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EPISTEMIC DEFLATIONISM

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ABSTRACT. It is argued that just as the deflationist programme in the theory of truth has been a fruitful research programme, so a similar deflationist programme should be instituted in the theory of knowledge. Three possible deflationist positions are developed and assessed in this regard—Crispin Sartwell’s view that knowledge is merely true belief, Richard Foley’s contention that knowledge is merely true belief plus other true beliefs, and the radical version of subject contextualism put forward by Michael Williams. It is argued that the key elements of the positions advocated by Foley and Williams can be combined in such a way as to form a plausible deflationist theory of knowledge.

0. INTRODUCTION

One of the dominant research programmes in the theory of truth is that of deflationism. Whilst this programme admits of a great deal of variation, it is essentially the view that truth is not nearly as philosophically significant—or, to use Crispin Wright’s (1992) phrase, “metaphysically heavyweight”—as many have hitherto supposed. The idea is thus that we should ‘deflate’ our conception of truth accordingly. At its most extreme, the claim is that the truth predicate is simply redundant, such that to assert that a certain proposition is true is to do no more than assert the proposition.¹ More modest forms of deflationism draw back from this extreme thesis but still allow that everything that is important about truth can be captured via a small set of platitudes. Paul Horwich (1990; 1998), for example, regards the equivalence schema “Necessarily, the proposition that p is true if and only if p ” as implicitly defining the concept of truth.² In contrast, Wright (1992, 1999) argues that the essential and basic features of truth are not exhausted by the equivalence schema and advocates a more comprehensive set of *a priori* platitudes, of which the equivalence schema is central. Nevertheless, he retains the deflationist aspiration to demystify truth.³

Whatever one might think of these deflationist accounts of truth, that they make an important contribution to the debate about truth ought to be uncontroversial. For even if false, what these theories achieve is to highlight the theoretical possibilities that are available in this regard. Moreover, the deflationist programme enables even opponents of the programme to identify the exact nature of the

motivation for adopting an inflated account of truth. This is because the advantage that such views hold is that they essentially incorporate a dialectical edge over their non-deflationist opponents right from the start. After all, it does seem to be a matter of common sense that, all other things being equal, one should prefer a theoretically weaker theory over any more robust counterpart. Accordingly, deflationists are able to shift a significant burden of proof onto the shoulders of their opponents, and this has been a powerful stimulus to the debate about truth, forcing proponents of non-deflationist views to produce arguments for their positions that extend beyond mere appeals to philosophical tradition.

The aim of this paper is to look at what a parallel deflationist programme might be in the theory of knowledge, and examine its prospects.⁴ In what follows I will simplify matters slightly by focussing on *empirical* knowledge rather than knowledge in general, though most of what I have to say ought to be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to knowledge in general.⁵ Moreover, note that it is not my aim to offer a full defence of a particular deflationist theory of knowledge, which would go well beyond the scope of this paper, but only to defend the utility of taking the deflationist programme as regards the theory of knowledge seriously by showing that there is a plausible deflationist position available that is worthy of further scrutiny. The structure of the paper is as follows. In §1, I identify what I take to be the most radical deflationist thesis available in this respect—the view that knowledge is merely true belief—and look into the arguments that have been offered, most notably by Crispin Sartwell (1991; 1992), in its favour. Whilst I do not ultimately find such a thesis to be viable, I nevertheless contend, in §2, that there is a plausible ‘sister’ view available here, developed by Richard Foley (2003), which treats knowledge as the possession of a true belief plus a (variable) set of further true beliefs. In §3 I argue that Foley’s view is best understood along ‘subject contextualist’ lines and, in §4, I contend that so understood his position shares some common ground with the radical subject contextualism advocated by Michael Williams (1991). I go on to outline how one can combine these two views to gain a plausible deflationary theory of knowledge. Finally, in §5, I offer some concluding remarks.

1. SARTWELL’S RADICAL EPISTEMIC DEFLATIONISM

At first pass, one might think that the most radical deflationist theory of knowledge available is one that denies that there is anything that ties all instances of knowledge together other than the fact that they are instances of knowledge. One might take Williams to be proposing just such a view in the following passage:

A deflationary account of “know” may show how the word is embedded in a teachable and useful linguistic practice, without supposing that “being known to be true” denotes a property that groups propositions into a theoretically significant kind. We can have an account of the use and utility of “know” without supposing that there is such a thing as human knowledge. (Williams 1991, 113)

That there are no necessary conditions for knowledge is not a plausible thesis, however. Although the debate over what epistemic conditions are applicable to the formulation of a theory of knowledge has never achieved consensus, there is little controversy over the claim that at the very least knowledge entails truth and (at least some type of) belief. Indeed, there is nothing in Williams’ work to suggest that he would reject this claim. Instead, the focus for his epistemic deflationism is on whether there is a specifiable (and “theoretically significant”) epistemic condition in addition to the belief and truth conditions that unites all instances of knowledge. We will return to consider Williams’ position in this respect further below. First, however, it is worthwhile pausing for a moment to consider the status of the truth and belief conditions on knowledge.

Take the former claim—that knowledge is factive—first. This is the contention that it is a necessary condition of an agent’s knowledge of a proposition that this proposition be true. It is difficult to see what possible counterexample there might be to this thesis. We might *think* that we know all sorts of propositions which, it turns out, are false, but *bona fide* knowledge is always knowledge of a true proposition. No doubt there will be some who will be uncomfortable with the use of the term “proposition” here, but we can side-step the issue about the status of propositions since those who object to this notion can simply replace their favoured alternative into their formulation of the factivity condition on knowledge. There thus seems little mileage in the idea that knowledge does not demand truth, and indeed no-one (so far as I am aware at least) has ever seriously maintained such a thesis.

The latter claim that knowledge entails belief is a little more contentious, though still fairly secure. This is the thesis that it is a necessary condition of an agent’s knowledge of a proposition that the agent believes the proposition in question. It is far from clear how one could know a proposition that one did not even believe. Indeed, lack of belief is sometimes explicitly treated as a defeater for knowledge possession, as in court cases where testimony is undermined by showing that the witness had previously behaved in ways which suggested that she did not even believe a certain proposition, and so could not, therefore, have known that proposition. Suppose, for example, that the witness claimed to know that the defendant was at home at the time of the murder (which he was), and yet phone records show that during this time the witness tried to contact the defendant at a different location. Here the concern need not just be that the testimony is false (though it would certainly look as if it might be), but also that even if the witness is in fact (to the best of her knowledge at any rate) being truthful, she could not plausibly be thought to have known the truth that she speaks of because

her actions indicate that she did not even believe this proposition to be true in the first place.⁶ Further considerations can be marshalled in defence of this platitude, such as that it identifies the sense in which knowledge concerns a relationship between a psychological state and the world, and thus that belief is essential to capturing the former element of the relation.⁷

The chief problem facing this doxastic condition on knowledge, however, does not come from worries about whether or not something like belief is essential to knowledge, but rather from those who would dispute the particular type of psychological state that is at issue here.⁸ For example, if one had a very robust understanding of belief that demanded some high degree of psychological sophistication on the part of the subject including, say, at least counterfactual assent to the relevant proposition, then this would clearly be controversial. For one thing, the doxastic condition would then seem to rule out *a priori* certain forms of epistemological externalism which allow that small children (and perhaps even animals) can have knowledge. Alternatively, one might worry that the standards set for belief possession are too low in that they demand no such psychological sophistication on the part of the subject and thereby (at least potentially) unduly extend the class of knowers. And, as one might expect, these possibilities are not mutually exclusive, since within these two extremes one would expect to find a whole spectrum of intermediate views (in an illuminating paper, Leslie Stevenson (2002) distinguishes no less than *six* distinct concepts of belief that have been offered in the literature).⁹ For our purposes, however, we can take the notion of belief as an undefined primitive (though we will have cause to say what it must at least involve in a moment), since what is uncontentious is that there is some such condition on knowledge.

The standard picture of knowledge does not rest content with these factivity and doxastic conditions on knowledge, however, and goes further to specify an extra epistemic condition or set of conditions that is able to transform true belief into knowledge.¹⁰ It is in opposition to this orthodoxy that we see the possibility of an interesting epistemically deflationist thesis emerging. If it could be established there was no need for a further epistemic condition on knowledge, then this really would be news. In particular, such a thesis would display the key deflationist *leitmotif* of offering a demystification of a philosophical concept by showing that, properly understood, knowledge succumbs to a simpler ‘decomposition’ than was previously thought. Moreover, if there was no epistemic condition on knowledge this would have the effect of deflating the very epistemological project itself which has tended (at least in more recent post-Gettier times) to almost exclusively concern itself with finding the correct formulation of the elusive extra epistemic condition.

One commentator who has been willing to commit himself, without qualification, to this radical deflationary thesis about knowledge is Sartwell (1991; 1992) who has straightforwardly argued that knowledge is just true belief. The main thrust of Sartwell’s presentation of his iconoclastic thesis

is his contention that the standard reasons put forward in the literature for thinking that there must be an epistemic condition on knowledge are, on closer inspection, inadequate. In particular, he notes (Sartwell 1991, 157-9) that the usual examples that are offered to show that knowledge cannot just be true belief do not uncontroversially achieve their aim because it is far from clear in such cases that the agent even believes the proposition in question, and Sartwell does not dispute that belief is a necessary condition for knowledge.

For example, take the case of a lucky guess that just happens to be true, such as when an agent correctly guesses which horse will win the next race (on the basis of a ‘hunch’ say), and bets accordingly. Clearly, the agent in this example does not know the proposition in question, and one might be inclined to argue that it was the agent’s lack of justification for her belief that was the problem. Crucially, however, such an example will not suffice to motivate an epistemic condition on knowledge for the simple reason that on most standard accounts of belief a lucky guess (even one that is acted upon, as in this case), is not an instance of belief.

Sartwell further argues that similar problems will infect more carefully formulated examples of true belief that, putatively, are not thereby instances of knowledge. He offers the following example:

While I am asleep, I am anaesthetised and whisked away to an operating room, where a mad scientist performs a surgical procedure on my brain. I am returned to my bed, and I awake to find myself disposed to assent to the utterance “Goldbach’s conjecture is true.” Goldbach’s conjecture is that any even number greater than two is the sum of two primes. [...] Let us suppose that Goldbach’s conjecture *is* in fact true, but that no one has demonstrated it to be true. (Sartwell 1991, 158)

Again, this supposed counterexample to the thesis that knowledge is true belief raises an issue about the notion of belief involved. As Sartwell notes, unless we are willing to ascribe various other true beliefs (and, indeed, further knowledge) to the agent, then the supposition that the agent believes what he assents to ceases to be plausible. He writes:

[...] no belief stands in isolation; I cannot have the belief that Goldbach’s conjecture is true and fail to have any related beliefs. The belief is constituted as a belief within a system of beliefs. In fact, the belief that Goldbach’s conjecture is true depends not only on beliefs, but on knowledge. I must know some things about numbers, and I must know what Goldbach’s conjecture is, in order to believe it. (Sartwell 1991, 158)

The problem is that once one starts to add more description to the example in order to make the attribution of belief plausible—such as ascribing some true mathematical beliefs and even mathematical knowledge to the agent concerned—then the intuition that the agent lacks knowledge in this case weakens accordingly.

A further issue that Sartwell raises is that facts about our linguistic practices which seem to count against a true belief model of knowledge are also inconclusive. He notes in this respect our practice of treating agents who are unable to offer grounds in support of their claims to know as

lacking knowledge (Sartwell 1991, 159). This fact alone merely shows, however, that one can only legitimately claim knowledge when one can offer reasons in support of that knowledge; it does not further show that one cannot possess knowledge without supporting reasons.¹¹ This contention gains some corroboration from the fact that there clearly are cases in which one is unable to offer supporting grounds in favour of one's knowledge and yet intuition dictates that one does know the proposition in question (such as in cases in which one simply cannot remember what reasons support the item of knowledge at issue). In any case, Sartwell also notes that it is equally true of a claim to believe a proposition that there is a convention that, unusual cases aside, one ought to be in a position to offer some account of why one believes what one does. Significantly, however, it is not thought to be a necessary condition of belief possession that one is able to offer such an account.

Finally, Sartwell argues that his theory of knowledge can also accommodate certain key intuitions that we have about the centrality of justification to epistemology (Sartwell 1991, 161-3; cf. Sartwell 1992). He contends that denying the necessity of a justification condition for knowledge possession is consistent with justification being an important *criterion* of knowledge, where he defines a criterion as "a test that we apply if we are in doubt as to whether the item has that property or not" (Sartwell 1991, 161). On this view, what is wrong with coming to believe true propositions on the basis of inadequate grounds is not that such true beliefs cannot be cases of knowledge, but that they are not cases of justified true belief where justification is a criterion for determining knowledge. Sartwell supports this contention by arguing that the cases in which one presses for a justification in response to a claim to know are situations in which either the truth of the proposition claimed is controversial or where it is controversial that the agent is in a position to know. So if I claim that I know that Goldbach's conjecture is true, the request for justification could either reflect the contentious nature of the proposition in question or the peculiarity that *I* take myself to know it given that, by hypothesis, I have no related specialist knowledge in this regard (indeed, in this case we would expect the claim to know to be contentious on both counts). Either way, however, the request for justification is plausibly understood in terms of a request for reasons for believing that the proposition is true. And by the lights of Sartwell's account of knowledge, this will be tantamount to a request for believing that the proposition in question is known. Sartwell thus maintains that he can explain our linguistic practices in this respect without proposing an inflated view of knowledge. By his lights

[...] the request for justification operates as a pragmatic rather than as a conceptual restraint. That is, justification is a practice that has as its goal to show that the conceptual conditions of knowledge are met. (Sartwell 1991, 162).

Similarly, Sartwell contends that it follows from his treatment of justification as a criterion of knowledge that we can account for our criticisms of agents who form beliefs in ways that are

unjustified (Sartwell 1991, 162-3). The reason for this is that beliefs formed in this way are suspect since beliefs formed in the absence of grounds are unreliable indicators of the truth. Accordingly, if such an agent were to claim knowledge of a proposition the truth of which was contentious, then the default position ought to be that we should pay her no heed. More generally, requests for justification in response to a claim to know will reflect our interest in evaluating the overall rationality of the agent as a means to determining whether she is (and is likely to remain) a reliable informant.¹²

Sartwell thus claims to have demonstrated that not only are the reasons offered in favour of the thesis that knowledge is more than true belief unsound, but that there are no good reasons for *not* believing that knowledge is merely true belief. His view thus represents one radical way of understanding the project of epistemic deflationism.

Whilst there is much to commend in Sartwell's critique of the thesis that knowledge is not just true belief, it nevertheless remains that the considerations that he offers do not suffice to establish the plausibility of the radically deflationist view that he defends, even when one bears in mind that in the face of an *impasse* the burden of proof is on the non-deflationist's side in this regard. More precisely, what Sartwell has clearly shown with his critique is that the arguments (if they can be called that) that are standardly offered in favour of the view that knowledge is more than just true belief are inadequate. What he has not demonstrated, however, is the more substantial claim that knowledge is merely true belief.

In order to see this, all one needs to do is to formulate one's counterexamples to the thesis that knowledge is merely true belief with Sartwell's objections in mind. Thus, we do not take an example of a belief in a lucky guess or a belief in an abstract proposition concerned with a subject matter of which the agent knows nothing, but rather a more mundane case of belief that lacks evidential support. Consider the following example. John is an extremely trusting fellow, so trusting in fact that he will believe just about anything that anyone tells him.¹³ John is told, as a joke, that the moon is made of cheese, and as a result he believes that the moon is made of cheese. Let us stipulate that the notion of belief in play here is robust enough to meet the qualms raised by Sartwell. Not only does John assent to the utterance "The moon is made of cheese", but he also acts on this belief in other ways (e.g., by telling others about what he thinks the moon is made of), and has the necessary true beliefs that are needed if this belief is to be *bona fide* (e.g., he knows what the moon is and what cheese is and what it would mean for the moon to be made of cheese). Finally, suppose that it turns out that a new space mission to the moon discovers that it is made of a particularly hard cheese after all, and thus that John's belief is in fact true. On Sartwell's view, John has a genuine belief and this belief is true and thus he must be credited with knowledge. By anyone's lights, however, such an attribution of knowledge would be highly counterintuitive.

Since we have set-up the example so that it is a genuine case of belief, Sartwell cannot respond to the example by adducing considerations relating to the notion of belief. Moreover, although there clearly are cases where we might be inclined to ascribe knowledge to an agent even whilst granting that the agent could not properly claim that knowledge, this does not seem to be one of these cases at all. It is not just that John is not in a position to claim to know that the moon is made of cheese, we would not even ascribe that knowledge to him in the first place.

When Sartwell formulates possible counterexamples to his thesis that knowledge is merely true belief, he does so by looking for examples in which the agent has *no* reason to believe what she does. With the examples so construed, the natural focus of attention becomes the supposition that the agent really does have the belief in question, since beliefs are not normally thought of as formed in isolation in the way that the formulation of these examples suggests. The more interesting counterexamples to Sartwell's thesis do not come from this quarter, however, but are represented by scenarios such as that just described where the agent *does* have reasons for believing what she does, it is just that they are manifestly awful ones (we will consider some more examples of this sort in a moment). Here we do not get the concern over whether the belief is genuine, but we do get the tension that results from supposing that mere true belief in such cases suffices for knowledge.¹⁴ Sartwell's radical epistemological deflationism is thus not in the running to be considered a plausible epistemically deflationary thesis.

2. FOLEY'S EPISTEMIC DEFLATIONISM

Whilst the radical epistemic deflationism represented by Sartwell's view is a non-starter, it does contain within it the germ of a related view which could also qualify as similarly deflationist. Sartwell's key idea was that in order to be credited with a belief in the first place, one needs to be credited with further true beliefs and knowledge, and that once this further attribution is made clear it is no longer so implausible to suppose that knowledge is just true belief. As we saw, even bringing these further belief ascriptions to light will not suffice to rescue Sartwell's view. Nevertheless, the natural thought that emerges at this juncture is that maybe all that differentiates knowledge from true belief is just more true beliefs, where these further true beliefs are not (at least ordinarily¹⁵) simply those true beliefs that are needed in order to be credited with the original belief in the target proposition. Just such a thought has been explored by Foley (2003).¹⁶ Such a view is still a deflationary conception of knowledge in that it removes the need for an extra type of condition for knowledge over and above those conditions relating to truth and belief. Moreover, as with Sartwell's

thesis, if true it would have a radical impact on contemporary epistemology which is largely concerned with finding a general epistemic condition on knowledge.

Foley is clearly aware of the radical nature of this proposal. He argues that the wealth of epistemological theories currently available in the literature all

[...] share a mistaken assumption. They all assume that what needs to be added to true belief in order to get knowledge is something related to truth but distinct from it—nondefective justification, indefeasible justification, reliability, proper functioning, or whatever. My suggestion, by contrast, is that having knowledge is essentially a matter of having sufficiently accurate and comprehensive beliefs. So what must be added to a true belief P in order to get knowledge? The answer is more true beliefs [...] (Foley 2003, 3)

Of course, not just *any* extra true beliefs will suffice to transform true belief into knowledge—rather, they must be a specific class of true beliefs. Foley therefore adds the following refinement to his view:

For a subject S to know a proposition P, there must not be important, relevant truths in the neighbourhood of P of which S is unaware. *A fortiori*, there must not be important, relevant truths that S positively disbelieves. (Foley 2003, 3-4)

In support of his position, Foley (2003, 1-2) runs through three Gettier-esque examples of true belief that is not thereby knowledge to show how the account would function. Note that these examples do not just lend support to Foley's position in comparison to its non-deflationary alternative positions, but by being cases of true belief that are not also knowledge they further count against the competing deflationary thesis proposed by Sartwell.

First, there is the example of Joan who always leaves her laptop on the corner of the desk in her office, and so believes, when she's out of the office, that the laptop is on the corner of a desk. As it happens, it *is* on the corner of a desk, but not *Joan's* desk because it has recently been stolen and moved elsewhere. Second, there is the case of Mary, who goes to sleep on Tuesday evening unaware that she has been given a sleeping potion which causes her to sleep for thirty-two hours rather than the usual eight. When she awakes she forms the true belief that it is about 7am. Unbeknownst to her, it *is* about 7am, but about 7am on *Thursday* morning rather than about 7am on Wednesday morning. Finally, there is the case of Jim who has bought a lottery ticket in a free and fair lottery with long odds. The winning ticket has not yet been chosen, but Jim believes, truly as it will turn out, that his ticket is not the winning ticket.

In all three cases, we have an example of true belief which is not also an instance of knowledge. Moreover, notice that there these examples give us no cause to be suspicious about whether or not the agent genuinely does have the belief in question (in no case is the belief formed "in isolation"), and so Sartwell's commentary in this regard is not relevant here. In response to these examples, Foley argues that rather than looking for an extra epistemic condition over and above true belief in order to explain why these are not cases of knowledge, we should instead simply look to the

relevant false beliefs that the agents hold. He does not run through the examples in turn, merely noting that in each case the agent lacks knowledge because

[...] these examples have been construed in such a way as to provide us, the onlookers, with information that Joan, Mary and John lack. Moreover, they have been constructed in such a way as to convince us that this information is significant. (Foley 2003, 4)

Presumably, then, Joan lacks knowledge because she lacks information (and thus true beliefs) about the fact that the burglar has moved the laptop, Mary lacks knowledge because she lacks information about the sleeping potion that she has been given, and Jim lacks knowledge because he lacks information about what the numbers are on the winning ticket. Foley concludes that

[T]he same treatment can be given of all the other examples in the vast post-Gettier literature that describe a subject who has a true belief P but intuitively lacks knowledge. Gettier examples are in effect little stories that make use of the common literary device of a narrator who provides the reader with information that the characters in the story lack. In Gettier cases, the narrator tells the story in such a way as to make the reader aware of an important feature of the situation about which the subject himself lacks true beliefs, thereby hoping to persuade the reader that the subject lacks knowledge. (Foley 2003, 4)

Foley clearly regards the issue of which further true beliefs are necessary for knowledge to be a context-dependent matter, in the sense that in different contexts different true beliefs might be required of the agent before we attribute knowledge. We will consider what, specifically, Foley might have in mind in this regard in a moment. For now the key point is that Foley holds that knowledge is merely true belief plus (at least typically) further true beliefs. With Sartwell's commentary in mind, we might also add (though Foley himself does not), that this further set of true beliefs extends beyond that set of true beliefs that is necessary for the original belief attribution.

If Foley's view is to be a genuine competitor theory to an inflated conception of knowledge which incorporated an epistemic condition, then it is necessary that Foley is able to support the contention that there is no general epistemic rubric which would enable us to generate the true beliefs that are necessary in each case for knowledge. For example, if it turned out that the set of true beliefs needed in each case was simply those true beliefs that enabled the agent to have reliable beliefs about the proposition in question, then the view would simply be tantamount to a reliabilist epistemology and reliabilism *does* incorporate an epistemic condition on knowledge. Moreover, given the obvious explanatory gain of being able to adduce the general condition, not even the dialectical advantage of being a deflationary thesis would suffice to rescue the view. Foley thus needs to argue that his thesis will not collapse into an inflationary view in this way.¹⁷

The way that Foley supports his position in this respect is to consider the case of an agent, Sally, who has maximally accurate and comprehensive beliefs, and who forms a belief about a certain proposition P.¹⁸ Intuitively, if any agent has knowledge of P then it is Sally since no-one could be in a

better epistemic position in this regard. Foley argues, however, that for any epistemological theory that incorporates an epistemic condition there will be a Sally who has maximally accurate and comprehensive beliefs about P and yet fails to know that proposition. Accordingly, *contra* these inflationary epistemological theories, one cannot capture what is in general demanded by a knowledge ascription in terms of an epistemic condition, but only in terms of the additional true beliefs that are needed to turn the agent's true belief in the target proposition into knowledge.

We will examine Foley's argument for this claim in a moment. First, it is worthwhile considering a *prima facie* objection that one might raise against Foley's claim that no-one could be in a better epistemic position than Sally. This is that even despite the fact that Sally's beliefs are maximally accurate and comprehensive, it could still be the case that her belief that P was formed in an epistemically inappropriate manner—e.g., via an unreliable method, such as a Ouija board. If this is so, the objection runs, then we can conceive of someone who is in a better epistemic position as regards P than Sally, namely Sally* who has a maximally accurate and comprehensive set of beliefs and who also forms her belief that P in the right kind of way.¹⁹ This objection does not go through, however, for the simple reason that in the scenario just described there *is* a relevant and important truth that Sally is unaware of—*viz.*, that she is forming her belief that P via an unreliable method—and thus her beliefs are not maximally accurate and comprehensive after all. Indeed, note that were Sally to be made aware of the fact that she is forming her belief that P in an unreliable fashion, then she would, all other things being equal, cease to believe this proposition.²⁰

This is not to suggest that Foley's claim about the epistemic ascendancy of Sally's belief about P will be immune to all objections of this sort, only that the most natural objections that arise to this claim do not go through. With this in mind, we will return to Foley's further contention that the example of Sally highlights just where inflationary theories of knowledge go awry.

Foley begins by noting that some have argued that one can only know a proposition if one's belief has the appropriate "ancestry", where this is defined in one of three ways: (i) in terms of the reliability of the processes involved; or (ii) causally, such that it demands that the belief must have been caused in an appropriate way by the very facts that make it true; or (iii) in terms of the proper functioning of the cognitive faculties of the agent.²¹ *Contra* these theories, however, Foley argues that

[...] there is nothing inconsistent in supposing that Sally's maximally accurate and comprehensive beliefs about P are neither caused by facts that make P true nor are the products of reliable processes nor are the products of properly functioning cognitive faculties. Her beliefs may instead be the result of some mix of strange processes and unlikely events, which against the odds have generated completely accurate beliefs about P. Whatever these strange processes and unlikely events may be, Sally, by hypothesis, is fully aware of them. In other words, not only does she have complete and correct beliefs about P, she also has complete and correct beliefs about how it is that through a series of improbable events she came to have these complete and correct beliefs. In particular, she understands how it is that in her specific situation, she has

come to have these true beliefs despite it being the case that they are not the products of facts that make P true, nor the products of processes that are in general reliable, nor the products of cognitive faculties functioning the way they were designed to function.

Ancestral accounts imply that it is inappropriate to say that Sally knows P or, for that matter, much of anything else either. [...] But this is implausible. Sally knows far more about these matters than do the rest of us. (Foley 2003, 16)

That is, it is entirely possible that one might gain knowledge of a proposition through an unconventional route, and Foley's point is that provided that the agent has all the relevant information in such cases then the oddity of the belief's ancestry should not deprive it of the status of knowledge. As he puts it:

The point of the example [...] is that there is not a single, privileged kind of causal history that her [*Sally's*] beliefs need to have in order to count as knowledge. By hypothesis, Sally is aware that the facts that make P true were not involved in any significant way in her coming to believe P; she is likewise aware that the processes that produced her beliefs about P are in general not especially reliable; and she is aware that in coming to have these beliefs about P her cognitive faculties were not functioning in ways they were designed to function. Nevertheless, she is aware of the precise causal history of her beliefs, and she has a complete and perfect understanding of how it is that this specific history led her to having maximally accurate beliefs, albeit in a peculiar and improbable fashion. (Foley 2003, 16-7)

Foley further argues that a similar point can be raised against the kind of 'tracking' accounts associated with the work of Robert Nozick (1981) since one can consistently suppose that Sally's beliefs are maximally accurate and comprehensive and yet fail to track the truth in close counterfactual situations (Foley 2003, 17). Indeed, by hypothesis, Sally will be aware that she would not track the truth in these close counterfactual situations and will know why this is the case. She would thus be aware of the fragility of her knowledge, but this seems perfectly consistent with that knowledge being genuine nonetheless.

The same will apply to those epistemological theories that primarily focus on justification rather than knowledge. Foley notes, for example, that

[...] an explanatory coherence account of epistemic justification that emphasises intellectual virtues such as simplicity and conservatism to distinguish among equally coherent but competing explanations of the observational data [...]

will face the problem that

[7]here are no assurances that Sally's beliefs are organised in such a way that they meet these conditions. A set of beliefs which is maximally accurate and comprehensive is not necessarily the simplest or most conservative set of beliefs capable of explaining the observational data. (Foley 2003, 19)

So any theory of knowledge in terms of coherent true beliefs will face the same kind of problem as that facing ancestral and tracking accounts of knowledge. Similarly,

[...] foundationalist theories of epistemic justification, which imply that a belief is epistemically justified

only if it is self-justifying or can be adequately defended by appeal to one's self-justified beliefs [...]

will face the problem that

[...] there are no assurances that Sally's beliefs meet these conditions. (Foley 2003, 19)

So again, a theory of knowledge in terms of true belief that meets the relevant foundationalist rubric will also succumb to the same kind of critique.

Foley's view thus enjoys a distinct theoretical advantage over its main inflationary competitor theories, since not only can it accommodate our intuition that Sally has knowledge in these cases, but it does so without having to adduce an extra epistemic condition on knowledge. And since these views are fairly representative of the main positions available in the literature, this is a good indication that Foley's view will enjoy this advantage over all extant inflationary theories of knowledge.

3. SUBJECT *VERSUS* ATTRIBUTER CONTEXTUALISM

Although he does not explore this point himself, Foley's view should also have an advantage over its rival inflationary theories by being able to accommodate our intuitions that agents do not have knowledge in cases in which, according to the rival theory under consideration, they do. For example, one problem that has been posed for reliabilist accounts of knowledge is the possibility of agents with entirely reliable beliefs about a certain subject matter but who lack the kind of reflectively accessible grounds that would support belief in that reliability in such a way that it seems inappropriate to ascribe knowledge to them. The famous example of the reliable clairvoyant offered by Laurence Bonjour (1985, 41) is a case in point. Foley's view would seem to be able to accommodate such examples by showing how the agent was lacking true beliefs that were necessary for knowledge in that context (such as true beliefs about the past reliability of her clairvoyancy skills). Indeed, the contextual nature of the approach might also be able to accommodate competing intuitions in this regard, in that it may be able to show how there are ways of understanding the story such that *different* true beliefs are relevant to knowledge, and which can thus allow that the agent *does* have knowledge.

Any development of this line of thought faces an immediate problem, however, in that it first needs to clarify what is meant by 'context' in this account, and Foley is not altogether clear on this point. We did not need to confront this problem above since the example of Sally is defined in such a way that contextual factors are all but irrelevant since there are no gaps in her set of true beliefs that a shift of emphasis can exploit. When it comes to cases where the agent's set of true beliefs is, in the relevant respect, sub-optimal, however, then the issue of context does come into play, and here we

need to get a grip on what Foley has in mind in this regard.

At the very least, the implication of Foley's contextualism is that we need to take features of the subject's context into consideration when evaluating that subject's knowledge, such that facts about her environment or about the epistemic standards in operation are relevant to whether or not she has knowledge whether she is aware of these facts herself or not. In places, however, Foley seems tempted to say something much stronger than this, which is that it is not just features of the *agent's* context that are relevant to the ascription of knowledge, but also features of the context of the one who is making the ascription—the *ascriber's* context. For example, in one of the quotations cited above, Foley employs the metaphor of the “narrator” in such a way as to imply that one can tell the same story in different ways so as to emphasise certain features of that story. And as the emphasis changes, so too does the correct epistemic evaluation that is applicable to the agent concerned. This way of putting matters appears to suggest that as far as Foley is concerned it could simultaneously be the case that in terms of one context of ascription in which certain features of the agent's context weren't emphasised it would be appropriate to ascribe knowledge, and yet in terms of another context of ascription where the emphasis is different (but where nothing else has changed) it would *not* be appropriate to ascribe knowledge.

For example, Foley talks of the context-dependence of the set of beliefs demanded for knowledge in terms of “narrow” and “broad” contexts of knowledge:

The way to narrow the context [...] is to arrange the details of the story so as to emphasise the importance of whether S is aware of specific information about P itself, thereby drawing attention away from the other particulars of the situation. S knows P if (i) S's belief P is true, and (ii) there is no significant, relevant lacuna in S's information about P and related matters, but in narrow contexts this second condition is more easily fulfilled because what primarily matters is whether S's belief is true. (Foley 2003, 5)

According to Foley, the limiting case of a narrow context is one where true belief alone will suffice for knowledge. He writes:

Andrew and Jane are bitter enemies and avoid each other whenever possible. You and I know this, and we each know that the other knows. We are at a party. Jane walks by, the two of us say hello to her, and after a brief conversation she leaves the room. A few minutes later, Andrew enters the room, says hello to us, and then moves on. I am surprised to see Andrew at the same party as Jane. So I ask you, “Does Andrew know that Jane is here?” You answer, “Yes, he knows.”

In this context, true belief is enough to ascribe knowledge. Andrew knows that Jane is at the party, you are telling me, because (1) he believes that she is at the party, and because (2) his belief is true, as you and I are both aware. Questions about how Andrew came to his belief (Did he see her? Did someone tell him about her being there?) and questions about his related beliefs (Does he believe that the party is so big that he won't run into her? Does he believe that she is aware of his being at the party?) are beside the point. (Foley 2003, 6)

Presumably, then, the claim is that the agent in this case has enough true beliefs to make the ascription of the belief plausible, but need have no further true beliefs in order to be attributed knowledge in this

context. Sartwell's contention that knowledge is mere true belief is thus transformed on this view into the claim that *sometimes* knowledge can just be true belief, and it is *always* no more than just true belief coupled with further true beliefs.²²

Notice how Foley puts the point, however. What is clearly being implied by this presentation of the example is that from a different context of ascription in which other features of the situation are being emphasised, the very same ascription of knowledge to Andrew would be inappropriate. Interestingly, however, when Foley describes a 'broadening' of this context he does so not by simply altering the focus of the ones who are assessing the agent's knowledge, but by actually changing the details of the situation:

[...] one can also arrange the details of a story so as to emphasise the importance of information in the neighbourhood of P, thereby broadening the context and eliciting different intuitions. Suppose you and I have talked with Jane and have then seen her leave the room, but I have just noticed across the room a woman who bears a striking resemblance to her. Andrew arrives at the party, comes up to us, catches a glimpse of the other women, and then exclaims, "Oh no, Jane is here," and quickly leaves the party. You have not yet noticed the Jane look-alike, and as Andrew departs you inquire, "How did he know Jane is here?" I respond, pointing out the Jane look-alike, "He didn't. He mistook the woman over there for Jane." (Foley 2003, 8)

This is not the same story told with a different emphasis, but rather a *different* story since certain salient facts have now changed. We now have a look-alike on the scene, and have Andrew being misled by the look-alike. This is significant because to say that different situations can elicit different ascriptions of knowledge because they demand a different range of true beliefs on the part of the agent is very different from allowing, as Foley seems to want to allow in places, that relative to the very same situation different (and apparently conflicting) ascriptions of knowledge can be appropriate. The former view is often called *subject contextualism*, since it places the focus on variable features of the agent's context, whether that agent is aware of these features or not, whilst the latter more radical view is known as *attributer contextualism* since it further demands that the context of the one who is making the ascription of knowledge is also relevant.²³ Foley's talk of contexts thus seems to equivocate between a subject and an attributer version of contextualism.

Of the two views, subject contextualism is clearly the weaker thesis since attributer contextualism is most naturally understood as the view that it is not *just* the subject's context that counts, but also the attributer's context.²⁴ Accordingly, subject contextualism is also the less contentious of the two views. Since our concern here is with deflationism, and since his explicit statements on the issue (as opposed to what is implied by what he says) point in this direction, I will take it that the form of contextualism that Foley wishes to endorse is of the less radical subject variety. Indeed, since both Foley's and (as we will see in a moment) Williams' deflationary epistemological theories are, properly understood, versions of subject contextualism, then this, combined with the fact

that subject contextualism constitutes the weaker thesis, presents us with *prima facie* grounds for preferring a construal of the deflationary approach that is configured along subject rather than attributer contextualist lines.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this is entirely consistent with the idea that perhaps there is an epistemologically deflationary theory available which incorporates an attributer contextualist thesis. Moreover, one also needs to remember that such *prima facie* grounds are extremely weak given that we have not taken into account the relative merits of these two sorts of contextualist thesis in dealing with the relevant epistemological data.²⁵ Accordingly, if attributer contextualism were able to offer a better account of this data, then this would suffice to make this construal of the deflationary view preferable over its subject contextualist rival. So whilst in what follows we will focus on subject contextualist renderings of the deflationist proposal, one should keep in mind that the issue of whether a deflationary epistemology is, *ipso facto*, a specifically *subject* contextualist epistemology is far from settled by the considerations that we have advanced here.²⁶

4. WILLIAMS' CONTEXTUALIST EPISTEMIC DEFLATIONISM

It is not an incidental feature of Foley's deflationism that it is allied to a contextualist epistemology because all deflationary epistemologies will be contextualist epistemologies. Clearly the reverse is not the case, since one can have a position which advocates an extra epistemic condition and yet demands that the application of that condition is contextually determined. For example, DeRose's (1995) version of attributer contextualism involves a general epistemic rubric that determines what is required of the agent in each context if she is to be correctly ascribed knowledge. Similarly, one could advocate a form of reliabilism that was understood along subject contextualist lines such that reliability was a necessary component of knowledge with the proviso that what is demanded by this reliability condition varies from context to context. Nevertheless, if one wishes to maintain Foley's position that there is no general epistemic rubric that determines what transforms true belief into knowledge, then given that the set of further true beliefs needed for knowledge varies from case to case, it will be necessary to adduce a contextualist thesis to explain this variability, albeit one that is not understood along inflationary lines.

Foley leaves this aspect of his position underdeveloped, however, and this means that if we want further detail on this point then we will need to look elsewhere. Accordingly, in this section I will argue that one way of developing Foley's position is to understand it along the kind of subject contextualist lines advocated by Williams (1991), though with a few qualifications added to the thesis

that Williams describes. As we saw above, Williams explicitly conceives of his view in epistemically deflationary terms, and his position does seem to offer the best presentation in the literature of how an epistemically deflationary version of subject contextualism might run.

Williams' primarily defines his version of subject contextualism in terms of the thesis that the epistemic status of a proposition is entirely dependent upon contextual factors. He writes:

[...] the epistemic status of a given proposition is liable to shift with situational, disciplinary and other contextually variable factors: [...] independently of such influences, a proposition has no epistemic status whatsoever. (Williams 1991, 119)

For example, classical foundationalism consists of the view that propositions can be divided into two distinct categories—those that are knowable directly on the basis of immediate experience, and those that are knowable indirectly by inference from propositions which are knowable directly (such as beliefs about the external world). This division is meant to cut across contexts in the sense that it holds in all contexts. It is this kind of picture of the epistemic architecture that Williams rejects, contending that in different contexts the order of inference could be entirely the other way around. For example, in terms of a psychological investigation into the nature of perception, it might be legitimate to employ beliefs about the external world in order to infer further beliefs about the subject's immediate experience (even our *own* immediate experience). In order to determine whether a certain true belief constitutes a case of knowledge one must thus look to the inferential relations that are at issue in that context.

Williams' view goes even further than this, however, in arguing that there are no epistemic constraints that hold across all contexts. That is, it is not just that the actual manner in which an agent's belief gains its epistemic status is dependent upon contextual factors, but that there is no general epistemic rubric by which one could accommodate the apparently multifarious ways in which agents gain knowledge in different contexts. Williams thus demarcates his contextualist view from other subject contextualist alternatives. He writes:

If we give up the idea of pervasive, underlying epistemological constraints; if we start to see the plurality of constraints that inform the various special disciplines, never mind ordinary, unsystematic factual discourse, as genuinely irreducible; if we become suspicious of the idea that "our powers and faculties" can be evaluated independently of everything having to do with the world and our place in it: then we lose our grip on the idea of "human knowledge" as an object of theory. (Williams 1991, 106)

As just noted above, one could imagine a version of reliabilism which maintained that although the exact type and degree of reliability that is relevant in each case is dependent upon the context, it is nevertheless a general epistemological fact that in all contexts it is reliability that transforms true belief into knowledge. On this view, the context-dependent epistemological analysis of the epistemic structures in play in different contexts would be combined with a context-independent epistemological

analysis which captured the general conditions for knowledge (i.e., that knowledge is reliably formed true belief). It is in his rejection of such a construal of the general subject contextualist thesis that Williams is led to the kind of deflationary epistemic position that we saw him giving expression to in §1—i.e., that there is nothing (at least nothing epistemic) that ties all instances of knowledge together other than the fact that they are instances of knowledge.²⁷

The exact motivation for preferring this radical construal of the epistemological data is never entirely explicated by Williams. He does argue that endorsing such a thesis enables one to see one's way past the sceptical problem, though even this motivation is moot given that Williams' solution to scepticism is itself often regarded as a 'sceptical' proposal to the problem. Williams claims, for example, that whilst the possession of knowledge is not, as the sceptic argues, impossible, it is unstable. What he means by this is that the knowledge that we have in ordinary contexts can disappear if we enter a new context, such as, in particular, the philosophical context in which the problem of scepticism is at issue. In this context we lack the knowledge that we typically ascribe to ourselves even though all the factors that we would usually regard as being relevant to the determination of knowledge possession can remain fixed throughout the context change (one's information state might be the same for example). Relatedly, Williams grants that whilst, if we know anything much, we know that we are not the victims of sceptical hypotheses (such as the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis), this does not mean that it would ever be appropriate to *claim* to have such knowledge, because in entering such a claim we are liable to thereby change the context in such a way that makes what is being claimed by such an assertion false. Whilst this response to the sceptic clearly blocks the core sceptical claim that knowledge is impossible, it could hardly be described as a painless resolution of the problem.²⁸

It is not my aim here, however, to defend the general project that Williams undertakes, much less to mount a defence of his response to scepticism. Instead, our goal is, recall, to try to see if there is any mileage in the deflationary epistemological thesis, and it should be clear that understanding Williams' view along these lines does offer some *prima facie* support for the position. After all, if we take seriously the idea that the deflationary programme can be applied to the epistemological case then this in itself presents us with a reason to prefer the more radical claim that Williams makes over its more modest contextualist rival. This is because, of the two views, the former position offers us the most minimal thesis about knowledge. Accordingly, the onus of explanation is not on Williams to defend the radical thesis, but on his opponents to account for why they endorse a view which rejects the radical thesis.²⁹

We saw above that Foley's position needs to be understood along contextualist lines if it is to be internally consistent, and, moreover, that it is best thought of as a subject contextualist thesis. With this in mind, the key advantage of construing Foley's view along the lines suggested by Williams'

account is that Williams' position offers the very kind of deflationary subject contextualism that any development of Foley's view needs. Moreover, combining the two theses also enables us to improve on Williams' account by adding some detail to his subject contextualist thesis whilst also clarifying an issue over which Williams himself seems to be driven by conflicting intuitions. As we'll see, these two points are inter-related.

Let's take the latter point first. For the most part, Williams writes as if the kind of line that he develops entails that there is no epistemic condition that ties all instances of knowledge together, and this is, accordingly, how we have interpreted his view here. In more recent work, however, there are passages where Williams *does* seem to want to suggest that there is a minimal epistemic condition on knowledge, albeit one that is applicable in a highly context-dependent way. For example, he writes:

A belief whose truth is *wholly* accidental cannot count as knowledge. But, for a contextualist, getting things right is never wholly nonaccidental either. (Williams 1999, 59)

Here Williams seems to be arguing that some sort of non-accidentality condition is necessary for knowledge, so that whilst the details of how the agent's belief meets that condition could vary from context to context, one thing we could say is the case in all contexts is that knowledge is true belief that is gained in a non-accidental fashion.

Notice, however, how vague a notion 'non-accidentality' is in this respect. This is not even the same kind of vagueness that would be at issue if it were demanded that the belief should be reliably formed, since we would at least have some idea of what this entailed (i.e., at the very least, that the belief be formed in a way that would normally ensure a greater ratio of true beliefs over false ones). Non-accidentality, on the other hand, seems to leave it entirely open what might be involved in satisfying it, whether it be some degree of reliability, tracking, or something else entirely. The natural suspicion is thus that Williams is merely using this term as a general 'catch-all' phrase in order to eliminate the possibility that knowledge could sometimes simply consist, in the limiting-case, in the possession of a true belief. As we noted above, Foley is more sanguine about this possibility, but I do not think we should let the plausibility of his view be too dependent upon it, for an interesting (and possibly more plausible) view remains even if he gives up on this thesis. Indeed, in the case described in the last section which was concerned with the first presentation of the 'party' example where Foley wanted to suppose that it was merely true belief that was constituting knowledge, it does seem at least arguable that the attribution of knowledge even in this case reflects the fact that the agent has more true beliefs about the subject matter in question than are necessary to be attributed the belief (he has true beliefs about how there are no Jane look-a-likes in the room for example).³⁰ Let us quietly drop this claim then, and have both Foley and Williams agreeing that true belief alone will never suffice for

knowledge. What now divides them?

That Williams is so vague about what, as a minimum, might be necessary to distinguish true belief from knowledge in all contexts is understandable given his prior commitment to the kind of deflationary version of contextualism that he has in mind. Accordingly, however we are to understand this ‘non-accidentality’ thesis, interpretational charity dictates it is not to be regarded as the expression of the view that there is an epistemic condition that is applicable across all contexts, albeit such that its exact application in each case is context-bound. But if it is not an epistemic condition, then what? It is at this juncture that Foley’s account is helpful, since one can capture what Williams is looking for here in terms of his thesis that knowledge is true belief plus further true beliefs. As we saw above, Foley’s position can be understood along the subject contextualist lines that parallel Williams’ account. As a result, instead of understanding Williams’ view as a non-accidentality thesis, we can instead treat it as a radical subject contextualist view that eschews the demand for an epistemic condition that applies across all contexts, demanding instead that each context will require a specific set of true beliefs in order for the agent to be ascribed knowledge.

Combining the two views thus enhances the prospects of the deflationary epistemological project. On the one hand, construing Foley’s account along Williams-style subject contextualist lines draws out just what is at issue in Foley’s use of ‘context’. On the other, construing Williams’ view along Foley-style deflationary lines allows us to add some content to the idea that what is epistemically demanded is entirely context-dependent without the need to make appeal to a placeholder notion (such as ‘non-accidentality’) which, by the lights of the deflationary project, is bound to be suspect.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Epistemic deflationism is thus able to offer a viable proposal that has radical consequences for epistemology as it is currently understood. For whilst we saw that the extreme epistemically deflationary thesis represented by Sartwell’s contention that knowledge is merely true belief is not plausible, the related view offered by Foley is able to adequately distinguish itself from competing inflationary accounts of knowledge and also offer considerations that cast it in an advantageous dialectical light. Moreover, we can offer more content to this proposal by allying it to the subject contextualist theory put forward by Williams.

As a coda to this discussion, it is worthwhile briefly reflecting on what ramifications such a deflationary thesis would have for epistemological analysis. Foley himself suggests that his view

highlights the need to regard the project of defining knowledge as being distinct from the project of defining justification. He argues that whilst the immediate moral to be drawn from his critique of contemporary epistemology is that one can define knowledge without needing any justification-type condition, this should not mean the abandonment of the quest to define justification but should instead lead to a reconfiguration of what is being sought in this regard. That justification is not a necessary component of knowledge does not mean that it lacks any epistemological import, and Foley argues that one should understand the project of understanding justification in terms of the epistemologically internalist paradigm of “exploring what is required to put one’s own internal, intellectual house in order” (Foley 2003, 23). So construed, we can be interested in having justification for our beliefs, and in what this involves, without thereby holding that meeting such a requirement is a necessary condition on knowledge. Accordingly, Foley claims that the contrast between externalist and internalist epistemological theories that has loomed so large in the recent epistemological literature should not be conceived of in terms of mutually exclusive projects. One can understand knowledge externalistically (though not in terms of an extra epistemic condition) via Foley’s account (since the truth of one’s beliefs is not a feature of one’s epistemic position that is reflectively available to one). In this way, one gets the required externalist account of “what is required for one to stand in a relation of knowledge to one’s environment” (Foley 2003, 23). And one can consistently also define justification in internalist terms, though do so on the understanding that meeting such a condition is not essential for the possession of knowledge.³¹ Foley’s position thus leads to a kind of epistemic pluralism such that whilst no extra epistemic condition is necessary for knowledge, meeting certain kinds of epistemic condition may be an important in other regards.

I think that this is essentially on the right lines. For too long the focus of epistemology has been at the lower end of the scale—on what is needed, at the very least, in order to know—and this has been prompted by the post-Gettier focus on what is involved in the necessary epistemic condition that must be met for the possession of knowledge. The natural debate to emerge then is that between the externalist who (it is argued) sets the epistemic standards for knowledge too low, and the internalist who (again, it is argued) sets the epistemic standards too high. Dropping this demand frees us from this kind of focus. What it enables us to explore more thoroughly is the kinds of epistemic conditions that are important to us in specific contexts. In some contexts, for example, it may be that it is only the meeting of external conditions that is of interest, whilst in others the importance of meeting internal epistemic conditions can be brought into focus. This might be reflected in how a relevantly different range of true beliefs is demanded in each case, but this need not necessarily be the case. An alternative possibility is that sometimes we desire more than mere knowledge, since there might be cases where we want, for example, knowledge *and* justified belief, where meeting the latter condition is not

thought of as an essential part of what is involved in possessing knowledge.

So whilst a deflationary theory of knowledge undermines the possibility of a general style of theorising about knowledge, the fragmentation that results need not be understood in a way that is antithetical to the epistemological project as a whole. Instead, this fragmentation has the potential to bring to the fore new foci for epistemological discussion that have hitherto remained hidden.³² This, coupled with the dialectical importance of the deflationary stance in any debate about the nature of knowledge, should suffice to ensure the utility of further exploring the prospects for a deflationary epistemological thesis. Indeed, since, as we have seen, there is a version of the deflationary position that does not succumb to the most obvious objections that one might level against such a view, the possibility remains that our interest in this thesis need not be exclusively methodological.³³

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NOTES

¹ This kind of view is more often associated with Ramsey (1927). For a fairly recent survey of the various different extant theories of truth in the literature, see Kirkham (1995).

² Though see Horwich (1998, 41-2), for an important qualification to this claim.

³ Wright offers the following list of truth-platitudes: truth does not admit of a more or less (absoluteness), truth is distinct from justification (contrast), any attitude towards a proposition is an attitude towards the truth of that proposition (transparency), truth is a property that is never lost (timelessness), a true proposition corresponds to reality (correspondence), that a truth-apt content remains truth-apt both within the scope of negation (and other sentence-functors) and within the scope of a propositional attitude (embedding), and that some truths may never be known (opacity) (1999, 226-7; see also Wright 1992, 34). It is also part of Wright's view to accommodate a certain pluralism concerning truth in that there may be different concepts of truth which have additional non-basic features in certain local discourses (Wright 1992, *passim*; Wright 1999, 228). Hawthorne & Oppy (1997) usefully distinguish six main varieties of deflationism concerning truth, together with four dimensions along which theories of truth can be more or less deflationary. The reader should note that, following Hawthorne & Oppy, I here treat 'deflationism' and 'minimalism' as interchangeable as regards the theory of truth.

⁴ As far as I am aware, Williams (1991) is the only person to put forward a position which he explicitly describes as being a "deflationary" account. There have, however, been theories of knowledge which have been described as "minimalist" theories. In particular, Hetherington (2001) and Greenough (2002, chapter 1) both offer subtle discussions of what they term "minimalist" epistemological proposals, though their views differ in some substantial respects. As I will explain below (in footnote 17), however, neither of these positions is minimalist in the relevant respect for our purposes here (or at least, in the specific case of Hetherington's proposal, it is not *obvious* that his view is minimalist in the relevant respect).

⁵ Accordingly, in what follows when I talk of "knowledge" the reader should take this as being shorthand for "empirical knowledge".

⁶ There is always the temptation in such cases to confuse this issue about non-belief with the issue of the *unreliability* of the witness' testimony. After all, unreliability is also a reason to think that an agent lacks knowledge, and thus cases like this which seem to indicate both non-belief and unreliability could be thought to be situations where the agent lacks knowledge simply because she is unreliable. In response to this worry, note that the prosecution could undermine this testimony simply by focusing upon the witness' lack of belief (just as they could undermine it simply by focusing upon the

witness' unreliability). This consideration alone should suffice to indicate that there are *two* grounds for thinking that the agent in question lacks knowledge here, not one.

⁷ Though see Williamson (1995; 2001, chapter 1) for the view that knowing is a mental state *simpliciter*. Note, however, that Williamson does not understand this thesis in such a way that it excludes the possibility that belief might nevertheless be a necessary condition on knowledge (see Williamson 2001, 41-8).

⁸ That said, Prichard (1950) famously maintained that belief was not a component of knowledge, though his arguments are unpersuasive. For a subtle defence of the claim that knowledge entails *some* notion of belief, along with a discussion of Prichard's arguments in this regard, see Hamlyn (1970, 78-95). For further discussion of the claim that belief is necessary for knowledge, see Radford (1966), Armstrong (1973, 138-49), Shope (1983, 178-87), and Williamson (2001, 41-8).

⁹ Stevenson (2002) lists Price (1969), Lehrer (1990a), and Cohen (1992) as offering the more demanding (and thus more exclusive) accounts of belief, with de Sousa (1971), Evans (1982) and Fodor (1983) offering the less demanding (and thus more inclusive) accounts.

¹⁰ For ease of expression, in what follows I will simply talk of "the epistemic condition", though readers should note that this way of putting matters is not meant to preclude the possibility that some epistemological theories might regard more than one epistemic condition as being necessary for knowledge.

¹¹ Although Sartwell does not mention it, there are good Gricean considerations in support of this contention. It might be thought to be a conversational implicature of a claim to know that one possesses good supporting grounds for the belief in question, so that to claim knowledge of a proposition where one's belief in that proposition lacks grounds would generate a false conversational implicature and would thus in this sense be improper. Needless to say, however, that such an assertion is in this regard improper would not itself entail that what is claimed is false. For the *locus classicus* for this style of approach, see Grice (1989).

¹² In a later paper, Sartwell (1992) goes on to develop this distinction between justification construed as a necessary condition for knowledge and justification construed as merely a criterion of knowledge. He claims that, by the lights of his view and in contrast to the received wisdom in this respect, there are *two* different goals relevant to epistemology—the goal of true belief (knowledge) and the goal of justification. Moreover, Sartwell contends that since the goal of attaining justification for one's beliefs is of merely instrumental value—because it is only valuable insofar as it enables us to achieve the goal of attaining true beliefs (knowledge)—then justification cannot be a necessary condition for knowledge. Given that Sartwell (1992, 167) himself concedes that the viability of this argument rests on the "groundwork" offered in Sartwell (1991), I will focus my attentions on the claims he makes in the earlier paper. For criticism of this later claim, see Sosa's comments in Bonjour & Sosa (2003, §6.2).

¹³ I here ignore the complications raised by John simultaneously being told both that a proposition and its negation are true (though note that if he is not told that they are both true simultaneously, then this issue can be dealt with fairly straightforwardly by stipulating that John always treats new information as 'trumping' old).

¹⁴ Interestingly, Sartwell (1991) does at one point consider an example of this form, one which concerns a patient at a mental hospital who hears voices that tell her to believe that $2+2=4$ and who forms her belief in this proposition on this basis. Here Sartwell admits that on his view he must be willing to ascribe knowledge (there are no reasons given for thinking that the putative belief is not genuine), and further grants in response to cases like this that "this is where the present account runs into difficulties" (Sartwell 1991, 162).

¹⁵ The reason for this *caveat* will become apparent below.

¹⁶ See also Foley (1986).

¹⁷ I noted earlier (in footnote 4) that Hetherington (2001) and Greenough (2002, chapter 1) have recently proposed what they term "minimalist" epistemologies. In the case of Greenough at least, what is meant by minimalism in this regard is very different from the deflationary stance just described. The reason for this is that epistemic deflationism as it is understood here incorporates the thesis that there is no epistemic condition on knowledge. Greenough's minimalist view, in contrast, is happy to grant the existence of an epistemic condition on knowledge, the issue for him being what the logically weakest (i.e., *minimalist*) construal of this condition is which is consistent with the agreed 'platitudes' about knowledge. The situation with Hetherington's minimalist account is more complex in that he allows that true belief is sometimes sufficient for knowledge. In general, Hetherington's claim is (roughly) that knowledge admits of degrees in virtue of what degree of justification is added to true belief in each case. This begs the obvious question of whether knowledge is not merely true belief on this view, with justification being an *additional* epistemic goal that one might meet with one's beliefs. If this were so, then we would have a thesis on offer which is akin to the radical epistemic deflationism which we saw being defended by Sartwell above (and which would therefore be subject to similar objections). Suppose, however, that we take Hetherington's remarks completely at face-value and therefore grant that knowledge can admit of degrees because it can incorporate a justification component that admits of degrees. Although we haven't explicitly argued for the claim that knowledge is never just true belief—we have, recall, merely defended the weaker claim that knowledge could not *always* be just true belief—the considerations that we have offered regarding the inadequacy of treating true belief as knowledge do present a *prima facie* case for thinking that even this more modest proposal is problematic. Indeed, I think that a detailed examination of the kinds of cases that Hetherington offers supports this contention (though I have not to space to consider these cases in detail here unfortunately). If this is right, then Hetherington's position collapses into the claim that

knowledge always incorporates a justification component, where that component in turn admits of degrees. Would such a view be a deflationary theory of knowledge, albeit a modest one? The answer to this question is contingent on the further issue of whether Hetherington would allow that there could be a general epistemic rubric for determining the degree of justification that is required in each case, and the answer to this question, so far as I can tell, is underdetermined by what Hetherington says in his book. Therefore, whether Hetherington's view is a deflationary position is moot, pending further details about the account.

¹⁸ Foley actually represents the proposition not as "P" but as "P_{cells}", though the reason for this is not relevant here and so I ignore this complication. I have altered the quotation that follows accordingly.

¹⁹ Indeed, it might not even be necessary for this objection that Sally* has a maximally accurate and comprehensive set of beliefs since merely forming her belief that P in the right kind of way might be thought to suffice to put her in a better epistemic position as regards P than Sally.

²⁰ There might be situations in which Sally continues to form her belief that P even whilst becoming aware that the method of belief formation in question is unreliable. Perhaps, for example, Sally simultaneously discovers that this method, whilst generally unreliable, is highly reliable when it comes to this subject matter, and thus is highly reliable in this instance. Such cases are of no use to our imagined objector, however, because now Sally is forming her true belief in a way that is, in the relevant sense, epistemically appropriate.

²¹ For an early and a more recent presentation of the reliabilist thesis, see Goldman (1986) and Greco (1999), respectively. The causal account is normally associated with Goldman (1967). Plantinga (1993) is the foremost exponent of a 'proper function' thesis, though this kind of view bears a number of similarities to the kind of virtue-reliabilist accounts of knowledge that have recently become popular in the literature (see, for example, Greco 1999).

²² Later on in the paper Foley (2003, 7-8) seems to weaken his stance on this point, claiming only that he wants to leave it open as a possibility that true belief alone can sometimes suffice for knowledge. Hetherington (2001) and Hawthorne (2002) also considers the possibility that sometimes true belief suffices for knowledge.

²³ For an overview of the distinction between subject and attributer contextualism, see Brower (1998), DeRose (1999) and Pritchard (2002a, §§5-7). For a more in-depth discussion, see Pritchard (2002b).

²⁴ Could one have an attributer contextualist view that did not regard the subject's context as relevant at all to the truth of an ascription of knowledge? Presumably, such a view is a logical possibility, although it is difficult to see how one could motivate such a position. After all, if one allows context to play a role at the level of the attributer, then on what principled grounds could one deny it a role at the level of the subject? Moreover, often the subject's context and the attributer's context are the same (as in the case, for example, of self-ascriptions of knowledge), and it would be odd to argue that in such cases it is only *qua* attributer that the context is relevant.

²⁵ I offer such a relative assessment in Pritchard (2002b).

²⁶ I am grateful to an anonymous referee from *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* for pressing me on this point. For the key versions of attributer contextualism, see DeRose (1995), Lewis (1996) and Cohen (e.g., 2000). For the key critical discussions of attributer contextualism, see Schiffer (1996); Feldman (1999); Heller (1999); Sosa (1999; 2000); Vogel (1999); Fogelin (2000); and Pritchard (2001a).

²⁷ Williams' regards his view in this respect as being broadly Wittgensteinian (see, in particular, Wittgenstein 1969), although, as Charles Travis has highlighted to me, there are precursors to this form of deflationary epistemology in the work of Austin as well. Consider, for example, the following passage:

"There *could* be no *general* answer to the questions as to what is evidence for what, what is certain, what is doubtful, what needs or does not need evidence, can or can't be verified. If the Theory of Knowledge consists in finding grounds for such an answer, there is no such thing." (Austin 1979, 124)

For an excellent discussion of the Austinian position in this respect, and which also covers the historical roots of such a view, see Travis (2003). For more on the relevant aspects of Wittgenstein's epistemology, and for further discussion of the relationship between Williams' view and its Wittgensteinian counterpart, see Pritchard (2001b; 2003), Williams (2003) and Wright (2003).

²⁸ Williams gives the clearest discussion of his response to scepticism and what it involves in Williams (1991, chapter 8).

²⁹ I give a fuller overview of Williams' stance in Pritchard (2001b; 2002a, §7; 2002b).

³⁰ My suspicion is that part of the reason why Foley fails to fully realise this possibility is because of his implicit equivocation between a subject and an attributer version of contextualism, as noted above. After all, on the supposition that it is the context of the attributer that is (primarily) relevant, then it is more plausible to suppose that the attributer might just have an interest in the agent having a true belief in certain scenarios and so ascribe knowledge on that basis. In contrast, this becomes less plausible once we give the subject's context its due weight.

³¹ For more on the epistemological externalist/internalist distinction as it features in the contemporary literature, see the excellent anthology edited by Kornblith (2001).

³² This point is important because it distinguishes the project of deflationary epistemology from the so-called 'death of epistemology' thesis—as popularised by Rorty (1979)—at least as that thesis is usually understood. Indeed, in earlier writings Williams (1977) himself expressed some sympathy with this school of thought. For further discussion of the death of epistemology thesis, see Williams (1992).

³³ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the faculty of philosophy at the Amsterdam Free University in May 2003, and I am grateful to the audience that day, especially Arianna Betti, Martijn Blaauw, Cornelis van Putten and René van Woudenberg. I am also grateful to Charles Travis and Michael Williams for discussions on themes related to the topic of this paper, and to the Leverhulme Trust for the award of a Special Research Fellowship which has enabled me to conduct work in this area. Finally, special thanks go to Patrick Greenough, since it was our discussions on his excellent work on epistemic minimalism which was the original stimulus for this paper.