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IS MERE TRUE BELIEF KNOWLEDGE?

ABSTRACT. Crispin Sartwell ingeniously defends the provocative thesis that mere true belief suffices for knowledge. In doing so, he challenges one of the most deeply entrenched epistemological tenets, namely that knowledge must be more than mere true belief. Particularly interesting is the way he defends his thesis by appealing to considerations adduced by such prominent epistemologists as William Alston, Laurence Bonjour, Alvin Goldman and Paul Moser, each of whom *denies* that knowledge is merely true belief. In this paper, I argue that the case Sartwell presents for his thesis fails. However, by examining why it fails, we may derive at least four important epistemological lessons: (1) being justified does not entail being able to give a justification; (2) we should distinguish between epistemic justification conceived of as *intrinsically* conducive to truth and conceived of as *extrinsically* conducive to truth; (3) we should distinguish between epistemic justification conceived of as an *essential* criterion of knowledge and conceived of as an *accidental* criterion of knowledge; and (4) epistemologists need to specify how the *telos* of inquiry involves more than the acquisition of (merely) true beliefs.

Socrates: Then tell me: what definition can we give with the least risk of contradicting ourselves?

Theaetetus: The one we tried before, Socrates. I have nothing else to suggest.

Socrates: What was that?

Theaetetus: That true belief is knowledge. Surely there can at least be no mistake in believing what is true and the consequences are always satisfactory.

Theaetetus 200d–e

Crispin Sartwell (1991, 1992) has ingeniously defended a provocative thesis, one remarkably akin (if not identical) to a thesis proposed and rejected in the *Theaetetus*. This thesis, endorsed by Skidmore (1993, 1997), Beckermann (1997), and von Kutschera (1982)¹, and which Lycan (1994)² calls “antiSocratic and outrageous”, advances the following analysis of propositional knowledge: an agent knows that *p* if and only if (i) *p* is true, and (ii) the agent believes that *p*.³

Sartwell holds, uncontroversially, that (i) and (ii) are both necessary conditions for propositional knowledge (hereafter “knowledge”). How-



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ever, in arguing that (i) and (ii) together *suffice* for knowledge, Sartwell challenges one of the most widely accepted epistemological tenets; to wit, that knowledge is something more than mere true belief.

This tenet, which we may call for ease of reference the “Insufficiency Thesis”, comes in at least three forms. The most widely accepted form takes knowledge to be, not merely true belief, but rather true justified belief (with a codicil for Gettier). A less widely accepted form takes knowledge to be true belief which satisfies some additional requirement other than justification.⁴ A third form of the Insufficiency Thesis takes knowledge to be unanalyzable in terms of belief.⁵

Since the vast majority of contemporary epistemologists take the Insufficiency Thesis for granted, Sartwell’s defense of what we may call the “Sufficiency Thesis” (that true belief suffices for knowledge) challenges what is probably a dogma of contemporary epistemology. Though I find Sartwell’s case ingenious and provocative, I think the Insufficiency Thesis is nonetheless true. Hence, my aim in this paper is to defend the Insufficiency Thesis against Sartwell’s probing challenge.

Sartwell’s case for the Sufficiency Thesis consists in trying to show that (1) various counter-examples do not refute the Sufficiency Thesis, (2) there are counter-examples to the traditional conception of knowledge, (3) the Sufficiency Thesis enjoys advantages over the traditional conception of knowledge, and (4) there are arguments (based on considerations adduced by such prominent epistemologists as William Alston, Laurence Bonjour, Alvin Goldman, and Paul Moser) that should lead us to prefer the Sufficiency Thesis to the traditional conception of knowledge. In what follows, I shall argue that, although Sartwell’s case fails and we have reason to prefer the Insufficiency Thesis to the Sufficiency Thesis, its failure brings to light a number of important epistemological lessons.

1. COUNTER-EXAMPLES TO THE SUFFICIENCY THESIS

Sartwell contends that the Sufficiency Thesis cannot be refuted by the flick of a counter-example (as many might be apt to think).⁶ He considers four supposed counter-examples in which a putative true belief is generated in a non-rational and unreliable way: (1) believing the Pythagorean Theorem is true solely on the basis of a dream; (2) arbitrarily betting that a horse will win a race which it does in fact win; (3) finding oneself disposed to assent to Goldbach’s conjecture (the story assumes it is true) as a result of a mad scientist’s manipulation of one’s brain; and (4) believing truly that the swallows have returned to Capistrano on the basis of reading tea leaves. (1991, 157–158)

I shall concede that cases (2) and (3), as Sartwell describes them, are not really counter-examples to the Sufficiency Thesis, because they are not really cases of belief at all: the notion of belief is richer than that of a mere disposition to assent to a proposition or that of a mere disposition to act as though a proposition is true. I shall also concede that, in the usual case, a lucky guess is not a belief.⁷

Having conceded all this, we are still left with (1) and (4) and with other long-standing counter-examples unmentioned by Sartwell. For instance, Plato in the *Theaetetus* (201a–d) gave the example of a jury that forms a true belief, not by considering the facts of the case, but by being swayed by the oratory of the lawyers. Socrates and Theaetetus conclude that the jury members do not know the truth, though they believe truly. Moreover, Russell (1912) gave the example (among others) of a man believing truly that the late Prime Minister's name begins with a 'B' on the basis of believing falsely that the late Prime Minister was Mr. Balfour instead of Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman. Russell also concluded that knowledge is not merely true belief. These counter-examples illustrate that the Sufficiency Thesis has the very implausible consequence that any true belief, no matter how accidentally or irrationally or unreliably formed, counts as knowledge.

To defuse the implausibility of the Sufficiency Thesis, Sartwell considers an appeal to linguistic practice, namely a supposed fact about the use of the word 'know', which he claims has been taken to support the thesis that knowledge is at least true justified belief. This supposed fact is "that it is always legitimate, when someone claims to know something, to ask how she knows it". (1991, 159) The idea here is that when someone claims to know something, it is always legitimate to ask the person for a justification (the reason why the person thinks the belief in question is true); hence, true belief alone cannot suffice for knowledge.

In response, Sartwell points out that the demand for a justification when someone makes a knowledge-claim does not by itself establish a disanalogy between knowledge and true belief, because a similar demand can be raised when someone claims to believe something truly. For instance, if someone were to claim that they believe Goldbach's conjecture is true, one might legitimately ask for the reason for this belief. He also points out that "in some cases where I make a knowledge-claim, and where the believed proposition is in no sense self-justified or *prima facie* justified, we reject the demand for justification" (*Ibid.* 160). For instance, if a child were to press us as to how we know elephants have trunks, and if she continues to press us after we have shown her pictures of elephants, cited authorities, etc., we may eventually give up and reject the demand for further

justification. As Sartwell puts it: “though this rejection may ultimately be illegitimate for conceptual reasons, it certainly does show that the actual use of the word ‘know’ is very far from clearly suggesting that every case of knowledge is a case of justified belief” (*Ibid.*).

Unfortunately for Sartwell, his attempt to defeat the counter-examples to the Sufficiency Thesis fails on two counts.

First, he conflates pragmatics with semantics. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that *claiming* to know something and *claiming* to have a true belief are similar in the following ways: (i) each implies, by conversational implicature, that the claim-maker has a reason for thinking her claim is true and (ii) in making such claims we sometimes reject the demand to adduce a justification (or at least further justification). Howbeit, given the pragmatics/semantics distinction, it does not follow that the truth-conditions of “knowing that *p*” and of “believing truly that *p*” are the same. That is, even if we grant Sartwell his point about the pragmatics or utterance-conditions of “claiming to know that *p*” and “claiming to believe truly that *p*”, the semantic point he needs to establish (namely, that “knowing that *p*” and “believing truly that *p*” have the same truth-conditions) does not follow.

Second, the primary motivation for the counter-examples does not stem from the allegedly erroneous appeal to linguistic practice mentioned by Sartwell, but rather from the intuition that it is exceedingly implausible to regard any true belief whatsoever, no matter how accidentally or irrationally or unreliably formed, as a case of knowledge.⁸ Hence, even if Sartwell had defeated the aforementioned appeal, he would not thereby have defeated the primary motivation for the counter-examples to the Sufficiency Thesis.

That these counter-examples still stand does not constitute a decisive refutation of the Sufficiency Thesis, but they give us reason to regard it as implausible. Let’s see if the rest of Sartwell’s case succeeds in overcoming this implausibility.

2. COUNTER-EXAMPLES TO THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTION OF KNOWLEDGE

In an attempt to go on the offensive, Sartwell advances a number of counter-examples to the traditional tripartite conception of knowledge.⁹

- (a) A mathematician in a flash of insight “seeing” the solution to a problem before she is able to give a proof.
- (b1) Religious faith that God exists (if indeed He exists) that is indifferent to any argument or objective evidence on either side of the question.

- (b2) A father believing truly, out of faith in his son, that the latter (who is in fact innocent) is innocent in the presence of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.
- (c) Circumstances where it is appropriate to utter 'I knew it all along'; e.g., believing truly at t that Nixon was involved in the Watergate cover-up even though a justification of this belief was not available to one at t . When at t_1 , one finds that the belief is indeed justified, one might say that one knew it all along.¹⁰

Sartwell's reason for thinking that the putative true beliefs described in his counter-examples are not justified true beliefs is that, in each case, the person in question is not able to give a justification (by this he means a reason, proof, or demonstration).¹¹

Do these putative counter-examples tell against the traditional conception of knowledge? No. Even if taken as genuine cases of knowledge, these putative counter-examples only tell against the traditional conception of knowledge when conjoined to Strong Internalism, not against the traditional conception of knowledge *per se*.

By "Strong Internalism" I mean the account of epistemic justification according to which a person's belief that p is justified if and only if the person is able to adduce a reason or proof or demonstration that p .¹² For example, your belief that gold is the element with atomic number 79 is justified if and only if you are able to adduce a reason or proof or demonstration that such is the case. Thus, when one accepts Strong Internalism together with the traditional conception of knowledge, one is committed to holding that, if someone has a true belief, but is not able to give a reason, proof, or demonstration that his belief is true, then his true belief does not qualify as knowledge. Hence, if the cases described in Sartwell's putative counter-examples are genuine cases of knowledge, then they are counter-examples to the conjunction of Strong Internalism and the traditional conception of knowledge.

But they are not genuine counter-examples to the traditional conception of knowledge *per se*, for one can accept the latter and *reject* Strong Internalism in favor of Externalism or more moderate versions of Internalism, accounts of epistemic justification that do not take an ability on the part of the believer to adduce a reason, proof, or demonstration for her belief to be a *necessary* condition of her belief's being justified (even if such an ability is a *sufficient* condition thereof).¹³ Moreover, rejection of Strong Internalism can be motivated on the ground that it sets the standard for a belief's being justified dubiously high. Consider, to take but one example, a five-year old girl who forms many true beliefs about her immediate physical environment on the basis of her sensory experience; suppose that, if asked,

she would be unable to adduce a reason or proof or demonstration for her perceptual beliefs, even if these resulted from perception and were very reliably formed. Strong Internalism commits us to holding that her perceptual beliefs are unjustified.¹⁴ By contrast, on Externalism or on moderate versions of Internalism, her perceptual beliefs could still be justified.

Let's now consider more specifically Sartwell's putative counter-examples to the traditional conception of knowledge. Regarding case (a), even if we suppose that the mathematician's pre-proof true belief counts as knowledge and that she is not yet able to adduce a proof, might not her true belief be justified because her mathematical belief-forming mechanisms are highly reliable, or be justified by her mathematical intuition? Regarding case (b1), even if we suppose that faith that God exists counts as knowledge (if indeed God exists), might not this true belief be justified by (say) religious experience, the epistemic legitimacy of which Alston (1993b) has forcefully defended? Regarding case (b2), might not the father's true belief that his son is innocent be justified on the basis of the father's past experience of his son's character and conduct? Regarding case (c), might not the true belief at t that Nixon is guilty be justified (even though one is not able to adduce a justification until t_1) because it was formed via a reliable belief-forming mechanism, perhaps an unconscious one?¹⁵

I raise such possibilities to illustrate a fundamental defect of Sartwell's putative counter-examples. The cases only seem plausible as genuine cases of knowledge if we suppose that the true beliefs in question are somehow or other non-accidental or non-arbitrary, and hence justified by something, even if the epistemic agent may not always be consciously aware of what that something is.¹⁶ Had Sartwell picked true beliefs that seemed accidental or arbitrary, his putative counter-examples would not even have a semblance of initial plausibility.

In sum, the putative counter-examples Sartwell adduces do not tell against the traditional conception of knowledge *per se*, even if they tell against the conjunction of the traditional conception and Strong Internalism. Though we have reason to reject Strong Internalism independently of these counter-examples, the latter give us another reason to reject it if we wish to preserve the traditional conception of knowledge.

3. PUTATIVE ADVANTAGES OF THE SUFFICIENCY THESIS

Sartwell thinks that the Sufficiency Thesis has the advantage (over the traditional conception of knowledge) of yielding an economical definition of knowledge. He is right that defining knowledge as mere true belief is more economical than defining it as true justified belief. But then again, defining

knowledge as mere belief would be even more economical than defining it as true belief. Economy of definition is a virtue only if the definition is sufficient.

A more fundamental advantage, claims Sartwell, is that (on his thesis) “we are under no pressure to *choose* between a broadly externalist and a broadly internalist account of justification” (1991, 163). He continues: “The pressure to choose between these views arises largely because proponents of each argues that their account is an account of the sense of justification that is *logically required for knowledge*. But justification is in *no* sense logically required for knowledge” (*Ibid.*).

I agree that we needn’t choose between a broadly externalist and a broadly internalist account of justification, for I take each as offering descriptions of epistemically desirable states of affairs; for instance, it is epistemically desirable that a person be able to adduce a reason or proof or demonstration for her belief that *p* and it is also epistemically desirable that her belief that *p* be produced in a reliably truth-conducive manner. But all this is perfectly consistent with an adherence to the Insufficiency Thesis. The pressure to choose between Internalism and Externalism stems most fundamentally from thinking that one kind of epistemic justification is the *only genuine kind* of epistemic justification or *the only or most desirable kind* of epistemic justification. And this pressure can arise for adherents of the Sufficiency Thesis and for adherents the traditional conception of knowledge. For example, someone might agree with Sartwell that knowledge is merely true belief and yet think that he must choose between Internalism and Externalism on the (mistaken in my judgment) assumption that there is only one genuine kind of epistemic justification (say, of the Strong Internalist variety). Hence, Sartwell’s claim of an advantage for the Sufficiency Thesis is off the mark.

Sartwell claims one more advantage for his thesis:

[T]he most conspicuous advantage of the present view over the traditional view is that it can allow that there is knowledge that is not constructed with the use of and cannot be manipulated with the tools provided by theories of justification. Problems are solved in a variety of ways, ranging from the reliable and rational to the perfectly inexplicable. We should not falsify our own intellectual lives in a philosophical reconstruction of how these lives are conducted by pretending that knowledge always proceeds along the orderly path of justification. (1991, 164)

These claims prove far from compelling. Adhering to the traditional conception of knowledge does not entail denying that problems are solved (and true beliefs are acquired) in a range of ways from the reliable and rational to the perfectly inexplicable, and its adherents need not take the activity of justifying to only proceed along some sort of orderly path. And

they can hold, invoking Reichenbach, that the context of justification and the context of discovery are distinct.

Moreover, who are the ones falsifying our intellectual lives here? Those who think that any true belief whatever, no matter how unjustified or groundless it may be, counts as *knowledge*? Or those who think that mere true belief does not suffice for knowledge? If anyone deserves the charge of falsifying our intellectual lives here, it seems to me to be those who call “knowledge” even the most unjustified or groundless of true beliefs.

In sum, none of the putative advantages Sartwell claims for the Sufficiency Thesis gives us a good reason to prefer it to the traditional tripartite conception of knowledge. But perhaps compelling arguments can still be adduced for this thesis. Let us next examine Sartwell’s attempt to offer some.

4. SARTWELL’S ARGUMENTS FOR THE SUFFICIENCY THESIS

We may distinguish three distinct Sartwellian arguments.¹⁷ The first two, if sound, would show that epistemic justification is not necessary for knowledge.¹⁸ The last, if sound, would show that knowledge is merely true belief.¹⁹ The first argument I shall call “the Instrumentality Argument”, the second “the Criterion Argument”, and the third “the *Telos* of Inquiry Argument”. I shall examine and evaluate each of these arguments in turn. But let us first understand Sartwell’s underlying assumptions.

Sartwell proposes (I think correctly) that “*knowledge is our epistemic goal in the generation of particular propositional beliefs*” (1992, 167). The idea here is that knowledge is the end or purpose (or *telos*) of inquiry, and by ‘inquiry’ he means the procedures that have as their goal the generation of belief with regard to particular propositions. He speaks of particular propositions to distinguish the epistemic goal of knowledge from wider-ranging goals such as wisdom or rationality which are concerned with beliefs in groups or with the entire belief structure.

Turning to epistemic justification, he proposes (I think correctly) as a sufficient condition for knowledge that a belief is justified “if it is produced (or, alternatively, could have been produced) by a correct procedure for inquiry, and to say that a belief is justified is to evaluate it positively along epistemic lines” (*Ibid.*, 168). Epistemic justification properly conceived, thinks Sartwell, can only be a *means* to knowledge or a *criterion* of knowledge; it cannot be a necessary condition for knowledge itself.

To see what leads Sartwell to this claim, we must understand his taxonomy of conceptions of epistemic justification. These, on his taxonomy, are either deontological or teleological.

A deontological conception is one which “prescribes duties and permissions in generating beliefs (and other propositional attitudes) without regard to any overarching epistemic goal” (*Ibid.*, 169). He rejects (I think rightly) deontological conceptions as being implausible: there seems to be no good reason to think we have any distinctly epistemic obligations at all in the absence of some overarching goal of inquiry.

A teleological conception is one “that prescribes some goal for epistemic activity and recognizes the legitimacy of any procedure that conduces to that goal, or alternatively, of any procedure that accords with certain rules, the observance of which in turn conduces to that goal” (*Ibid.*). Under this category falls the *injunctive teleological* conception of epistemic justification which prescribes rules, duties, or permissions which, if observed, will conduce to knowledge. Sartwell rejects (I think rightly) injunctive teleological accounts as presupposing a doxastic voluntarism (the idea that our beliefs are somehow or other under our direct voluntary control) which Alston (1989b) has shown to be untenable.

The only viable conception of epistemic justification left, thinks Sartwell, is Alston’s “evaluative” or “strong position” account according to which a belief is justified if it is based on an adequate ground (or grounds), and a ground’s adequacy is a matter of its putting one in a strong position to generate a true belief (a ground’s adequacy is a function of its truth-conducivity). Even if we are not always responsible or to be praised for being in a strong position, it is a good thing, from the epistemic point of view, to be in such a strong position.

We have now arrived at the very heart of Sartwell’s case. Sartwell quotes a wide variety of epistemologists in addition to Alston, including the foundationalist Paul Moser (1985), the (erstwhile) coherentist Laurence Bonjour (1985), and the reliabilist Alvin Goldman (1986), as endorsing the view that on any adequate account of epistemic justification, the latter should be conceived in terms of truth-conducivity.

But if it should be so conceived, then epistemic justification, Sartwell thinks, is merely a *means* by which we achieve knowledge; it is of purely instrumental value to us in our pursuit of that goal. It is not necessary (it is even incoherent) to build into the specification of a goal something which serves merely as a means of achieving it. Moreover, epistemic justification, if rightly conceived in terms of truth-conducivity, can only be, he thinks, a *criterion* of knowledge rather than one of its logically necessary conditions; that is, whether a belief is justified can be a test for whether it is knowledge, but the belief’s being justified is not a necessary condition for it to be knowledge.

He goes even further. Knowledge, the *telos* of inquiry, should be conceived as merely true belief and not as true belief based on adequate grounds (or reached from a strong position). His reason is that if the *telos* of inquiry were true belief based on adequate grounds (or reached from a strong position), the question, "Why do we want to have adequate grounds (or be in a strong position)?" ought to be misguided, given that "there is no good answer to the question of why we desire our ultimate ends" (1992, 175). But, thinks Sartwell, the question is not misguided. He adds: "we cannot even specify what it is to have adequate grounds except that these grounds tend to establish that the proposition in question is true; we cannot even specify what it is to be in a strong position except as being in a strong position to get the truth" (*Ibid.*). For Sartwell, this indicates that the *telos* of inquiry can be formulated without reference to the notion of ground or position. And so, on the only plausible conception of justification, believing the truth is in fact our overarching epistemic *telos* with regard to particular propositions, and knowledge (that *telos*) is merely true belief.

To sum up, Sartwell adduces three distinct arguments which may be stated as follows:

The Instrumentality Argument.

- First premise.* Knowledge is (identical to) the *telos* of inquiry.
- Second premise.* Epistemic justification is conducive (merely as a means) to knowledge.
- Third premise.* It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build into the definition of the *telos* of inquiry anything that is conducive (merely as a means) to it.
- Conclusion.* It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build epistemic justification into the definition of knowledge.

The Criterion Argument.

- First premise.* Knowledge is (identical to) the *telos* of inquiry.
- Second premise.* Having epistemic justification for beliefs is a criterion for whether they are knowledge.
- Third premise.* It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build into the definition of the *telos* of inquiry any criterion of it.
- Conclusion.* It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build epistemic justification into the definition of knowledge.

The *Telos* of Inquiry Argument.

- First premise.* Knowledge is (identical to) the *telos* of inquiry.
- Second premise.* The *telos* of inquiry is (merely) true belief.
- Conclusion.* Knowledge is (merely) true belief.

At first blush, these arguments seem impressive. The premises for the most part articulate assumptions which are (apparently) widely shared, and the arguments seem logically valid. So has Sartwell proven that knowledge is merely true belief? No. The arguments fail, but for non-obvious reasons. By seeing why they fail, we may derive some important epistemological lessons.

In evaluating all three arguments, I shall grant in each case the truth of their first premise. The problems with the arguments lie in their other premises. Let me begin with the Instrumentality Argument.

Two kinds of conducivity need to be distinguished: *extrinsic conducivity* and *intrinsic conducivity*. *X* is extrinsically conducive to *Y* if and only if *X* is a means to some goal or end *Y* but is not constitutive of *Y*. *X* is intrinsically conducive to *Y* if and only if *X* is both a means to some goal or end *Y* and is also constitutive of *Y*.

As an example of extrinsic conducivity, consider the use of road maps on an automobile journey to accomplish our goal of arriving at our destination. The use of road maps here is extrinsically conducive to our goal of arriving at our destination because it is a means to that goal without being constitutive of that goal.²⁰

The notion of intrinsic conducivity, because less familiar, requires further explication. Here ethics and aesthetics may be used to illuminate epistemology; in particular, insight may be garnered from the ethical theories of J. S. Mill and Aristotle. According to Mill, pleasure, health, and exemption from pain, (to give but three examples) are not merely means

to the end of happiness; “besides being means, they are part of the end” (1969, 204). In other words, they are means to, and constituents of, happiness. Or consider an Aristotelian theory of the good life according to which having close friendships and living virtuously (*inter alia*) are not merely means to, but are constitutive of, the good life.²¹ Or consider the following aesthetic example: good acting on the part of those playing the Oracle, Oedipus, Laius and Jocasta are not only means to, but are constitutive of, a beautiful performance of *Oedipus Rex*. In all three of these cases, we have exemplifications of the concept of *intrinsic conducivity*, exemplifications of some *X* being not only a means to, but constitutive of, some end *Y*.

Equipped with our distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic conducivity, we may now defang Sartwell’s Instrumentality Argument. If we read ‘conductive’ in his second premise as meaning extrinsic conducivity, then he begs the question, for he is presupposing what he purports to establish, namely, that epistemic justification is not constitutive of knowledge. But if we read ‘conductive’ as meaning intrinsic conducivity, then his second premise conflicts with the third premise and the conclusion, for if epistemic justification is constitutive of knowledge, then it is necessary and coherent to build it into the definition of knowledge. Either way, the argument turns out flawed.

Sartwell and his defenders might protest that when he uses ‘conductive’ in his second and third premises, he is using it in the same sense as those epistemologists whom he quotes (Alston, BonJour, Goldman, and Moser) who claim that epistemic justification must be truth-conductive, and so he is not really begging any question. Though I strongly doubt that this is exegetically accurate, let me grant this point for the sake of argument. Even so, Sartwell’s argument would at best constitute a circumstantial *ad hominem* against those who hold the traditional tripartite conception of knowledge *and* also hold that epistemic justification is only extrinsically conducive to knowledge. But it would not constitute a compelling argument against the traditional tripartite conception of knowledge *per se*.

Let me turn now to Sartwell’s Criterion Argument. In this connection, two kinds of criteria need to be distinguished: *accidental criteria* and *essential criteria*.

An accidental criterion is used to test whether an *Z* is an *F* by determining whether (i) *Z* has one of the typical, but non-essential, properties of an *F* or (ii) *Z* has one of the typical, but non-essential, constituents of an *F*. As an example of (i), consider how the taste of a metal might serve as an accidental criterion for determining what kind of metal it is; howbeit, the metal’s taste is not one of its essential properties. As an example of (ii), consider epithermal gold orebodies which typically, though not always,

have arsenic as a constituent; the presence of large amounts of arsenic in an orebody can thus serve as a useful accidental criterion for testing whether it's an epithermal gold orebody.

An essential criterion is used to test whether an *Z* is an *F* by determining whether (i) *Z* has one of the essential properties of an *F* or (ii) *Z* has one of the essential constituents of an *F*. As an example of (i), consider that lithium has the essential property of being the element with atomic number 3; hence, if *Z* is found to have atomic number 3, then *Z* is lithium. As an example of (ii), consider once again an Aristotelian theory of the good life according to which being healthy and having close friendships are (*inter alia*) essential constituents of the good life; hence, on this theory, being healthy and having close friendships are essential criteria for whether a life counts as a good life.

Using this distinction, we can now defang Sartwell's Criterion Argument. If Sartwell means by 'criterion' an accidental criterion, then in his second premise he is assuming that epistemic justification is not an essential constituent (or property) of knowledge, but this is precisely what he is seeking to establish. If Sartwell means by 'criterion' an essential criterion, then the second premise conflicts with the third premise and the conclusion, for if a true belief's having epistemic justification is an essential criterion for whether it counts as knowledge, then epistemic justification is an essential constituent (or property) of knowledge, and hence it is necessary (and coherent) to build it into the definition of knowledge. Either way, we are not left with a compelling argument against the traditional tripartite conception of knowledge.

That said, Sartwell's second argument can serve as a circumstantial *ad hominem* against epistemologists (if there are any) who want to hold the traditional conception of knowledge *and* take the having of epistemic justification to be merely an accidental criterion of knowledge.

Finally, let's turn to Sartwell's *Telos* of Inquiry Argument. Sartwell's defense of the second premise proves unconvincing on a number of counts; let me mention two.

First, suppose you believed that having close friendships and being healthy (*inter alia*) are essential constituents of the good life. If someone were to ask you, "Why do you want close friendships and why do you want to be healthy?", you might very well answer, "I want close friendships and want to be healthy because I would not be able to live the good life otherwise". The fact that the question is not misguided does not show that close friendships or health are not essential constituents of the good life. By parity of reasoning, just because the question, "Why do we want to have adequate grounds (or be in a strong position)?", is not misguided does not

show that having adequate grounds (or being in an epistemically strong position) is not an essential constituent of knowledge, the *telos* of inquiry.

Second, it does not follow from (i) “we cannot specify what it is to have adequate grounds except that these grounds tend to establish that the proposition in question is true; we cannot even specify what it is to be in a strong position except as being in a strong position to get the truth”, that (ii) “the *telos* of inquiry can be formulated without reference to the notion of ground or position”, unless we assume that the *telos* of inquiry is merely true belief, which is precisely what Sartwell needs to show.

Given these considerations, I find Sartwell’s defense of the second premise the opposite of convincing.

Worse yet, given certain plausible assumptions about knowledge, we have reason to think this premise is false, and hence the argument unsound. The case against the second premise, which is simultaneously a case against the Sufficiency Thesis and for the Insufficiency Thesis, may be predicated on the following plausible assumptions.

The *telos* of inquiry is to have more than mere true belief, for the goal of inquiry is to have true beliefs which enjoy epistemic security; that is, true beliefs which have a (more or less) secure connection to the truth-maker in virtue of which they are true.²² Consider, for the purpose of illustration, a detective who is seeking to know who murdered the mayor. The detective’s goal is not merely to form a true belief about the identity of the murderer, but to form a true belief about the identity of the murderer that is epistemically secure; that is, a true belief that is reliably connected to that which makes the belief true (call these the “facts of the case”). The (epistemic) goal of the detective is not to have a merely true belief about the identity of the murderer, no matter how groundless or unjustified that belief may be and no matter how accidentally or unreliably that belief may have been formed. Of course, the example of a detective is an extreme example; in the case of our run-of-the-mill beliefs about the world around us, we are not after the sort of evidence that would stand up in a court of law. But even in the case of our run-of-the-mill beliefs, the goal of inquiry is to have true beliefs that have at least *some* epistemic security; the goal is not to have true beliefs no matter how groundless or unjustified and no matter how accidentally or unreliably those beliefs were formed. If so, then the *telos* of inquiry cannot be to have (mere) true belief.

It’s also worth noting in this connection that the concept of knowledge carries an evaluative force that is not carried by the concept of mere true belief. That’s why to judge that a belief is knowledge is in some sense to judge that it is somehow or other not arbitrary or groundless or accidental or baseless; by contrast, to judge that a belief is true leaves open whether

that true belief is arbitrary or groundless or accidental or baseless. If so, then 'knowledge' and 'true belief' are neither intensionally nor extensionally equivalent. Hence, if the *telos* of inquiry is knowledge, then it cannot be mere true belief.

If my reasoning is sound, then the second premise of Sartwell's *Telos* of Inquiry Argument is false, the argument is unsound, and we have reason to reject the Sufficiency Thesis in favor of the Insufficiency Thesis. In the end, all three of Sartwell's arguments have turned out, on critical scrutiny, to be flawed.

On this note, then, I bring to an end my rebuttal of Sartwell's case for the Sufficiency Thesis and my defense of the Insufficiency Thesis. Despite the failure of Sartwell's case, we may derive from it some significant epistemological lessons.

Adherents of the traditional conception of knowledge, lest they play into Sartwell's hands, would be wise to:

- (1) reject Strong Internalism according to which being justified in believing that *p* entails being able to give a reason, proof or demonstration that *p* is the case;
- (2) explicitly distinguish between intrinsic conducivity and extrinsic conducivity, and specify how epistemic justification is *intrinsically* conducive to knowledge;
- (3) explicitly distinguish between essential criteria and accidental criteria, and specify how the presence of epistemic justification is an *essential* criterion of knowledge;
- (4) specify how the *telos* of inquiry must involve more than the acquisition of mere true belief.²³

NOTES

¹ Actually, von Kutschera (1982) arrived at this thesis before, and independently of, Sartwell. In this paper, however, I will focus only on Sartwell's defense of the thesis, and will address on another occasion the considerations adduced in its favor by von Kutschera (1982) and Beckermann (1997).

² Lycan merely offers a circumstantial *ad hominem* against Sartwell, one which I do not find persuasive. Latus (2000) and Maitzen (1995) offer brief criticisms of Sartwell's thesis, criticisms which do not address the full force and breadth of his case.

³ An interesting question posed to me by an anonymous referee of this journal concerns whether Sartwell's account of propositional knowledge (of knowing that such and such is the case), and my criticism thereof, pertain to the use or meaning of "know" in ordinary English or to some technical/specialized use or meaning in epistemology. The answer for me, and I think for Sartwell as well, is that we are concerned with elucidating what is commonly meant by "know" (more specifically: "know that"), and not just concerned

with elucidating some technical/specialized meaning or use in epistemology, e.g., how (say) Moser uses "know". However, I think Sartwell and I would agree that, given the considerable conceptual overlap between what is ordinarily meant by "know that" and what epistemologists mean by "know that", no sharp distinction can be drawn between them.

⁴ A number of philosophers deny that justification is a necessary condition for knowledge. See, for instance, Carrier (1994), Plantinga (1993), Alston, (1989a), and Dretske (1981). But none of these philosophers thinks that true belief suffices for knowledge and so each adds a third condition to the analysis of knowledge.

⁵ See Williamson (2000) for an impressive defense of this view. Williamson argues that, though belief can be a necessary (albeit insufficient) condition of knowledge, we should not conceptualize knowledge as a species of belief. I intend to address Williamson's thesis in another paper.

⁶ Sartwell's response to these counter-examples is part of his attempt to convince his readers that the burden of proof against the Sufficiency Thesis should be held in suspension.

⁷ Believing, as Sartwell rightly points out, carries with it some degree of serious commitment. Hence, a lucky guess, which presumably carries no such degree of serious commitment (if it did, it would not be a guess), does not count as a counter-example to the Sufficiency Thesis.

⁸ One need not blur pragmatics and semantics with regard to the use of the word 'know' to find it exceedingly implausible that someone has knowledge in the cases described in counter-examples (1) and (4) or in the counter-examples adduced by Plato and Russell.

⁹ Sartwell acknowledges that these counter-examples "would establish only that justification is not a necessary condition of knowledge; more would need to be said in order to do more than merely suggest that true belief is sufficient" (*Ibid.*). What he is attempting to offer with these counter-examples is not a demonstration of the truth of the Sufficiency Thesis but a plea for a suspension of the burden of proof against it.

¹⁰ Skidmore (1993), in support of Sartwell, offers a fifth putative counter-example worth considering: (d) Believing an arithmetical truth, e.g., that $2 + 2 = 4$, without being able to give a proof.

¹¹ Skidmore (1993) uses the same reasoning in denying that the true belief in his counter-example is a case of justified true belief. Notice how Sartwell and Skidmore seem to presuppose here a Strong Internalist account of epistemic justification. I shall say more on Strong Internalism shortly.

¹² See the next note for a more precise statement of Strong Internalism.

¹³ A very common way of drawing the Internalist/Externalist contrast is in terms of whether (i) the justification of a belief must be something of which the believer can in principle be aware; Internalists affirm (i), while Externalists deny (i). Adhering to what I call "Strong Internalism" entails holding not just (i) but also (ii) justification must be something propositionally structured (such as a reason, proof, or demonstration) and (iii) the believer in question must be able to adduce this justification. Bonjour (1985) offers a particularly lucid version of Strong Internalism. More moderate versions of Internalism deny (ii), (iii), or both. See Alston (1993b) for a particularly lucid version of Moderate Internalism. The most popular version of Externalism is Reliabilism, according to which a belief is justified if and only if it is produced by a reliably truth-conducive belief-forming mechanism. See Goldman (1986) for a particularly lucid version of Externalism.

¹⁴ Or consider a brain-damaged person whose perceptual belief-forming mechanisms are in perfect working order and who forms many true beliefs about his immediate environ-

ment by way of these reliable belief-forming mechanisms. Suppose that, because of his particular brain-damage, he is unable to adduce a reason, proof or demonstration for his beliefs, even if they are true, result from perception, and are very reliably formed. Once again, on Strong Internalism, we must conclude that the brain-damaged person's beliefs are unjustified. More generally, how many of our putatively justified beliefs are such that *we* (as normal, adult human beings) would be able to adduce a reason, proof, or demonstration for them? Fewer than seems reasonable (at least by the lights of those who accept Externalism or more moderate versions of Internalism).

¹⁵ Regarding Skidmore's example, might not the true belief that $2 + 2 = 4$ be justified on the basis of the self-evidence of the proposition or by the reliability of basic arithmetical belief-forming mechanisms?

¹⁶ We could put this point in Nozickian terms (e.g., in addition to being true, a true belief must track the truth in order to count as knowledge) or in Plantingan terms (e.g., in addition to being true, a true belief must be warranted to count as knowledge).

¹⁷ In explicitly distinguishing three separate arguments, my exposition of these arguments will differ somewhat from Sartwell's, for he does not explicitly distinguish three separate arguments in making his case. Distinguishing these three arguments will make the exposition and evaluation of Sartwell's case more efficient.

¹⁸ Both arguments have stronger versions according to which it is incoherent to build epistemic justification into the concept of knowledge.

¹⁹ Note that it is very important to keep in mind, in the course of the following discussion, the distinction between the claims that (i) knowledge is merely true belief and (ii) epistemic justification is not necessary for knowledge. Alston (1989a) and Plantinga (1993), for instance, do not think that epistemic justification is necessary for knowledge, but they do not think that true belief suffices. Moreover, it's a *non-sequitur* to infer (i) merely on the basis of (ii), because something other than epistemic justification, e.g., Nozickian truth-tracking or Plantingan warrant, might be what turns mere true belief into knowledge.

²⁰ Cf. Skidmore (1993, 72).

²¹ See *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII–X.

²² One way to think of theories of epistemic justification is to think of them as theories about the nature of the epistemic security of beliefs.

²³ In my paper "The *Telos* of Inquiry" (a work in progress), I consider at length the nature of the goal of inquiry. Thanks to Katherine Le Morvan, William P. Alston, Jose Benardete, Dana Radcliffe, and to two anonymous referees of this journal for very helpful suggestions and comments on earlier versions of the present paper.

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