *to* lie, but it does make her subjective reason not to lie less weighty. Whatever counts against lies counts less against them – perhaps not at all – if you are playing Diplomacy. So by adding this detail to the case we can reveal that it is rational for Sheila to say  $p$  after all, by undercutting her subjective reasons to not say  $p$ .

So much for the way in which features affecting the relative weights of reasons give rise to defeaters for rationality and correctness – countervailing defeaters affect the balance of reasons by being included on the 'other side' of the balance, and undercutting defeaters affect the balance of reasons by reducing the weight of the reasons on 'this side' of the balance. On the assumption that facts about rationality and about correctness simply consist in facts about the balance of reasons, these are precisely the two basic ways in which we predict that rationality and correctness may be defeated. This is a central virtue of the account.

#### **4 defeaters for knowledge**

Now knowledge, on the account defended in this paper, entails both rationality and correctness. You know  $p$  just in case the reasons for which you believe  $p$  are both subjectively and objectively sufficient. The reasons for which you believe  $p$  are objectively sufficient only if they include objective reasons sufficient to outweigh all of the objective reasons for the alternatives, so since they include only a subset of all of the objective reasons to believe  $p$ , they can outweigh all of the objective reasons for the alternatives only if the set of *all* of the reasons to believe  $p$  outweighs all of the objective reasons for the alternatives – that is, only

if it is correct to believe  $p$  (and hence only if  $p$  is true – so knowledge implies truth, even though truth is not an explicit condition on knowledge).

Similarly for the explanation of why you know  $p$  only if it is rational for you to believe  $p$ : you know  $p$  only if the reasons for which you believe  $p$  are subjectively sufficient – that is, only if the subjective reasons for you to believe  $p$  among them outweigh all of your subjective reasons for each of the alternatives. But the subjective reasons for you to believe  $p$  which are among the reasons for which you believe  $p$  are a subset of your subjective reasons to believe  $p$ . So if the former outweigh all of the reasons for the alternatives, the latter must, as well – that is, it must be rational for you to believe  $p$ .

The fact that knowledge entails both rationality and correctness predicts that knowledge can be defeated in all of the ways that rationality can be defeated *and* in all of the ways that correctness can be defeated. So it predicts that defeaters for knowledge will be more complicated than defeaters for either rationality or correctness. This prediction is a good one. As is well-known, claims to knowledge can be defeated in ways that depend on the agent's subjective circumstances *or* in ways that depend on features of the agent's objective circumstances or environment which she knows nothing about.

The first sort of cases include cases in which a subject fails to know because there is counterevidence of which she is ignorant. For most things that we know, there is counterevidence of which we are ignorant, but we at least possess good enough evidence that the counterevidence of which we are ignorant is relatively insignificant. But sometimes someone has a rational, true belief, but there is excellent counterevidence of which she is unaware. Suppose, for example, that Jack believes that the presidential election will be on Tuesday, because he remembers hearing that somewhere at some point. In fact, the presidential election will be on Tuesday, and this is supported by excellent evidence: most of the official calendars put it on Tuesday, the newspapers are reminding voters that the election will be on Tuesday, it is codified in federal law that the election is held on a particular Tuesday, and so on. But Jack is unaware of all of this – he just remembers hearing somewhere, a long time ago, that the election would be on Tuesday. Since he doesn't have any contrary evidence, it may be rational for Jack to believe that the election will be on Tuesday. But suppose that due to a minor computer glitch, the batch of official election calendars that was mailed out to Jack's municipal government lists the election for Wednesday. That is evidence that the election will not be on Tuesday – objective reason to believe that it won't be on Tuesday. Since the official calendar is better evidence than Jack's vague recollection, Jack doesn't really know that the election will be on Tuesday.

In environments with contrary evidence like this, it is harder for subjects to know – even if they don't actually rely on any of the contrary evidence and aren't even aware of it. This is just the phenomenon

of objective countervailing defeat. It is not the sufficiency of the *complete* set of objective reasons to believe that the election will be on Tuesday that is challenged, of course; but the objective sufficiency of the reasons *for which* Jack believes that the election will be on Tuesday is called into question, and may be defeated in some cases like this.

Knowledge can also suffer from objective undercutting defeat. An objective undercutting defeater for knowledge, is a fact about the subject's situation – which the subject need not know about – which undercuts the objective weight of some of the reasons for which the subject believes *p* sufficiently for it to turn out that the reasons for which the subject believes *p* are not objectively sufficient, after all. A wide range of cases from the epistemological literature about misleading environments have this character. Someone who believes that she is looking at a barn because it looks like a barn may nevertheless fail to know that it is a barn, because unbeknownst to her, there are a lot of barn facades in the neighborhood, which look like barns but are not. This is because the fact that something looks like a barn is not nearly as good a reason to believe that it is a barn, if there are a lot of barn facades in the neighborhood. That is, the fact that there are so many barn facades nearby is an objective undercutting defeater for the subject's reason to believe that she is looking at a barn. Depending on how many barn facades there are in the neighborhood, and on what other reasons there are for which the subject believes that she is looking at a barn, this fact will reduce the weight of this reason sufficiently that it no longer outweighs the objective reasons for the alternatives, and that is how it defeats the subject's claim to knowledge.

Even more straightforwardly, defeaters of knowledge can take the form either of subjective countervailing defeaters or of subjective undercutting defeaters. If someone believes something that would be, if true, compelling evidence against *p* and believes *p* anyway, that is obviously not a case in which she knows *p*. And if someone *believes* that she is in fake barn country and believes that she is looking at a barn on the basis of no evidence other than that it looks like a barn, that is obviously not a case of knowledge. The first of these is a case of subjective countervailing defeat, and the second a case of subjective undercutting defeat. In both cases, the subject's claim to knowledge is defeated because the reasons for which she believes fail to be subjectively sufficient. In both such cases, the agent neither knows nor is justified in her belief.

## **5 more on sufficiency, and an optional extension: pragmatic intellectualism**

So far, I've laid out my account of knowledge, explained how it delegates various features of the explanation of defeater phenomena to facts about the weight of reasons (which I've sought to explain

elsewhere), and shown how the complex defeater phenomena arising for knowledge can be seen as the product of simpler defeater phenomena which arise for correctness and rationality. The feature of my account which enables it to delegate certain features of the account of defeater phenomena to an account of reasons' weight is my account's leading proposal that for the reasons to believe  $p$  to be *sufficient* is simply for them to outweigh the reasons for the alternatives.

From the point of view of the study of ethics and practical reason, this proposal about sufficiency is highly natural, but it has been largely invisible to epistemologists; in fact, as Robert Shope [1983] ably documents, many analyses of knowledge in the Gettier literature failed primarily because they sought to use conditionals to analyze sufficiency in terms of justification, rather than adopting a prior account of sufficiency which allowed them to use it to account for justification (and knowledge), as I have done. The main difference, I think, is that my account makes room for this account of sufficiency by explicitly acknowledging that withholding is a third alternative to both believing  $p$  and believing  $\sim p$ . 'Balance of reasons' accounts of sufficiency look hopeless if only reasons to believe  $p$  and reasons to believe  $\sim p$  are being considered, but things look quite different when we include reasons to withhold. Just as my account of knowledge can delegate the complete details of many features of defeater phenomena to an account of reasons' weight, it can delegate the complete details of many features of sufficiency to an account of reasons to withhold. In this section I explore one – optional, but I think attractive – way in which this might go.

In recent literature, a small number of philosophers have advocated the idea that a subject's claim to knowledge can be defeated not only by factors like the ones that I've mentioned in the last section, but by certain features of her *practical* situation – sometimes described as what is *at stake*. These defeaters come in two varieties. In the first sort of situation, the subject believes herself to be in a situation where there are serious consequences to falsely believing that  $p$  of the following sort: for example, it is Friday afternoon and the subject is deciding whether to wait in line at the bank to deposit her paycheck or return on Saturday morning. She believes that the bank will be open on Saturday morning, on the grounds that she remembers it being open on Saturday morning when she drove by a month or two ago. But she also believes that if she does not get her paycheck deposited by Sunday, her mortgage payment will bounce, and her home will go into foreclosure. Since banks do sometimes change their hours, and those are pretty big stakes on which to risk the bank being closed when she comes back on Saturday, it may seem irrational for the subject to believe that the bank will be open on Saturday – certainly it is irrational for her to act on this belief – and correspondingly, authors like John Hawthorne [2004], Jason Stanley [2005], Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath [2002], and I [unpublished] have argued that the subject may also fail to know that the bank will

be open the next day under such circumstances – even if the subject’s evidence that it will be open would be good enough for knowledge under other circumstances.

I don’t mean to defend the view, here, that knowledge may depend on features of an agent’s practical circumstances like this – although I have defended a version of that view elsewhere, which I call *pragmatic intellectualism* (Schroeder [unpublished]). All that I mean to do here, is to point out that it is one way in which some theorists have held that knowledge can be defeated; I will be shortly illustrating how it can be accommodated in the framework of this paper. But as I was saying, theorists who advocate the view that stakes can defeat knowledge have noted that insofar as stakes seem to be able to defeat knowledge, they seem to be able to defeat it whether agents know about them or not. So-called ‘ignorant high stakes’ cases are cases in which the stakes are high even though the agent doesn’t realize it – for example, the bank will foreclose on Hannah’s house if her rent check is not deposited by Sunday, but Hannah is not aware of it. In such cases – or at least, so the view goes – Hannah’s claim to knowledge is also defeated.

It should now be clear that the two sorts of defeat which can be provided by stakes are varieties of subjective and objective defeat, respectively. In the case in which Hannah believes that the bank will foreclose on her house if her check is not deposited, her knowledge is defeated because the reasons for which she believes that the bank will be open on Saturday fail to be subjectively sufficient. In this case, this is not because these reasons are diminished in weight – as in the case of subjective undercutting defeat – or because they turn out to be outweighed by reasons to believe that the bank will not be open on Saturday – the fact that the bank will foreclose on her house if her check is not deposited by Sunday is not, itself, any reason to believe one way or the other about whether the bank will or won’t be open on Saturday. So in this case, the reasons for which Hannah believes that the bank will be open on Saturday fail to be subjectively sufficient because they are outweighed by her subjective reasons to *withhold* belief about whether the bank will be open on Saturday. This is because in believing that the bank will foreclose on her house if her paycheck is not deposited by Sunday, Hannah has excellent subjective reason to *withhold* belief about whether the bank will be open on Saturday. And intuitively – at least, so I have argued elsewhere (Schroeder [unpublished]) – this is a correct description of what is going on.

Similarly, in the case in which the bank really *will* foreclose on her house if her check is not deposited, the reasons for which Hannah believes that the bank will be open on Saturday fail to be *objectively* sufficient. Again, this is not because their objective weight is diminished, as with objective undercutting defeaters, or because they are outweighed by the objective reason to believe that the bank will not be open on Saturday – the fact that the bank will foreclose on her house if her check is not deposited by Sunday is not, intuitively, objective reason to believe either way about whether the bank will be open on Saturday.

But it is, plausibly, objective reason to withhold belief about whether the bank will be open on Saturday – and that is why it is plausible to say that in this case, the reasons for which Hannah believes that the bank will be open on Saturday fail to be objectively sufficient.

As noted earlier, I don't mean to defend here the idea that knowledge can be defeated by practical factors which depend on stakes – either as the subject believes them to be or as they are in reality. All that I mean to illustrate here, is that the account of knowledge developed in this paper can easily accommodate and predict why defeaters for knowledge would come paired in objective and subjective variants – even if the defeaters are of a practical variety.

In general, the account of knowledge defended in this paper does have as a consequence that knowledge can at least in principle be defeated by either objective or subjective reasons to *withhold*, in addition to being defeated by objective or subjective counterevidence (that is, reason to believe that  $\sim p$ ), and by objective or subjective undercutters – these are the three ways, after all, in which the reasons for which someone believes that  $p$  fail to be either objectively or subjectively sufficient – it can be reduced in weight, or it can lose out to either the reasons to believe that  $\sim p$  or to the reasons to withhold – for those are the two alternatives to believing that  $p$ . So whether or not this account of knowledge predicts that knowledge can be defeated by pragmatic factors depends on whether the reasons to withhold can be pragmatic in nature.

If reasons to withhold *can* be affected by practical considerations such as the cost of relying on a false belief, then the view leads to *pragmatic intellectualism* – the kind of pragmatic encroachment on knowledge outlined in this section. Whereas if reasons to withhold include only considerations based on features like lack of simplicity or explanatory power, then the very same account of knowledge will not suffer from pragmatic encroachment – though defeaters based on lack of simplicity or explanatory power will still arise in both objective and subjective varieties. So though pragmatic intellectualism gives one illustration of how the theory of reasons to withhold might go, for purposes of this paper we can leave the question of the nature of reasons to withhold for another occasion.

## 6 basic perceptual knowledge

Just as the account of knowledge defended in this paper is compatible with but does not entail the possibility of practical defeaters for knowledge, it is compatible with, but does not entail, what I take to be an attractive picture about basic perceptual knowledge. All it takes to get that attractive picture is to suppose that one can have a subjective reason either by having a *belief* with a certain propositional content,

or by having a *perceptual experience* with that content. If perceptual experiences are, just like beliefs, ways of having subjective reasons, then in having a perceptual experience whose content is  $p$ , and going on to form the belief in  $p$  on that basis, the reason for which one believes  $p$  is  $p$ . But, as I have been assuming, if  $p$  is true, then  $p$  is the best sort of reason there is to believe  $p$ . (This is the assumption that I made in order to guarantee that knowledge entails truth.) Hence, if you form the belief in  $p$  on the basis of a perceptual experience as of  $p$ , the reasons for which you believe  $p$  cannot fail to be objectively sufficient, unless they suffer from some sort of undercutting defeat. Similarly, if you form the belief in  $p$  on the basis of a perceptual experience as of  $p$ , you have a subjective reason to believe  $p$  – namely,  $p$  – which is the best sort of subjective reason that you could have to believe  $p$ , again absent defeating considerations. Hence, if you form the belief in  $p$  on that basis, the reasons for which you believe  $p$  cannot fail to be subjectively sufficient, unless they suffer from some sort of undercutting defeat.

These assumptions would therefore explain why perceptual experiences are a privileged source of knowledge. In the absence of the unreliability of your perceptual experiences (which would be an objective undercutter) or a belief in the unreliability of your perceptual experiences (which would be a subjective undercutter), any belief in  $p$  formed on the basis of a perceptual experience as of  $p$  is knowledge. And this seems right, both as an intuitive matter, and in terms of the basic consequence of the analysis presented here, that knowledge is belief whose rationality is robust in a certain way in the face of exposure to new truths. If you have seen for yourself that Jack is in the next room, and your vision is not in fact unreliable, then only misleading evidence could make it rational for you to change your mind.

My own view is that this package constitutes an attractive picture about both the justification of basic perceptual beliefs, and about basic perceptual knowledge (see Schroeder [forthcoming a] for further discussion on the justification side). But I'm not seeking to defend this further package, here. The only point that I wish to make, here, is that this picture follows naturally and automatically from the account of knowledge defended in this paper, *on the assumption* that perceptual states can be, like belief states, ways of having subjective reasons. So the account defended here accommodates and leads naturally to, but does not entail, this further explanatory picture about *how* perceptions give rise to perceptual knowledge – a picture which explains why perceptual knowledge is privileged but defeasible.

## 7 gettierology

Let's now rehearse how the account of this paper relates to the conditions of belief, truth, justification, and 'whatever is left over', of traditional Gettierological approaches to analyzing knowledge, just to make sure

that we understand how everything is working. The belief condition is obvious. The reasons for which you believe something are both objectively and subjectively sufficient only if you believe it. So knowledge entails belief. It is not, however, a matter of believing it *and* some other things being the case – it is rather a *way* of believing.

We've also already touched on the truth condition. The analysis defended in this paper does not contain any truth condition, but it does entail that you know  $p$  only if  $p$  is true. This is because I am assuming that if  $\sim p$  is true, then  $\sim p$  is a conclusive reason not to believe  $p$ . So as long as either  $p$  or  $\sim p$  is true, the reasons for which you believe  $p$  are objectively sufficient only if  $p$  is true. Hence, you know  $p$  only if  $p$  is true. Truth is therefore entailed by the account, even though it is not itself an explicit condition on knowledge.

We've also covered the relationship between knowledge and doxastic justification, standardly taken to be the third condition on knowledge. On the view being defended here, you know  $p$  just in case the reasons for which you believe  $p$  are both objectively and subjectively sufficient. And on the view of doxastic justification articulated in section 2, you are doxastically justified in believing  $p$  just in case the reasons for which you believe  $p$  are subjectively sufficient. So in a natural sense, doxastic justification is half of knowledge. Knowledge really involves two conditions on the motivating reasons for which you believe  $p$  – one of which is doxastic justification, and one of which is the state which we noted in section 2 had no name of its own. So knowledge entails doxastic justification.

And that brings us to the X-factor. What is it that we add to belief, truth, and justification, to yield knowledge? The answer is, there isn't exactly something that we simply add to belief, truth, and justification, to yield knowledge. Knowing  $p$  is believing  $p$  in a certain way: namely, having the reasons for which one believes  $p$  satisfy two conditions. One of those conditions corresponds to doxastic justification; the other is not something that we add in addition to truth; it is something that entails truth. It is not something that we add, over and above believing or over and above believing justifiedly; it is a *way* of believing justifiedly. In the next section I'll draw out the importance of this point by illustrating the diagnosis that the account defended here gives to Timothy Williamson's argument that knowledge is *prime*, on which he rests his claims for the special explanatory role of knowledge, and which plays at least a heuristic role in his case that knowledge cannot be analyzed. What we'll see, is that even though we have here analyzed knowledge in terms of belief, *inter alia*, we can agree with Williamson that knowledge is prime and even – in contrast to Williamson's primitivist view – explain *why* it is prime. Relatedly, we can agree with Williamson that knowledge plays a special explanatory role that cannot be played by belief or by justified belief, but also go on, in contrast to Williamson's primitivist view, to explain *why* knowledge is



able to play that special explanatory role – without overstating that role. I'll close by explaining why I think dismissal of the Gettierological project of providing an analysis for knowledge is premature.

## 8 primeness and explanatory power

At the center of Williamson's [2000] case that knowledge cannot be analyzed, is his argument that knowledge is what he calls a *prime* condition. Williamson doesn't go anywhere so far as to suggest that the primeness of knowledge entails that it is unanalyzable – in fact, as we'll see later, he anticipates precisely the sort of view developed in this paper, at least in the abstract. But it is the closest thing to an argument against the analyzability of knowledge that he does offer, other than inductive pessimism about the Gettierological project, and so, since Williamson has been the most prominent voice articulating the view that knowledge cannot be analyzed, it is worth looking carefully at what the primeness argument actually shows, and how.

What Williamson means by the thesis that knowledge is prime, is that there is no way of separating out knowledge into 'internal' and 'external' factors, in such a way that to know  $p$  is to satisfy both the internal and external components. Since belief and justification are internal, and since truth is external, the idea is that you can't add any external condition which, together with truth, is what it is to know.

Williamson's argument for the primeness thesis is simple. What he does, is to construct pairs of cases, A and B, of subjects who know something, such that an internal duplicate of A who is in B's external circumstances does not know it. If knowledge is just a conjunction of internal and external factors, then this should be impossible – for A must satisfy the internal factor of knowledge (since she knows), and B must satisfy the external factor of knowledge (since she knows), so C – who has A's internal make-up and B's external circumstances – must satisfy both the internal and external factors of knowledge, and hence must know, as well.

One of the simple examples that Williamson considers, is a subject, A, who sees water normally through her right eye, but whose left eye, by chance, is receiving light rays 'emitted by a waterless device just in front of that eye', but a head injury prevents further processing of signals from her left eye. This subject processes the visual signals from her right eye, and believes that there is water in front of her on the visual evidence. Intuitively, she knows that there is water in front of her. Subject B is just like subject A, except that everything is reversed – the left eye sees water normally, the right eye is confronted by the 'waterless device', and it is the signals from the right eye which are internally impaired. By parity of reasoning, subject

B knows that there is water in front of her. To complete the argument, subject C is exactly like subject A internally – she is receiving water-like light rays in both eyes, but the signal from her left eye is prevented by a head injury – but is in exactly B’s external circumstances – the real water is in front of her left eye, and the waterless device is in front of her right eye. Intuitively, subject C does not know that there is water in front of her – for the only thing leading her to believe this, is her illusory perceptual experience as of water, through her right eye.

Why does this happen? *Why* is knowledge prime? Williamson offers no answer, merely trying to show how useful a concept it is, on the assumption that it really does have this feature. But we can answer that question. Knowledge is prime, because it isn’t merely a *conjunction* of internal and external factors – the basic essence of knowledge is to require a kind of *match* between the reasons *for which* one believes – which are an internal component – and the balance of objective reasons to believe – which is an external component. So knowledge doesn’t just require an internal condition and an external condition – what it essentially requires, is that there be the right kind of *match* between the internal and the external.

It is this match between the internal and external which Williamson’s examples exploit. Subject A’s internal component matches her external component, because the basis on which she believes – the evidence coming from her right eye – is in fact an excellent reason to believe. Similarly, subject B’s internal component matches her external component, because the basis on which she believes – the evidence coming from her left eye – is in fact an excellent reason to believe. Subject C fails to know, however – even though she believes on the same basis as subject A and is confronted by the same objective reasons for belief as subject B – because the reasons for which she believes no longer match the objective reasons for her to believe.

The idea that prime conditions can result from a *match* between internal and external components should not be surprising, and Williamson even explicitly acknowledges that an analysis of knowledge on which it required such a match is not eliminated by his argument for primeness. Being prime is a very far cry from being unanalyzable; even the state of *having a true belief* is a prime condition. If A believes only  $p$  and is in a situation in which  $p$  and B believes only  $\sim p$  and is in a situation in which  $\sim p$ , each has a true belief – but C, who like A believes only  $p$  and like B is in a situation in which  $\sim p$ , does not have a true belief. Why not? Her internal state no longer *matches* her external state. The account of knowledge developed in this paper explains the primeness of knowledge in exactly the same way – and without any resort to *ad hoc*ery; it falls directly out of the account’s independent features.

This means, in particular, that the account of knowledge developed in this paper can agree with Williamson that there is an explanatory role for knowledge that exceeds that of any internal component of

knowledge – for example, belief or justified belief. But we can go one better, and explain exactly *why* knowledge is able to play this explanatory role. Williamson’s leading example of an explanation in which knowledge plays a role that cannot be played by any internal component of knowledge, is the case of a burglar who ‘spends all night ransacking a house, risking discovery by staying so long’. Williamson’s explanation of why the burglar stayed so long, is that he knew that there was a diamond in the house. The burglar’s behavior is not explained by the fact that he believed that there was a diamond in the house – because several hours of ransacking with no results to show for it would in most cases suffice to make it rational for someone who believes, but does not know, that there is a diamond in the house, to give up that belief. Similarly, the burglar’s behavior is not explained by the fact that he justifiably believed that there was a diamond in the house – for even a very good justification to believe that there is a diamond in the house can be defeated by the accumulation of the kind of counterevidence one is bound to come by in the course of eight or nine hours of searching for it with no luck.

In contrast, Williamson claims, the burglar’s searching all night *can* be explained by the fact that he *knew* that there was a diamond in the house. The account of knowledge defended here can go beyond Williamson’s claims, and explain why. In order to know, the reasons for which you believe need to be objectively sufficient – that is, they need to be good enough to outweigh all comers. That means that knowing something doesn’t just mean believing it or rationally believing it – it means, believing it in a way that whose rationality is robust in a certain particular way with respect to further true information that might come along. Because knowledge is belief for reasons that are objectively sufficient, it is belief for reasons that continue to suffice to make belief rational no matter what further evidence the subject collects, unless she collects counterevidence that is less objectively weighty than she takes it to be, because it has an objective undercutter that she does not yet know about.

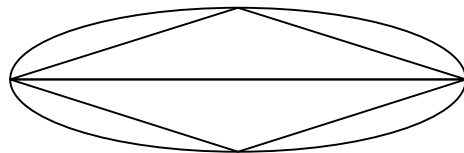
So the only true thing that the burglar could discover in the course of his searches that would make it cease to be rational for him to believe that there is a diamond in the house is *misleading* counterevidence – evidence is itself defeated, but whose defeater the burglar does not yet know about. Importantly, because of the possibility of such misleading counterevidence, the rationality of the burglar’s belief is not robust in the face of just *any* new true information – but it *is* robust in a way that it would not be, if it were justified but not knowledge. Someone whose belief is justified but is not knowledge may cease to be justified in the face of a *wider range* of things that she might discover, so someone who knows has a belief whose rationality is *more* robust in the face of future discoveries than someone who merely justifiedly believes. That is why Williamson’s best examples of the distinctive explanatory power of knowledge appeal to cases of explaining

the subject's persistent behavior even as she acquires new information that constitutes evidence against what she believes.

Williamson himself argues that knowledge is prime, argues that knowledge has a distinctive explanatory role, and notes that it is the primeness of knowledge which suits it for its distinctive explanatory role. But he does not *explain* why knowledge is prime, or explain why the exact way in which knowledge's primeness suits it for the exact explanatory role that it plays, without leading to worries about overgeneralization in the face of cases involving misleading counterevidence.<sup>11</sup> But as I've been trying to illustrate in this section, the account of knowledge defended in this paper can do both of these things: it explains *why* knowledge is prime, and it explains exactly why knowledge plays the exact distinctive explanatory role that it does.

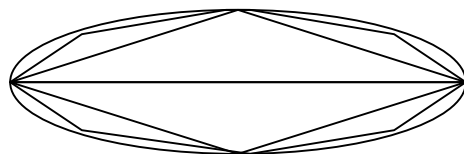
## 9 on premature advertisements of the death of gettierology: a parable

Once upon a time, it was a commonplace that ellipses are pairs of congruent isosceles triangles joined along the side bisected by their lines of symmetry. Long ago, an ancient philosopher named Lapto, in a famous dialogue called the Nemo, had articulated what was widely held to be this view, and it was frequently noted by other philosophers, including the famous ellipticologist Hischolm. Lo and behold, as orthodoxy so often is, this view was undermined when an enterprising philosopher set on tenure named Getmund Eddier published a one-line paper in *Analysis* consisting only of the title, 'are ellipses pairs of triangles?' and the following diagram:



Eddier's article took the philosophical world by storm; a model of clarity and concision, it set the agenda for a generation of ellipticologists, who had previously worried themselves mostly about whether any ellipses exist, and if so, what brings them about.

Soon hundreds of amendments of the traditional analysis of ellipse were on offer. One strategy proposed amending the traditional view with four additional triangles:

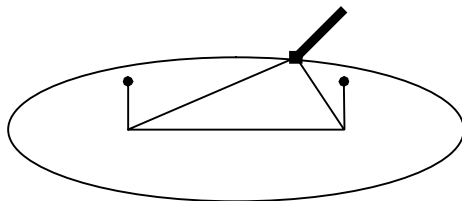


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<sup>11</sup> Compare the criticisms leveled against Williamson by Kvanvig [2003, 13-18].

Unfortunately, this strategy was soon seen to be insufficient, and though additional triangles were suggested, in successive rounds of eight and sixteen, no one ever found this route quite satisfactory. Another common early strategy was to supplement the traditional analysis with rectangles, but that never quite worked out, either. One of the most promising early strategies was to replace the triangles of the traditional analysis with parabolic arcs – this proposal *seemed* closer to the right track, but it faced remarkably recalcitrant problems as well. A few hardy souls held that the whole enterprise had gone off-track early on, and while some of these held that ellipses are rectangles, others defended the view that they are circles.

One insightful approach suggested that the shape of an ellipse is based on a certain relationship between points on the perimeter from some privileged points in the interior, but when pressed on what this relationship is, the best answer available seemed to be that an ellipse is the shape that you would make if you stuck two pins in a board, tied a piece of string in a loop, and used a pen to trace out the shape allowed by the furthest points that the string would stretch from the two pins, as in the following diagram:



This proposal, however, was quickly shot down on the grounds that whether something is an ellipse should not turn on the elasticity of one's available string or whether one's hand would shake with excitement or palsy at the prospect of successfully drawing an ellipse; it was held to fall victim to a particularly egregious sin which came to be known as the conditional fallacy. Though some ellipticologists attempted various band-aids, including the stipulation that only string of very low elasticity is allowed, most saw these kludges as merely another endless string of successful triangles, simply by another name.

Though some ellipticologists kept on hischolming at their Eddierological enterprise for quite some time, offering progressively more arcane refinements, most philosophers grew bored with it, and came to the conclusion that the main lesson of the literature was that ellipses couldn't really be that interesting. Some of the same ellipticologists who had earlier proposed analyzing ellipses as rectangles or as circles now recognized the inadequacy of their earlier proposals, and instead proposed doing away with the problematic notion of an ellipse altogether, and making do with the less problematic notions of rectangles or circles, instead. In this climate, an ellipticologist named Will Timonson created a great stir by suggesting that the problem was not that ellipses were uninteresting, but that they cannot be analyzed. Timonson showed that ellipses in fact play many important theoretical roles, including that they are the paths of planetary orbits

and the shape the circles occupy in our visual fields, and advocated an ‘ellipse-first’ ellipticology that dispensed with the Eddierological attempt to provide any analysis of ellipticality.

Despite all of the strong inductive grounds for pessimism about analyses of ellipticality, however, something had gone deeply wrong in the Eddierological enterprise. The problem wasn’t that ellipticality was unanalyzable *or* that its proper analysis showed it to be arbitrary, *ad hoc* or uninteresting, but that ellipticologists had simply been applying the wrong tools. Ellipses aren’t made up out of triangles, rectangles, or even circles or parabolic arcs – though the latter have much in common with ellipses. They are simply maximal sets of points in the plane which share a summed distance from each of two fixed points. One of the proposed analyses came close to getting this right, but was dismissed for irrelevant reasons, as it applied inapt conditional tools in order to capture this concept. Insofar as it was right, it was not because ellipses have anything to do with string and pins, but because string and pins provide a useful practical approximation to finding the points based on their summed distance from the fixed points (represented by the pins). Moreover, the correct analysis of ellipticality plays a crucial role in explaining why Timonson’s observations were correct – for example, the ellipticality of the planetary orbits is explained by the analysis of ellipticality, together with the inverse square law of gravitation.

The point of this cautionary tale is simple: even when inductive pessimism about an analytical enterprise is clearly warranted, there remains a very legitimate question about the legitimate *scope* of that pessimism. If the tools utilized in the analytical project are crude or clumsy or simply of the wrong kind, or if promising ideas in the course of the project are prematurely further analyzed using crude tools – as in the ‘string and pins’ attempt to implement the correct analysis, in this story – then their failure is to be expected, even if a correct analysis is ultimately available. My own view is that something broadly like this has happened in the real-life field of epistemology: that the tools applied in early Gettierological attempts were crude, that promising ideas were sometimes dismissed because they prematurely attempted to analyze the parts of their picture in unpromising ways, and that a correct analysis of knowledge *is* available, which both sheds light on why various previous attempts to analyze knowledge were overly crude and required amendment, and why knowledge plays some of the important roles that it in fact does. I have tried to introduce such an analysis in this paper.

## **10 reasons for optimism – or at least less pessimism**

The analysis that I have presented may be wrong, but even that would not undermine the lesson of the parable and should not simply add to inductive pessimism about the project. One of the most important

features of the Gettier literature has been an endless series of counterexamples involving defeaters, defeated defeaters, and defeaters whose defeaters are defeated which have been evaded in the literature only by analyses that are so excessively complicated that they sound so *ad hoc* and arbitrary as to make knowledge uninteresting or by analyses which are so excessively vague that they amount to more platitude than explanation or theory.<sup>12</sup> It is natural to see these phenomena as motivating the view that knowledge cannot be analyzed – particularists in ethics have likewise been moved by a very similar set of data about defeating considerations for moral wrongness to conclude that no interesting and once-and-for-all generalizations at all are to be had about moral wrongness – much less any analyses.<sup>13</sup> But from the point of view of the theory of knowledge advocated in this paper, these complications arise not because the analysis of knowledge is itself complicated (and therefore arbitrary and *ad hoc*), but from the nature of reasons' weights.

Not all counterexamples from the Gettier literature tell us anything enlightening about knowledge, however; a major strand of counterexamples from the literature exhibit mistakes that epistemologists made in analyzing notions subsidiary to knowledge. Of these, one of the ones which gave epistemologists the most trouble, was understanding what it is for reasons or evidence to be *sufficient*. As Robert Shope documents in *The Analysis of Knowing* (cited approvingly by Williamson [2000] and Kvanvig [2003] as an authoritative picture of where the analysis of knowledge went wrong), theory after theory of knowledge fell prey to versions of the conditional fallacy not because they had a fundamentally wrong idea about the right way to proceed at the outset, in analyzing knowledge, but because they tried to analyze the sufficiency of reasons or evidence in terms of what the subject *would* be justified in believing, *were* she to believe on the basis of those reasons.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to appreciate that mistakes like this are not mistakes about knowledge *per se*, but mistakes in the analysis of the subsidiary concept of *sufficiency*. For all that these problems show, knowledge really *can* be analyzed in terms of the sufficiency of reasons (as I have claimed here); the analyzers have simply gone on to adopt bad theories about what sufficiency is. Much of the work of this paper, in fact, has consisted in making plausible and defensible proposals about how various features of the details of how knowledge works should be *delegated* – in particular, some to the theory of reasons' weight, and some to the

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<sup>12</sup> Examples of the former sort of view may include Lehrer [1974] and Swain [1981]; one example of the latter is Feldman [2003, 36-37]. For important versions of the allegation that analyses of knowledge are bound to succeed at avoiding counterexamples only by becoming transparently arbitrary and *ad hoc*, see especially Williamson [2000, 30-31] and Kvanvig [2003] chapter 5.

<sup>13</sup> Compare especially Dancy [2004], and see Schroeder [forthcoming b] for discussion.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly, many accounts in the traditional literature fallibly attempted to say what it is for something to be the reason *for which* an agent believes something – an account of the *basing* relation, in the usual terminology in epistemology. As with sufficiency, we shouldn't take the failure in analyzing a subsidiary notion like something being the reason for which an agent believes something to be a failure in analyzing knowledge in terms of the reasons for which an agent believes.

study of reasons to withhold. If I am right, then since these are things that we need a successful account of anyway, we should not be deterred from our theory of knowledge by the failure of premature attempts to account for either of these things.

One of the most natural lessons to draw from the persistence of conditional-fallacy-type problems in trying to understand sufficiency in terms of justification, is that this gets things the wrong way around: justification (like knowledge) needs to be understood in terms of sufficiency, rather than the other way around. That is the approach taken in this paper. Still, it *is* understandable why epistemologists have been so reluctant to appeal to sufficiency in order to explain justification, because it is genuinely hard to see what can informatively be said about the sufficiency of reasons for belief, if we restrict our attention only to reasons to believe  $p$  and reasons to believe  $\sim p$ , as has been so common in the epistemological literature. For it is a well-known fact that the reasons to believe  $p$  can in some cases be much better than the reasons to believe  $\sim p$  but still fail to be sufficient (because withholding belief is the only rational option given how closely the evidence is balanced), while in other situations the reasons to believe  $p$  can be considerably less better than the reasons to believe  $\sim p$ , but still be sufficient. This makes it look very difficult to see how the sufficiency of reasons could follow directly from their weights or how their weights balance, as I have claimed in this paper.

The key insight offered here is that things are different, once we remember that a third option, other than believing  $p$  and believing  $\sim p$ , is always available: *withholding*. If reasons are sufficient when they outweigh the reasons for each of the alternatives, and withholding is always an alternative both to believing  $p$  and to believing  $\sim p$ , then it is not enough to compare the reasons for believing  $p$  to the reasons for believing  $\sim p$  in order to determine their sufficiency – you must also compare them to the reasons to withhold. The main consequence of this idea is that it is reasons to withhold that we must study, in order to determine when reasons are sufficient, and I began to explore one way of thinking about this in section 5 – a task I’ve pursued in greater dept elsewhere (Schroeder [unpublished]).<sup>15</sup>

This progress in understanding what it is for reasons to be *sufficient* underscores the fruitful relationships to be had between epistemology and the study of practical reason. It is not methodologically crazy to expect the parallel notions of reasons, rationality, sufficiency, of doing or believing something *for* a reason, to bear important relationships to one another. I say this not as a moral philosopher with imperialistic ambitions, but as a philosopher who grew up on a diet of both epistemology and moral philosophy and impressed with these parallels. When a concept like that of a reason or rationality arises in

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<sup>15</sup> Contextualists like Keith DeRose [2009], who hold that *sufficiency* can be understood in a context-dependent manner, may still be able to take advantage of many of the other ideas in this paper.



multiple domains, it strikes me as extremely unpromising to tackle it in one domain alone and hope that one's results will generalize; a strategy that looks less prone to error would assume that the right account must apply across each domain, and take that as a constraint on accounts from the get-go. A second parallel that I have drawn on in this paper, which has benefited from taking this perspective, is the relationship between *objective* and *subjective* reasons – a parallel that I have argued for extensively elsewhere in both the practical and epistemic cases (Schroeder [2008]).

These, at any rate, are a few of my reasons for optimism – or at least, less pessimism – about the project of analyzing knowledge. I leave it for you, the reader, to decide if they are sufficient, and I take it that you know what I mean, in doing so. (Which is itself evidence for the naturalness and non-arbitrariness of the central concepts that I have been employing.)

In any case, whether I am right or not about the grounds for not giving up on the Gettierological project of analyzing knowledge, the virtues of the account developed in this paper are supposed to stand on their own: it is a natural concept which arises out of a simpler range of concepts of independently recognizable importance, which predicts and explains the wide range of defeater phenomena in a unified and non-*ad hoc* way, which at the option of some simple auxiliary assumptions can explain certain pragmatic intuitions about knowledge, which fits into a simple and elegant explanatory picture of basic perceptual justification and knowledge, and which predicts and explains why and how knowledge is both prime and its distinctive explanatory role. Knowledge, if this account is on the right track, is not strange or *ad hoc* or unanalyzable; it is an entirely natural concept, with a predictable and explicable role, and whose value can be readily recognized.<sup>16</sup>

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