

Epistemic Grace

§1.0 Introduction

In this paper I argue for a new virtue epistemic account of the nature of knowledge. The account is motivated by the challenges that cases of testimonial knowledge and Barney type cases present for existing virtue epistemic accounts of knowledge.

The first challenge is to show that such an account yields the answer that plausible cases of testimonial knowledge are indeed cases of testimonial knowledge. Here, rather than examine this issue by way of consideration of the Jenny case, as has been standard in the literature, I examine what I take to be the harder case for virtue epistemic accounts of knowledge, intuitive cases of testimonial knowledge in young children. The second challenge is dealing satisfactorily with Barney type cases. An account should yield the answer that Barney doesn't know and do so in a well motivated way.

I argue that the challenge of articulating an account of knowledge on which plausible cases of testimonial knowledge come out as indeed being cases of testimonial knowledge can be overcome primarily by rejecting the claim that the potential knower is required to believe truly because of the exercise of a cognitive ability. Rather, I argue that what is required is that belief be because of the exercise of virtue.

I attempt to overcome the challenge posed by Barney type cases initially based on a non-standard reading of Gettier cases according to which its bad epistemic luck that is knowledge undermining. Building on this reading, I argue that thinking of knowledge as requiring what I call epistemic grace both yields the right results in standard Gettier type cases and Barney type cases, and does so in a well motivated way.

§2.0 Testimonial Knowledge

Much of the recent debate regarding the challenge to virtue epistemic accounts of knowledge posed by cases of testimonial knowledge has focused on the Jenny case. The Jenny case runs as follows:

Our protagonist, whom we will call “Jenny”, arrives at the train station in Chicago and, wishing to obtain directions to the Sears Tower, approaches the first adult passerby that she sees. Suppose further that the person that she asks has first-hand knowledge of the area and gives her the directions that she requires. Intuitively, any true belief that Jenny forms on this basis would ordinarily be counted as knowledge. (Pritchard, 2010: 40).

The thought is that the case poses a challenge for virtue epistemic accounts of knowledge, according to which the knower is creditable for the truth of their belief. After all, in the Jenny case it seems plausible to think that it is the testifier rather than the recipient of testimony that deserves the credit for the truth of the recipient’s belief.

Debate around the case has centred on how much of a contribution is made from the ability of a testimonial recipient and whether that contribution is sufficient to say that the recipient is creditable for the truth of her belief.¹ There are, however, other intuitive cases of testimonial knowledge that pose a greater challenge in this regard and therefore the focus on the Jenny case seems misplaced. Intuitive cases of testimonial knowledge in young children are just such cases, as in such cases it is plausible that there is less contribution made from the ability of the testimonial recipient, thereby making it more difficult to claim that the contribution made is sufficient to say that the agent is creditable for her true belief.

§2.1 Traits and Abilities

Greco's (2011) robust virtue epistemology requires that the exercising of ability explains the truth of an agent's belief.² Pritchard's (2012: 273) anti-luck virtue epistemology requires that the exercising of ability on the agent's part produce that agent's safe true belief ("such that her safe cognitive success is to a significant degree creditable to her cognitive agency"). Both Greco and Pritchard conceive of ability as being reliable.

Ability thus conceived appears to rule out intuitive cases of testimonial knowledge in young children as indeed being cases of knowledge. On the one hand it looks like we should say that there are cases of testimonial knowledge in young children, on the other hand it looks like a young child believing truly has little or nothing to do with the exercise of ability where ability is understood as being reliable.

One motivation for saying that there are cases of testimonial knowledge in young children is based on response intuitions to cases such as the following:

Sarah, a four year-old child, asks her mother where, Lucky, the family dog, is. Her mother answers truthfully that her older brother Paul has taken Lucky for a walk.

Assuming this is a normal case, her mother is not for example out to deceive Sarah in this matter, then intuitively Sarah knows that Lucky has been taken for a walk.³ That Sarah could have easily been deceived by her mother, that being a four year-old, if her mother had said anything within a very wide range of possibilities, then Sarah would have still believed her, doesn't seem to undermine the intuition that she knows that Lucky has been taken for a walk. At the same time, however, such a consideration does undermine both the claim that in cases of knowledge the knower believes truly because of the exercise of her ability and the claim that her safe true belief is the product of ability such that the true belief is significantly creditable to her cognitive agency. That Sarah believes truly that Lucky has been taken for a walk is surely down to her mother's testimony that this is the case, and if someone is creditable to a significant degree for Sarah's true belief that Lucky has been taken for a walk then surely it's her mother.

Such cases of testimonial knowledge in young children might be taken as a challenge to virtue epistemic approaches generally. Such a challenge would involve moving from the plausible claim that young children in Sarah type cases don't exercise a reliable cognitive ability in either of the ways described by Greco and Pritchard and that there is therefore no such requirement for knowledge, to the alternative and less plausible conclusion that no contribution from the cognitive agent to her/his believing

truly is required. Before showing that these two conclusions can and should be teased apart, it is worth pausing to consider a salient feature of Sarah type cases, a feature of that type of case which is such that we're inclined to attribute knowledge.

Part of the intuition that Sarah knows seems to be related to the presumed relationship between speaker and hearer; to see that this is so, notice that our intuition that Sarah knows may weaken or disappear altogether if we imagine Sarah asking a neighbour where his dog is. Even if the neighbour answers accurately and sincerely, whether Sarah knows now seems to depend on her relationship with the neighbour; whether this neighbour is a friend of the family, someone who talks to Sarah quite regularly and is playing some, even if small, part in Sarah's upbringing, or whether this is a neighbour with whom Sarah's family have barely any contact, someone with whom Sarah seldom speaks or with whom up until now Sarah has never spoken, someone who is a stranger to Sarah. I come back to how the relationship between testifier and testimony recipient has a bearing on whether there is knowledge, or more precisely justified belief, later in this section. For now it suffices to flag the consideration.

Having briefly considered the significance of the relationship between Sarah and the testifier, let's return to trying to tease apart the aforementioned conclusions. While the Sarah case indicates that there is no need for the exercising of a reliable cognitive ability in either of the ways that Greco and Pritchard claim in order for an agent to gain knowledge, there may still be a need for the exercise of epistemic virtue. On the one hand, while the Sarah case plausibly is a case in which the protagonist gains knowledge; on the other hand, testimonial cases may be constructed in which the mere reliability of the testifier as well as the good epistemic practices of the broader

community that explain the agent believing truly won't be sufficient to get the agent knowledge. For example, suppose the agent possesses an apparently strong defeater against the truth of the relevant belief or against the reliability of the testifier and yet continues to believe. If this were the case, then, even if the belief is in fact true and the testifier is in fact reliable, we wouldn't claim that an agent in such a case knows.⁴ A plausible explanation for saying so is that an epistemically vicious belief that p cannot be a candidate for knowledge that p. This is based on the similarly plausible assumption that an agent continuing to believe that p in the face of apparently stronger defeaters against the truth that p, or against the reliability of the testifier, renders her/his belief an epistemically vicious belief.

While the epistemic virtuousness and epistemic viciousness of beliefs undoubtedly come in degrees and while there are surely difficult boundary cases in which it may be difficult to determine whether the belief is epistemically virtuous or epistemically vicious, the claim that a particular belief, say a belief that p, is either epistemically virtuous or epistemically vicious seems right. Perhaps that this seems so is related to us thinking that in cases in which a proposition cannot be believed epistemically virtuously are ones in which an agent should suspend belief or not believe either way. The foregoing commits one to denying that beliefs may fall into a zone of epistemic permissibility in which a belief is neither virtuous nor vicious. This implies, and this is why this is of interest for my purposes, that claiming that vicious belief cannot be a candidate for knowledge implies that if a belief is a candidate for knowledge, then that belief can only be a virtuous belief.

Now the question which arises is whether there can be a virtuous belief that doesn't involve the exercising of a reliable cognitive ability and whether that kind of virtuous belief can be a candidate for knowledge. Let me deal with the first part first. In certain everyday cases that an agent may find herself in, it seems correct to say that she is not in a position to exercise a reliable cognitive ability such that it will explain her believing truly. Sarah type cases are such cases.⁵ Yet in such cases it seems perfectly appropriate epistemically for such listening agents to believe; in other words belief in such cases seems epistemically virtuous rather than vicious. Given that, in such cases, as has been previously argued, the agent believing truly is not because of the exercise of cognitive ability and the cognitive agent is not primarily creditable for the truth of her belief, or significantly creditable for her true belief, on the basis of the ability exercised, the virtuousness of the belief remains to be explained. An obvious move would be to defend a position according to which less of a contribution from the ability of an agent is required. Aside from such a position being vulnerable to Gettier type counterexamples, it simply seems ill-suited to explaining what is virtuous about the relevant beliefs in Sarah type cases. To put the point differently, it doesn't look like the epistemic virtuousness of the young child's belief is owing to the exercise of her cognitive ability.

A plausible alternative explanation of the virtuousness of the belief is that the virtuousness of the belief is attributable to the exercising of a relevant epistemically virtuous trait. The thought is that if an agent believes in such a case as it is epistemically appropriate for them to believe, that it's implausible that cognitive ability is doing the relevant work such that the agent epistemically appropriately believes, and we assume that the right account of the nature of knowledge is a virtue

epistemological account, an account upon which the cognitive agent must make some contribution towards her believing truly in order to have knowledge, then it looks like her appropriate belief might be explained by the exercising of an epistemically virtuous trait.

Thinking of the kind of belief required for knowledge, an epistemically virtuous belief, either as being from the exercising of an epistemically virtuous trait or from the exercise of a cognitive ability puts us in a much better position to make sense of intuitive cases of testimonial knowledge in a way that fits into a virtue epistemological framework. I have been focusing on Sarah type cases because they seem to be the hardest type of case for both Greco and Pritchard to account for, but what I say with regard to dealing with such cases also plausibly applies to non-Sarah type cases of testimonial knowledge, though not necessarily all cases of testimonial knowledge. Plausibly, given good epistemic practices of an epistemic community, being trusting is, *prima facie*, an epistemically virtuous trait, although the conditions under which it is virtuous for a normal adult to trust differ from the conditions under which it is virtuous for a child to trust.⁶

A motivation for distinguishing the conditions under which it is virtuous for a child such as Sarah to trust and the conditions under which it is virtuous for an adult such as Jenny to trust is that an account on which a normal adult only had to meet the conditions a child is required to meet in order to have a virtuous belief would yield the wrong results. By yield the wrong results I mean that it would commit us to saying that cases that intuitively aren't cases of knowledge are cases of knowledge. The distinction of the conditions under which it is epistemically virtuous to trust allows us

to distinguish between adults who believe testimony from an epistemically virtuous trait and adults who believe from an epistemically vicious state, such as gullibility, while allowing us to hold onto the claim that Sarah's belief is from an epistemically virtuous trait. One reason why categorising the testimonial belief of young children as knowledge is so tricky is that it looks like young children, generally being credulous in the way that they are, should mean that we put their belief into the same category as gullible beliefs and a plausible candidate for true testimonial belief being precluded from qualifying as knowledge is testimonial belief formed because of gullibility, formed because the hearer would believe almost anything said. Yet it seems epistemically appropriate for Sarah to believe that Lucky has been taken for a walk and there remains the intuition that she knows that Lucky has been taken for a walk.

It would be odd to criticise a young child as gullible. And yet it's not as if adults don't criticise or blame children. A parent might say to another that a child is very demanding, or that a child is very aggressive; similarly a parent might say to a child that she shouldn't throw her food on the floor or that she shouldn't have given her baby sister's favourite soft toy to the family dog to chew on. And yet believing almost anything they're told doesn't seem an appropriate criticism of a young child, while in contrast it would be an appropriate criticism of a normal adult. Children are sometimes admonished not to believe everything they're told, but one supposes that this is at a later stage of development than the stage children such as Sarah are at and it is children such as Sarah that we're concerned with here. It seems likely that the children that are admonished are admonished because they are expected to be able to exercise some degree of discrimination. Young children are in a unique situation epistemically, they neither have nor have had the opportunity to build up the

experience required in order to be discriminating in the testimony they receive. Even if this wasn't the case, it seems that they don't have the requisite abilities developed to a sufficient degree to be able to make use of possible relevant experience. For young children, at their early stage of development, given the difficulty they would have in developing further both generally and epistemically in the absence of trusting their caregivers, it is epistemically appropriate, and as such epistemically virtuous, of them as cognitive agents to trust. Admittedly this way of explaining the epistemic virtuousness of the trust of young children is one on which practical factors such as underdeveloped ability and lack of experience have a bearing on whether the basis on which an agent believes is deemed epistemically virtuous. Given some consideration, the manner of the explanation shouldn't be seen as worrisome.

What we suppose counts as virtuous for a normal human adult differs from what we would suppose counts as virtuous for, say, a god. Part of what we suppose determines what counts as virtuous for a normal adult human being is based on what adult humans are capable of and what their limitations are. For example, a normal adult human agent may virtuously believe that there is a sheep in the field in the Roddy case, albeit believing because of her misidentification of a sheep shaped object in that field, although believing from the exercise of cognitive ability; but a god, and perhaps a sheep expert, plausibly would not virtuously believe on the same basis.^{[7][8]} If one holds that the conditions under which a belief's virtuousness can vary like this, then one is well-positioned to defend the claim that Sarah believes virtuously.

Intuitively, it is similarly epistemically virtuous for a person to trust an expert claim, given suitable background conditions. Whether an agent's belief is epistemically

virtuous, however, varies according to the role that agent is playing. For example, it wouldn't be epistemically virtuous for a peer tasked with reviewing the expert's claim simply to believe the expert's claim on the basis of her testimony.⁹ It's not as if we'd just criticise him for not doing the job expected of him but grant that his simple belief of the expert testimony, the same way the non-expert believes the testimony, is epistemically virtuous.¹⁰

While thinking of knowledge as requiring virtuous belief, with the possibility that this includes belief because of the exercise of a virtuous trait rather than only belief that is because of ability, helps us provide a virtue epistemological account of cases of testimonial knowledge, the associated virtue epistemic claim that the cognitive agent is creditable for their believing truly needs to be explored. The cognitive agency of a young child does make a contribution to her gaining a belief that is true in Sarah type cases. She trusts rather than not trusts. That Sarah is trusting is epistemically virtuous given her stage of development. If requirements external to Sarah's cognitive agency are met, then she will have knowledge. Nonetheless the trait of trusting shouldn't be confused with an ability. That Sarah believes truly isn't plausibly down to a faculty of her cognitive agency, unlike say visual perception, that can be exercised to get true beliefs. A consequence of defending an account on which Sarah has a true belief but not because of the exercise of ability is that one must give up the notion that a knower is always primarily creditable for the truth of her belief or that her safe cognitive success is to a significant degree creditable. What seems right to say about Sarah type cases, and is befitting of cases being social epistemological cases, is that credit is shared. While credit for the truth of the belief is down to the first testifier who believes truly what he testifies to because of the exercise of ability and to the wider

community that sustains good testimonial practices, the testimonial belief is down to the testimonial recipient and that belief is intuitively creditable if the recipient believes virtuously.

The account I offer leaves open the possibility that some true testimonial beliefs may be gained because of the exercising of ability. The account also leaves open the possibility that in some cases of testimonial knowledge an agent's virtuous belief may be formed from a combination of the exercising of a cognitive ability and the exercising of an epistemically virtuous trait; plausibly it is such a combination that would make Jenny's belief in the Jenny case epistemically virtuous and put her in the running for knowledge.¹¹

§3.0 Epistemic Grace: Revisiting the Gettier Problem

In this second part of my paper I attempt to deal with the challenge raised by the Barney case. Having in the previous section argued for expanding what we think makes for an epistemically virtuous belief to include beliefs held because of the exercise of an epistemically virtuous trait, in this section I make an argument for what knowledge requires in addition to an epistemically virtuous belief. I do so initially on the basis of an alternative reading of standard Gettier type cases, a reading which is equally applicable to Barney type cases. I'll argue that such a reading is intuitive and ultimately helps us to provide plausible explanations of the relevant cases.

My starting point in attempting to overcome the challenges outlined is a non-standard reading of the almost 50 year-old Gettier problem.

Consider the Roddy case, a standard Gettier type case, from Chisholm (1977: 105), which has been adapted by Pritchard (2012: 251):

Using his reliable perceptual faculties, Roddy non-inferentially forms a true belief that there is a sheep in the field before him. His belief is also true. Unbeknownst to Roddy, however, the truth of his belief is completely unconnected to the manner in which he acquired this belief since the object he is looking at in the field is not a sheep at all, but rather a sheep-shaped object which is obscuring from view the real sheep hidden behind.

The standard analysis of the Gettier type case has been that although the protagonist therein has a true belief that is justified, the justification for her belief is not appropriately connected to what makes their beliefs true; it's a matter of luck that their beliefs are indeed true.¹² Following this reading of Gettier type cases, the task for epistemologists has been taken to be to provide an account of the nature of knowledge that either directly, via an anti-luck condition, or indirectly, via a strengthened justificatory condition, rules out such luck; these approaches have been pursued by Pritchard (2010) and Greco (2009) respectively.

It's not obvious, however, that we should see the cases this way. Linda Zagzebski (1994: 66) identifies Gettier cases as involving two elements of luck; bad luck that one's justification, which is sufficiently robust to satisfy the justification condition for knowledge, doesn't get one a true belief, and good luck that one happens to get a true belief. This identification of two elements of luck in Gettier cases doesn't by itself, however, challenge the view that a condition that rules out the relevant epistemic good luck is required. Zagzebski's identification of both good luck and bad luck does, however, provide resources for a challenge to the standard view.¹³

A non-standard way of seeing Gettier type cases is one according to which the agent in a Gettier type case should not be seen as lucky because he has a true belief; rather he should be seen as unlucky because he doesn't have knowledge. In Gettier type cases, agents have justified beliefs and ordinarily having a justified belief means that knowledge has been gained.¹⁴ In such cases, although knowledge has not been gained, if knowledge had have been gained then the agent would have had a true belief as well. A natural reading of Gettier type cases is that the agents therein are better described as unlucky not to have knowledge, rather than lucky to have a true belief.

By way of analogy, consider a person, who loses her fortune on a particular day because of bad luck, but, because of good luck, she acquires a lesser fortune that same day. Other things being equal, it would be more appropriate to say she has been unlucky rather than lucky or at least more unlucky than lucky on this day. To keep things simple let's change the case slightly and say that the fortune she loses and gains is in the form of cash in both cases. Interestingly, the appropriateness of the analogy with Gettier type cases might be contested on the basis of claiming that of knowledge and that which falls short of knowledge, it is only true belief that is of significant value, and therefore that in Gettier type cases nothing of significance is lost when one loses knowledge but still ends up with a true belief. Such a position, if advocated, however, would come at the cost of committing the advocator to a revisionary solution to the *Meno* problem, at least when considered synchronically.¹⁵ Wanting to stay neutral on such issues might be thought of as a dialectical reason for not going further than saying that there is good luck and bad luck in Gettier type cases,

but that neutrality won't motivate the inclusion of an **anti-luck** condition in an account of the nature of knowledge.

Alternatively, one may wish to defend the view that the kind of luck present in Gettier type cases is value neutral, in other words it is neither good nor bad luck. This view however, is problematic. As Ballantyne (2010) writes, significance is widely held to be a requirement of luck, marking the difference between luck and something that is merely unlikely.¹⁶ Ballantyne describes the consensus in the debate about luck thus; “[t]he consensus just is, at bottom, that if an event is lucky for an individual, then it’s somehow *good for* or *bad for* her.” (The emphasis is Ballantyne’s own). Such a consensus looks right when we consider a case offered by Pritchard (2005: 132), mentioned by Ballantyne, in support of the requirement. An unlikely landslide that occurs that affects nobody is not lucky because it is significant to nobody. We can further stipulate that the unlikely landslide occurs on a distant, uninhabited planet to make the intuition that significance is a requirement for luck clearer.

While this seems right, it is worth pointing out that luck in everyday language is often used in a comparative way where the event itself is not plausibly thought of as good for the individual but is thought better than some considered alternative that is relatively nearby. Consider the usage of “luck” in the “Four Yorkshiremen” sketch by Monty Python. The sketch begins with four well-dressed Yorkshiremen commenting on the pleasing taste of an expensive wine before they move on to reminisce about their childhoods:

TG (Terry Gilliam): But you know, we were happy in those days, though we were poor.

MP (Michael Palin): Aye. BECAUSE we were poor. My old Dad used to say to me, "Money doesn't buy you happiness."

EI (Eric Idle): 'E was right. I was happier then and I had NOTHIN'. We used to live in this tiiny old house, with greaaaaat big holes in the roof.

GC (Graham Chapman): House? You were lucky to have a HOUSE! We used to live in one room, all hundred and twenty-six of us, no furniture. Half the floor was missing; we were all huddled together in one corner for fear of FALLING!

TG: You were lucky to have a ROOM! *We* used to have to live in a corridor!

MP: Ohhhh we used to DREAM of livin' in a corridor! Woulda' been a palace to us. We used to live in an old water tank on a rubbish tip. We got woken up every morning by having a load of rotting fish dumped all over us! House!?

Hmph.
EI: Well when I say "house" it was only a hole in the ground covered by a piece of tarpolin, but it was a house to US.

GC: We were evicted from *our* hole in the ground; we had to go and live in a lake!

TG: You were lucky to have a LAKE! There were a hundred and sixty of us living in a small shoebox in the middle of the road.

MP: Cardboard box?

TG: Aye.

MP: You were lucky. We lived for three months in a brown paper bag in a septic tank. We used to have to get up at six o'clock in the morning, clean the bag, eat a crust of stale bread, go to work down mill for fourteen hours a day week in-week out. When we got home, our Dad would thrash us to sleep with his belt!

GC: Luxury. We used to have to get out of the lake at three o'clock in the morning, clean the lake, eat a handful of hot gravel, go to work at the mill every day for tuppence a month, come home, and Dad would beat us around the head and neck with a broken bottle, if we were LUCKY!

("Four Yorkshiremen Sketch". The only alteration to the quoted text is the bracketed additions of the names for which the initials stand.)

The upshot of the non-standard reading of Gettier type cases, thinking of the protagonists in Gettier type cases as unlucky not to know, is that an alternative to the anti-luck direction taken in epistemology emerges into view. The task given this way of thinking of Gettier type cases isn't to include a condition in one's analysis of knowledge that rules out certain types of good epistemic luck; rather the task is first to identify how bad epistemic luck may be knowledge undermining and, second, based on that identification, offer a suitable account of the nature of knowledge.

§3.1 Why Epistemic Grace?

The bad epistemic luck I've described in Gettier type cases, and this can be said of both standard Gettier type cases and Barney type cases, can plausibly be conceived as being an absence of co-operation from the world, or, as McGlynn (*forthcoming*) might put it, "uncooperative external circumstances".^{[17][18]} Despite Roddy and Barney having justified beliefs, beliefs that are the product of the exercise of cognitive ability, and their beliefs being true, neither has knowledge. Their justified beliefs put them in the running for knowledge, that they don't have knowledge is due to factors beyond the contribution that is required of them.¹⁹ If this is accepted, and independent of particular accounts of the nature of knowledge it seems quite a natural way of thinking of the cases, then logically we also get the point that knowledge depends, **at least sometimes**, upon something which is beyond the scope of what is realised by the exercising of an agent's cognitive ability, and the subsequent belief being true. A further, stronger point seems plausible; that, for **any** belief, despite a human agent forming a virtuous belief, forming a belief because of a cognitive ability or of an epistemically virtuous trait, and that belief being true, the agent may still not gain knowledge.²⁰ An agent not having knowledge in such cases, other things being equal, is unlucky.

This way of conceiving of bad epistemic luck and its theoretical relationship to knowledge, presupposes a certain way of thinking of justified belief. The accounts of Alexander Bird (2007), Martin Smith (2010) and Jonathan Ichikawa (draft) offer elaboration on the thought that justified belief should be thought of as would-be knowledge or potential knowledge.²¹ Smith (2010: 12) does so as follows, "[m]y belief is justified just in case I have *done my epistemic bit*—the rest, as it were, is up to

fate.” Directly after, and in a way that resonates with thinking of the knowledge undermining epistemic luck in Gettier cases as being bad rather than good, Smith writes, “[m]y belief will qualify as knowledge provided that the world obliges or cooperates—but *I* am not required to do anything further”. (The emphasis is Smith’s own in both quotes). Although the two ways resonate with one another, they can also be pulled apart, which raises the question of which provides the right answer to what separates justified belief from knowledge.

If one accepts that knowledge must be safe, regardless of whether it requires an independent condition or not, then one accepts that the world, in the broadest possible sense, needs to be a certain way in order for there to be knowledge. Given this, rather than saying an **absence** is required, a positive construal of what is required is appropriate; therefore an absence of bad luck is not what is required.

The idea of knowledge requiring the cooperation of the world fits better with such a consideration. This idea, however, does not neatly capture the theoretical relationship between the agent’s contribution and the world’s contribution that is necessary and jointly sufficient for knowledge. More precisely, while it seems correct to say that knowledge requires cooperation from the world, simply saying that does not capture the ordering of cooperation in a case of knowledge, the prior work required of the agent before what the world can contribute has a bearing on whether there is knowledge. The differences here are subtle and perhaps minor, and if one wanted to offer a modified and an enlarged account in the language of cooperation from the world, then one undoubtedly could. My theoretical preference, however, is to talk in

terms of what I call “epistemic grace” which seems to me to provide an immediate and intuitive grasp on what is required for knowledge.

While conceiving of knowledge as requiring either an absence of bad luck or cooperation from the world is intuitive and puts us on the right track, ultimately conceiving of knowledge as requiring “epistemic grace” is more explanatorily fruitful than a modified bad epistemic luck or epistemic cooperation from the world requirement. First, however, what is meant by “epistemic grace” should be explained. Epistemic grace can be understood by way of analogy with a religious conception of grace. According to a religious, synergetic account of grace, whether someone receives grace and so is saved is not just down to God, but also depends on the person acting in the right way. In the epistemic case, the thought is that it is through good epistemic work, having a virtuous belief, that one puts oneself in a position to gain knowledge, but whether one does indeed gain knowledge depends on whether one’s virtuous belief enjoys epistemic grace. Claiming knowledge to require epistemic grace reflects, as highlighted earlier, the dependence of any epistemically virtuous belief on the world in order for it to be knowledge. Tying what I’ve argued knowledge requires together, we get the analysis that:

S knows that p iff S has an epistemically virtuous belief that p and that virtuous belief enjoys epistemic grace.

§3.2 Dealing with Gettier Cases

Key to the presence of religious grace is the action of God. The presence of epistemic grace depends on whether the environment in the particular case in which a virtuous belief is formed is such that the way the belief has been formed is in fact appropriate given the environment. There are two dimensions of normativity immediately relevant to knowledge. One dimension, related to virtuous belief, is anchored in what the agent in a particular case should believe, taking into account factors such as what he knows, the evidence that is available to him in the case, his epistemic duties – say as a police witness or as a peer reviewer. The other dimension is anchored in an objective perspective, how the world is, and whether, given how the world is, the way in which the agent formed her belief in the particular case is suited to getting the truth in the environment in which the belief was formed. Epistemic grace is present when the virtuous belief is virtuously formed in such a way in the particular case that it is suited to getting truth in the environment in which the belief is formed. Saying that the way in which the agent formed her belief is **suited** to getting the truth means that the way is such that it yields a true belief in the environment; environment here refers to both the local and regional environment.

We can see how this account deals with a number of problem cases. In the Roddy case, Roddy has a virtuous belief but his belief doesn't enjoy epistemic grace, it turns out that given how the environment is, the way he formed his belief is such as to be ill-fitted to getting the truth in his environment. In the Barney case, like Roddy, Barney forms a virtuous belief, like Roddy, it turns out that the world Barney is in is such that the way he formed his belief is not a good way of getting the truth in his environment. In the Sarah case, Sarah forms a virtuous belief. It turns out that the world Sarah is in is such that the way she formed her belief is a good way of getting

true beliefs in her environment. The approach argued for gives us the right answer to the cases and does so in a well-motivated way. This way of thinking of knowledge also yields the intuitive answer that there is justified belief in brain in a vat type cases. While the agent with the experiences that she has forms the virtuous belief that she has hands, her virtuous belief does not enjoy epistemic grace – it turns out that the way her belief is formed is such that her belief is not appropriate, from the objective perspective, given her environment.

A belief that enjoys epistemic grace is not just true in most nearby worlds but it is also true in the actual world. Intuitively it wouldn't be appropriate to say that a virtuous belief enjoys epistemic grace if it weren't actually true. Therefore, a belief enjoying epistemic grace implies the truth of the belief. Similarly, if a virtuous belief is formed in such a way as to be true in the actual world but not true in most nearby worlds, then the virtuous belief doesn't meet the second normative criterion, i.e. that the virtuous belief be formed in such a way as to be well fitted to getting truth in the agent's environment, from the objective perspective. On my account, whether a belief enjoys epistemic grace depends on the belief being an epistemically virtuous belief. It is by a belief being epistemically virtuous that, so to speak, it is in the running for epistemic grace. As such, the epistemic grace requirement is not independent from the requirement that a belief be epistemically virtuous. This is appropriate given that epistemic grace has been characterised as potentially being enjoyed by beliefs that are candidates for knowledge, by epistemically virtuous beliefs.

§3.3 A Possible Worry

I've argued that an epistemically virtuous belief is necessary in order to know. But isn't there an important sense in which an epistemically virtuous belief itself is owing to epistemic grace? The same kind of question may be asked of a synergetic account of a religious conception of grace, that is, whether someone knows how to or is in a position to do the right things to put herself in a position to receive grace also seems to require grace. Rather than this being worrisome for my account, it, on the contrary, seems appropriate if we keep the ordering clear. That S may be born into an epistemic community that has good epistemic practices and so she herself is in a good position to gain good epistemic practices and so is in a position to form epistemically virtuous beliefs may itself be thought of as a matter of epistemic grace. But S, as a cognitive agent, has to be doing what it takes to have a virtuous belief if her belief is to be in the running to be knowledge.

§4.0 Conclusion

Motivated by a non-standard reading of the Gettier problem, I have articulated a conception of epistemic grace and have argued that it is a requirement for knowledge. In so arguing, coupled with the epistemically virtuous belief condition, the particulars of which were motivated in my section on testimonial justification, I have shown how such a requirement allows for satisfactory handling of both standard Gettier type cases and Barney type cases; by requiring epistemic grace we get the result that Barney doesn't know.

My paper addresses the challenge of dealing with both Barney type cases and Sarah type cases, yielding the conclusion that an agent knows a proposition iff his belief is

epistemically virtuous and that virtuous belief enjoys epistemic grace. I believe that this account of the nature of knowledge overcomes the challenges outlined at the beginning of the paper and has interesting implications for the value of knowledge.

NOTES

¹ For more on the debate, see Pritchard (2010), Greco (2010, 2011), Kallestrup and Pritchard (2012).

² Pritchard (2010: 24) describes robust virtue epistemology as approaches on which knowledge is **exclusively** accounted for as a true belief because of “epistemically virtuous belief forming processes”.

³ It is necessary for Sarah to have understanding of the concepts involved in the proposition in order to be in a position to know the proposition. That such an understanding is necessary for knowledge is uncontroversial.

⁴ This fits with Greco’s (2010: 167) claim that an agent also needs to meet a weak internalist condition in order to be in the running for knowledge; the agent must be motivated towards the truth such that if she had a reason not to believe the reliability of her way of forming beliefs, then she wouldn’t believe.

⁵ Typical cases of non-experts forming beliefs on the basis of expert testimony plausibly also meet this criterion.

⁶ By “normal adult” I just mean an adult that is typical in the relevant respects of adults in the actual world.

⁷ For a full description of the Roddy case, see §3.0.

⁸ Depending on the conception of a god in play, it might be thought either a god doesn’t form beliefs or that a god wouldn’t be lucky in gaining a true belief in the way described. For my part I’m using “god” here as a surrogate term for a being that’s massively more advanced in terms of its cognitive abilities than the normal human adult.

⁹ Greco described a case like this in a keynote address at the 2012 *Edinburgh Graduate Epistemology Conference*.

¹⁰ Consideration of such a type of case also, and relatedly, lends support to the claim that knowledge is an honorific term in the sense of attributing knowledge to someone being a praise of that person in a certain respect.

¹¹ A task I regard as remaining is explaining how testimonial doxastic justification may differ in degrees on my account, an account on which the justification condition of knowledge is satisfied by a belief being virtuous either because of the exercise of an virtuous trait or because of the exercise of a cognitive ability.

¹² For an early attempt to make good on this reading of the Gettier problem, see Goldman (1967).

¹³ Although Zagzebski (1994) considers various strategies, to rule out Gettier type cases, her own view is that they are inescapable.

¹⁴ Later in this paper I return to the claim that ordinarily having a justified belief means that knowledge has been gained. At this point I want to sketch out the alternative way of seeing the Gettier problem. I

take it that the claim is sufficiently plausible such that its inclusion does not render the sketch unsatisfying.

¹⁵ One might have a Socratic account according to which knowledge is of more value than a mere true belief, because having knowledge entails having a justified belief, and having a justified belief better enables one to hold on to knowledge over the course of time. Such an account could motivate the view that when we freeze frame matters, and so take them synchronically, then knowledge is no more valuable than true belief. Neither Greco nor Pritchard have such an account.

¹⁶ Thanks to Lee Whittington for this point and directing me to Ballantyne's paper.

¹⁷ The Barney case, which Alvin Goldman (1976) credits to Carl Ginet, is described by Pritchard (2012: 251) thus: "Using his reliable perceptual faculties, Barney non-inferentially forms a true belief that the object in front of him is a barn. Barney is indeed looking at a barn. Unbeknownst to Barney, however, he is in an epistemically unfriendly environment when it comes to making observations of this sort, since most objects that look like barns in these parts are in fact barn façades."

¹⁸ I say "might" because although McGlynn does use the phrase "uncooperative external circumstances" as an alternative to talk of a lack of cooperation from the world, as far as I'm aware he doesn't use it as a diagnosis for an alternative reading of the Gettier problem.

¹⁹ Greco (2010: 167) would claim that an agent also needs to meet a weak internalist condition in order to be in the running for knowledge; the agent must be motivated towards the truth such that if she had any reason not to believe the reliability of their way of forming beliefs, then she wouldn't believe.

²⁰ What is here written is not intended as challenging the possibility of infallibilist justification, that an agent's justification, say that p, may entail the truth of p, rather the claim is that possession of a justified belief, whether the justification entails the truth of the belief or not, is not sufficient for knowledge.

²¹ It should be noted that the debate in which Bird, Smith and Ichikawa are involved is inspired by the knowledge first approach, which eschews analysing knowledge into component parts and according to which justification should be understood in light of an understanding of knowledge. Nonetheless, the account which Smith provides of justification, is not ultimately, however, described in terms of knowledge.

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