

KNOWLEDGE BEFORE GETTIER¹

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According to a historical claim oft-repeated by contemporary epistemologists, the “traditional” conception of knowledge prevailed in Western philosophy prior to the publication in 1963 of Edmund’s Gettier’s famous three-page article “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” On this conception, knowledge consists of justified true belief. In this article, I critically consider evidence for and against this historical claim, and conclude with a puzzle concerning its widespread acceptance.

KEYWORDS: Knowledge; Justified True Belief; Gettier

“For much of the history of Western philosophy, the dominant account of knowledge was that knowledge is justified true belief. But in a short paper published in 1963, Edmund Gettier challenged this traditional account by offering a pair of hypothetical counter-examples.” Machery et al. (2015, 1)

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1. Introduction

You have probably heard this story. For several decades, many epistemologists have retold it in their books, articles, and classrooms. Composed of two key claims, it runs as follows. In the ages prior to 1963 reigned the “traditional” (or “standard” or “classical”) conception or analysis of knowledge according to which justified true belief is both necessary and sufficient for knowing that *p*. In 1963, however, Edmund Gettier, with two famous counter-examples, overturned this conception, or at least seriously challenged it, and epistemology has never been the same. We may call the first part of this story the “Knowledge Before Gettier” or “KBG” claim, and the second the “Knowledge After Gettier” or “KAG” claim.

I shall not address here whether Gettier succeeded in refuting the well-known “Justified True Belief” (JTB) conception of knowledge, nor shall I discuss the KAG claim. I aim, rather, to address an issue that has drawn comparatively little attention, namely whether the KBG claim is true historically. This claim seems to have attained the rarified status of a near-consensus view in contemporary epistemology as evidenced by how often epistemologists assert or repeat it while adducing (usually) no or (occasionally) little textual evidence for it.

A few have dissented from this near-consensus. Kaplan (1985), Butchvarov (1989), Plantinga (1990), Turri (2015), Antognazza (2015), and Dutant (2015) stand out for their dissent.² While Plantinga and Turri each evince scepticism about the KBG claim, each does so briefly without any sustained consideration of the textual evidence

² Although Pasnau (2013) nowhere even mentions Gettier nor directly addresses the KBG claim, he provides an indirect form of such dissent in arguing that the history of philosophy “shows that the modern preoccupation with the threshold separating knowledge from mere true belief is anomalous, in that epistemology has traditionally focused more on the ideal case than on defining boundaries” (1016).

for or against it. Butchvarov contends that the “traditional conception of knowledge” was not the JTB conception, but was “Cartesian” in taking knowledge to entail the “unthinkability of error.”³ He provides however no textual evidence for his sweeping generalization. Kaplan calls into question the historical importance of Gettier’s counter-examples and argues that neither Plato nor Descartes held the JTB conception of knowledge, but he neither examines the textual evidence for the KBG claim, nor considers counter-examples other than from Plato and Descartes.

Antognazza and Dutant each offer markedly more developed dissenting cases. Antognazza, in discussing how non-anachronistic engagement with its history benefits philosophy itself, argues that the JTB conception of knowledge is not traditional at all. She does so by giving us grounds for being sceptical that it accurately reflects the views advanced by Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and the Neoplatonists, Aquinas, and seventeenth-century philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, and Leibniz. Dutant also rejects the KBG claim, calling it “the Legend.” He does so by raising pertinent questions (such as: Why it is so hard to find statements of the JTB analysis before the mid-twentieth century? Why did nobody notice Gettier-style cases), and by sketching a case that what properly merits the title of “traditional conception of knowledge” is what he calls “Classical Infallibilism” according to which one knows that p iff one has a belief that p bearing a discernible mark of truth.

In rejecting the KBG claim, Antognazza and Dutant each marshal compelling evidence (particularly from prior to the 20th century) that I do not aim to rehash. I aim

³ As he puts it: “contrary to the common opinion today, it is the Cartesian conception that was the traditional conception of knowledge, espoused, for example, by Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Hume, at least insofar as knowledge was taken to require the impossibility of mistake, or infallible apprehension, or indubitability” (145). In what works these philosophers espoused this view he does not tell us, nor does he consider the textual evidence that has been adduced for the KBG claim.

rather to help fill a lacuna in the literature by critically examining textual evidence adduced for the KBG claim by Gettier and by others and by considering whether counter-examples from the works of significant pre-1963 twentieth century Anglo-American philosophers give us grounds for being sceptical about it.⁴ While a key objective of mine is to ascertain a historical truth concerning epistemology, my interest is not solely historical, for considering whether pre-Gettier (1963) epistemologists conceived of knowledge in ways other than the JTB conception can help make us *now* more cognizant of alternative possibilities for conceiving of knowledge. We are liable to be unaware of such possibilities if we take the KBG claim for granted as has so often been done in epistemology since the appearance of Gettier (1963).

In light of these considerations, the following structure informs the rest of this paper. In section 2, I present some representative statements of the KBG claim, distinguishing three main versions of it. In section 3, I examine textual evidence adduced in Gettier (1963) for this claim. In section 4, I consider textual evidence adduced by Shope (1983) and Plantinga (1990), the only two works in the literature other than Gettier (1963) that provide such evidence.⁵ In section 5, I discuss conceptions uncited by Gettier, Shope, and Plantinga that can be seen as falling in the ballpark of the JTB conception of knowledge. In section 6, I take stock of my findings, noting the relative paucity of textual evidence for the KBG claim. In section 7, I consider counter-examples to this claim from pre-1963 conceptions of knowledge that can be found in

⁴ I limit myself to textual evidence. An interesting question that I cannot pursue here concerns the extent to which the KBG claim may be supported or undermined by evidence from oral history that might be recorded from those who lived in the pre-Gettier (1963) period. Recording such evidence before those who lived through that period pass away—many of them already have—would be a worthwhile project.

⁵ Plantinga (1993) repeats the same points and evidence concerning the KBG claim as found in Plantinga (1990).

works of significant twentieth century Anglo-American philosophers. I conclude in section 8 with a puzzle concerning the KBG claim's widespread acceptance.

2. Representative Statements of the KBG claim

Statements of the KBG claim all have in common the notion that, prior to Gettier (1963), the traditional (or “standard” or “classical” or “dominant” or “widely held” or “generally accepted” or “almost universally agreed”) conception or analysis of knowledge (that *p*) was in terms of justified true belief. The extent of the pre-Gettier (1963) period is demarcated in three main ways in the literature: on the first it extends all the way back to Plato, on the second to Descartes, and on the third to the first half of the twentieth century.⁶ We attend to these below.

2.1. Back to Plato

Moser (1987) extends the pre-Gettier (1963) period all the way back to Plato:

Since the time of Plato's *Meno*, at least, philosophers have been vexed by the question of what exactly propositional knowledge is. The most troubling question is: What are the logically necessary and sufficient conditions for one's having propositional knowledge? Also since Plato's time, it has been widely held by philosophers that propositional knowledge requires justified true belief. (...) However, since Edmund Gettier's celebrated counterexamples of 1963, philosophers generally have held that

⁶ Note that the KBG claim is frequently asserted without clear specification of its historical extent. For instance, Moshman (2014, 12) writes: “Prior to 1963, it was generally agreed that belief, truth, and justification are each necessary and sufficient for knowledge. Then, Edmund Gettier (1963) published a three-page article that challenged this consensus by presenting two examples of justified true belief that do not qualify as knowledge.” Similar assertions can be found in Goldman (1967, 357), Skyrms (1967, 373), Moser et al (1998, 96), Sosa (1991, 35), Williams (2002, 131), Williamson (2000, 8), DePoe (2011, 41), Beilby (2005, 74), Douven (2005, 207), and Conee (2015, 21), among others.

the standard analysis needs modification (91).⁷

2.2 Back to Descartes

BonJour (2010) extends the pre-Gettier (1963) period not back to Plato but to Descartes (or at least to his time):

It is reasonable to say [that] some version or other of the traditional conception of knowledge was taken for granted, often without very much in the way of specification, by virtually all philosophers seriously concerned with knowledge in the period from the time of Descartes until the middle of the twentieth century. In 1963, however, Edmund Gettier published a remarkably short (three-page) paper that seemed to many to show clearly that the traditional conception was at the very least seriously incomplete and quite possibly even more badly mistaken (39-40).

2.3. Back to the Early 20th Century

Pollock (1986) extends the pre-Gettier (1963) period to the early part of the 20th century (and not, at least explicitly, to either Plato or Descartes):

Consensus is rare in philosophy, but from the early part of this century until 1963 it was almost universally agreed that knowledge was the same thing as justified true belief. That is, that a person knows something, *P*, if and only if (1) she believes it, (2) it is true, and (3) her belief is justified. But in 1963, Edmund Gettier published his seminal paper “Is Justified

⁷ Other examples of the KBG claim extending the pre-1963 period all the way back to Plato can be found in McGlynn (2014, ix), Villoro (1998, 6), Kraft (2012, 9), Bechtel (2013, 23), and Brandom (2001, 97), among others.

True Belief Knowledge?” in which he showed to everyone’s astonishment that this identification is incorrect (9).⁸

Notice that each of these three versions of the KBG claim specifies a significantly different swath of history. In each case, the author provides no textual evidence from anyone who putatively held the JTB conception of knowledge. To be sure, these examples stem from works focused on contemporary epistemology, not on the history of the field. Even so, it’s remarkable how the KBG claim is thus asserted more or less as something “every epistemologist knows” and so not in need of any textual evidence as to its truth. But is it true?

3. Gettier’s Evidence⁹

When we look back *now* to his famous 1963 article, it’s striking that Gettier *never* claimed to be offering counter-examples to the supposedly “traditional” or “standard” or “classical” conception of knowledge as justified true belief.¹⁰ He begins by claiming *only* that “[v]arious attempts have been made in recent years to state necessary and sufficient

⁸ Baergen (1995, 108) makes a similar claim extending the KBG claim to the first sixty years of the 20th century.

⁹ An interesting question, posed to me by this journal’s editor, concerns whether Russell (1912, 131f) anticipated Gettier’s counter-examples. Russell there envisaged two scenarios. The first was of someone having a true belief that the late Prime Minister’s name begins with a “B” on the basis of believing falsely that his name was Mr. Balfour. The second was of someone having a true belief that a battle has turned out a certain way, a belief based on reading about the battle in a newspaper report that correctly anticipated its outcome before a telegram giving this result had actually been received. It seems to me clear from the textual context that Russell intended his counter-examples to be directed against conceiving of knowledge as mere true belief, but not as justified true belief. It’s noteworthy for instance that he gave his examples after writing: “At first sight, we might imagine that knowledge could be defined as ‘true belief.’” For helpful discussion, see Griffin (2015). By my lights, Gettier’s originality lay in formulating counter-examples explicitly directed at the conception of knowledge as *justified* true belief. Interestingly, Gettier wrote his doctoral dissertation on Russell’s theories of belief at Cornell, and was no doubt influenced by, and intimately familiar with, the latter’s works.

¹⁰ The textual evidence from Gettier (1963) does not establish DePoe (2011, 41)’s contention that Gettier aimed to “disprove the traditional account of knowledge” or Nagel (2014, 48)’s contention that Gettier aimed to “challenge the leading theories of knowledge in his day.”

conditions for someone's knowing a given proposition" (121)¹¹ What were these attempts? Gettier explicitly cited only *two*.¹²

The first was from Chisholm (1957, 16) where we find stated the following necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge that *p*:

S knows that P IFF (i) S accepts P, (ii) S has adequate evidence for P, and (iii) P is true.

The second is from Ayer (1956, 34) where we find stated the following necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge that *p*:

S knows that P IFF (i) P is true, (ii) S is sure that P is true, and (iii) S has the right to be sure that P is true.

Gettier (121, n. 1) also suggested that Plato seemed to be considering some such definition at *Theaetetus* 201, and perhaps accepting one at *Meno* 98.

But were any of the examples cited by Gettier of the putative JTB conception of knowledge? Here we may distinguish between "clear-cut" and "in the ballpark" examples. The former are cases where someone explicitly analyzes knowledge in terms of truth, belief, and justification. The latter are cases where someone analyzes knowledge in terms of truth, but instead of belief uses different but related notions (such as acceptance or being sure), and instead of justification uses different but related notions (such as the right to be sure). Interestingly and perhaps surprisingly given the subsequent widespread acceptance of the KBG claim, it's not clear that Gettier (1963)

¹¹ By "knowing a given proposition" Gettier presumably meant knowing that *p* where *p* is some proposition.

¹² We should keep in mind that Gettier published this article in *Analysis*, a journal devoted to short discussions and one that does not cover the history of philosophy. Given this journal's strictures, Gettier could not thoroughly discuss who allegedly held the JTB conception of knowledge.

provided any “clear-cut” example of the JTB conception of knowledge; his examples prove at best to be “in the ballpark.” We turn to them below.¹³

3.1. Gettier’s Example from Chisholm (1957)

While the JTB conception defines knowledge in terms of *belief*, Chisholm (1957, 16-17) defined it in terms of *acceptance*, taking the latter to be equivalent to assuming and as intending to express doubt or hesitation. In considering whether knowing that *h* is true entails believing that *h* is true, Chisholm distinguished three senses of ‘belief’: one according to which *S*’s belief that *h* is true entails that *S* does not know that *h* is true; a second according to which ‘I believe’ entails ‘I know’ or at least ‘I have adequate evidence’; and a third according to which *S*’s belief that *h* is true is nothing more than assuming or accepting that *h* is true in a way that ordinarily intends to express doubt or hesitation (17). He explicitly rejected the idea that knowing that *h* is true entails believing that *h* is true in the first two senses, but accepted it in the third sense (17).

So one problem with reading Chisholm (1957) as offering a clear-cut example of the JTB conception of knowledge has to do with how, on his conception, knowing entails believing only if the latter is understood as being nothing more than accepting or assuming. The problem arises insofar as we accept the quite intuitive notion that the believing requisite for knowing cannot be merely accepting or assuming, for it requires a

¹³ Recall that in considering them, my aim is *not* to show whether Gettier’s counter-examples succeed in refuting the views he sets out to refute, but whether he provides any clear-cut examples of the JTB conception of knowledge.

degree of conviction in the truth of a proposition (although not necessarily complete conviction) that accepting or assuming do not.^{14,15}

Another problem arises insofar as we hold the intuitive notion that, on a JTB conception, *S*'s knowledge (that *p*) is a species of *S*'s belief (that *p*): such knowledge is belief that meets the conditions of being true and being justified for the believer.¹⁶

¹⁴ See Sartwell (1991) and Le Morvan (2016).

¹⁵ Other reasons may tell against granting a sense of 'belief' on which belief is merely assuming or accepting. One is that believing does not seem to be under direct voluntary control as accepting or assuming seem to be. Two related considerations also merit note. First, as van Fraassen (1980) argues, it's possible to accept a proposition without believing it (*e.g.*, a scientist not believing that a theory is true, but accepting it as a basis for further research). Second, as Bratman (1999) argues, it's possible to believe a proposition without accepting it (*e.g.*, believing that a ladder is stable without accepting that it is until one has checked its stability).

¹⁶ It is true that the JTB conception is typically stated as a bi-conditional such that *S* knows that *p* iff (i) *S* believes that *p*, (ii) *p* is true, and (iii) *S* is justified in believing that *p*. Does it follow from this, as a referee has objected, that these conditions are symmetrical such that knowledge is not a species of belief? The referee adds that if "the analysis makes it natural to take knowledge to be a species of belief, then it makes it natural to take it as a species of truth, or of justification. But it doesn't." The referee, it seems to me, is mistaken, for at least some bi-conditionals (particularly non-arbitrary ones) may naturally be read asymmetrically as having a genus condition together with one or more species conditions. For instance, consider the bi-conditional: *X* is a triangle iff (i) *X* is a polygon, (ii) *X* has exactly three sides, and (iii) *X* has exactly three angles. In the case of the latter bi-conditional, it's natural to read (i) as specifying a genus condition, and (ii) and (iii) as specifying species conditions, for a triangle is a polygon that has exactly three sides and exactly three angles. Similarly, a natural reading of the JTB bi-conditional is to take it as specifying that knowledge is belief that is true and justified for the believer, where (i) specifies a genus condition and (ii) and (iii) specify species conditions, for if knowledge is justified true belief, then knowledge is belief that is true and justified for the believer. The referee also objects that "Chisholm's criterion for the species claim is roughly this: if B is a species of A then predicates suitable for A are suitable for B. (If knowledge was a species of belief, then since we can say that one believes hesitantly we could say that one knows hesitantly.) If that's the criterion then we should definitely not think that an 'iff' claim suggests a species claim. For instance you graduate only if you go to college; you may graduate poorly; but you can't go 'poorly' to college. So endorsing the JTB analysis doesn't make it natural to endorse the species claim in the strong sense that Chisholm targets." The referee, it seems to me, is mistaken once more. The Chisholmian claim (as expressed by the referee) that "if B is a species of A, then predicates suitable to A are suitable to B" is fallacious as can be shown with counter-examples. For instance, the predicate "can be four-sided" is suitable to polygons, but not suitable to triangles, a species of polygons. Or consider the following counter-example: writing is a species of the genus communicating, but just because predicates such as "orally" or "non-verbally" are suitable to communicating but not to writing, it does not follow that writing is not a species of the genus communicating. In general, it's fallacious to conclude that *x* is not a species of *y*, just because predicates suitable to *y* are not suitable to *x*. Accordingly, the fact that some predicates are suitable to belief but not to knowledge does not show that knowledge is not a species of belief. As for the referee's "college" example, it is not an example of a bi-conditional, and moreover graduating poorly is not a species of the genus going to college, so the example fails to provide analogical support for the thesis that knowledge is not a species of belief.

Chisholm (1957), however, categorically rejected the notion that knowledge is a species of belief:

we must not think of knowing as being, in any sense, a “species of” believing, or accepting. A man can be said to believe firmly, or reluctantly, or hesitatingly, but no one can be said to know firmly, reluctantly, or hesitatingly...The relation of knowing to believing, in the present sense of “believe,” is not that of falcon to bird or of Airedale to dog; it is more like that of arriving to traveling. *Arriving* entails *traveling*—a man cannot arrive unless he has travelled—but arriving is not a species of traveling (17-18).

Thus if we read Chisholm (1957) as offering a JTB conception of knowledge, we have to read him as offering a variation of it at odds with the notion that knowledge is a species of belief, a notion that seems quite intuitive if knowledge really is justified true belief.¹⁷

Given these problems with reading Chisholm (1957) as offering a clear-cut example of the JTB conception of knowledge, it’s more accurate to hold that he offers an “in the ballpark” example thereof.

3.2. *Gettier’s Example from Ayer (1956)*

Ayer (1956) defines knowledge in terms of *p*’s being true, *S*’s being sure that *p* is true, and *S*’s having the right to be sure that *p* is true. Notice however that this definition includes *being sure* that *p* is true. Although being sure presumably entails believing, the

¹⁷ Even if a referee is right in contending that “Chisholm wouldn’t think that endorsing the JTB claim would commit him to take knowledge to be a species of belief,” what this shows is that Chisholm endorsed a variation of the JTB conception that is intuitively odd (at least to me).

latter need not entail the former insofar as it's possible to believe that a proposition is true without being sure that it is true. Put in other words: while believing and being sure both involve conviction in the truth of a proposition, they differ insofar as being sure involves a higher degree of conviction than belief requires.¹⁸

Second, Huemer (2002, 435) has pointed out that when “Ayer says that *S*, in order to know that *p*, must have ‘the right’ to be sure that *p*, what Ayer means is that we, the people *attributing* knowledge to *S*, are thereby expressing a sort of attitude of approval towards *S*'s belief.” As Huemer notes, what Ayer meant by ‘*S* has the right to be sure that *p*’—understood in light of his emotivist account of the meaning of evaluative terms—is not equivalent to ‘*S* is justified in believing that *p*’ (435-436). If Huemer is correct, then Ayer should not be read as analyzing knowledge in terms of justification.

Thus, Ayer's definition of knowledge, like Chisholm's fails (although for different reasons) to yield a clear-cut example of the JTB conception of knowledge; it is more accurately classified as an “in the ballpark” example thereof.

3.3. *Gettier's Examples from Plato*

As for Gettier's brief references to the *Theaetetus* and the *Meno*, consider the following.

In *Theaetetus* 201, Socrates does consider Theaetatus's proposal that true belief (or opinion) with a λόγος (logos) (orthê doxa meta logou) is knowledge.¹⁹ Whether a true belief's having a logos is equivalent to its being justified is an exegetical question too large to resolve here.²⁰ If we understand a logos in this context as an account or

¹⁸ Conviction is scalar and comes in degrees: being sure that *p* requires a very high degree of conviction that *p* is true, whereas one can presumably believe that *p* without being sure that *p*.

¹⁹ He considers this definition only after he considers and rejects previous proposals: that knowledge is perception (151e-187a) and that knowledge is true belief or opinion or judgment (187b-201c).

²⁰ See Gerson (2006) and Antognazza (2015) for defenses of the thesis that the Platonic conception of knowledge is not in terms of justified true belief. See by contrast Fine (1990) and (2004) for grounds for taking it to be a JTB conception.

explanation, rather than a justification, then this passage does not give us an example of a JTB conception of knowledge. In any case, Plato does not depict Socrates as accepting the definition of knowledge as true belief with a logos, for the dialogue ends inconclusively after considering and rejecting three accounts of what this logos could be.

As for Gettier's suggestion that Plato perhaps accepted the JTB account of knowledge at *Meno* 98, once again what Socrates considers there is true belief (or right opinion) with a logos, and the question he considers is why knowledge is more valuable than true belief. He suggests that when we work out the logos of a true belief through the process of recollection, this belief is thus tethered to the mind and so becomes knowledge.²¹ That such "tethered" true belief *becomes* knowledge does not entail that knowledge is justified true belief.²² In any case, even if Plato took knowledge to be true belief with a logos, it remains unclear (or at least controvertible) that this equates to *justified* true belief. We should rather take having a logos as a mere analogue of being justified and classify Plato's view as being merely "in the ballpark" of the JTB conception.

4. Shope's Evidence and Plantinga's Evidence

We saw above that Gettier does not provide a clear-cut case of anyone who actually held a JTB conception of knowledge. But surely, one might think, such cases can readily be found elsewhere in the literature. Finding such cases, however, proves surprisingly

²¹ As Kaplan (1985, 352) notes: "As is well known, the doctrine of recollection is invoked earlier in the *Meno* to explain how we can seek to identify (and inquire into the nature of) Platonic abstract objects such as virtue. The doctrine states that such inquiry is actually an attempt at recollecting an innate knowledge of these objects—knowledge present in us at birth. It is knowledge of abstract objects such as virtue whose explication Plato is seeking, and it is only the innate stable knowledge of such objects that Plato seems willing to call 'knowledge.'"

²² Worth noting is that if the "Two Worlds" interpretation of Plato is correct, knowledge and belief in the *Republic* V-VII have different objects: forms and necessary truths in the case of knowledge, and physical objects and imitations of them in the case of belief.

difficult. Two rare cases that can be found in the literature, however, are Shope (1983) who contends that Kant represents a major figure who proposed a version of this conception, and Plantinga (1990) who cites C.I. Lewis as another.²³ We turn to both below.

4.1. Shope's Example from Kant

Shope (1983, 17-18) cites the following passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason* in making his case that Kant adhered to the JTB conception of knowledge:

The holding of a thing to be true, or the subjective validity of the judgment, in its relation to conviction (which is at the same time objectively valid), has the following three degrees: *opining*, *believing*, and *knowing*. *Opining* is such holding of a judgment as is consciously insufficient, not only objectively, but subjectively. If our holding of the judgment be only subjectively sufficient, and is at the same time taken to be objectively insufficient, we have what is termed *believing*. Lastly, when the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient both subjectively and objectively, it is *knowledge*. The subjective sufficiency is termed *conviction* (for myself), the objective sufficiency is termed *certainty* (for everyone). There is no call for me to spend further time on the explanation of such easily understood terms. (A822, B850)

²³ Shope (1983) reiterates and discusses Gettier's examples from Chisholm, Ayer, and Plato. The only example he provides that was not mentioned by Gettier is from Kant. Plantinga (1990), like Gettier (1963), takes Ayer (1956) to have also offered a JTB conception of knowledge, but we have seen above how this may be a problematic reading of Ayer's view.

Shope claims that Kant's definition of knowledge incorporates a belief condition because "it requires that one's holding the judgment to be true involves subjective sufficiency" (18). He claims it incorporates a justification condition because "it requires objective sufficiency, which is defined shortly before this passage: the grounds of a judgment are said to be objectively valid when the judgment is 'valid for everyone, provided only he is in possession of reason' (A820, B848), and the validity is said to concern whether the judgment has the 'same effect on the reason of others' (A821, B849)" (18). He claims it incorporates the truth condition because Kant generally uses 'objectively valid' to indicate that something is related to an object, and takes truth to be the agreement of knowledge with its object, and thus "intends the requirement of objective validity to involve the truth of one's judgment" (18-29).

Whether Shope is correct in interpreting Kant as advancing a JTB conception of knowledge raises exegetical questions too large to resolve here.²⁴ However, I can sketch why I find his interpretation problematic. As articulated in A820/B848 – A821/B849, Kant advances a conception of knowledge on which it is the holding of a judgment that is subjectively sufficient (held with conviction) and objectively sufficient (held with certainty). Belief by contrast is the holding of a judgment that while subjectively sufficient is objectively insufficient, while opining is the holding of a judgment that is both subjectively and objectively insufficient. If knowledge is a form of belief, as it is on the JTB conception, then it is objectively insufficient *qua* Kant's conception of belief AND objectively sufficient *qua* his conception of knowledge. Thus if Kant subscribed to the JTB conception of knowledge, he held an incoherent account according to which

²⁴ For helpful discussion, see Chignell (2007a) and (2007b). See also the discussion in Dutant (2015), particularly notes 58-62. According to Dutant, it's an open case whether Kant subscribed to the JTB conception or to Classical Infallibilism.

knowledge is at once both objectively insufficient and sufficient, and I see no good reason to ascribe to him such an incoherence.

A way to avoid such incoherence is to understand Kant as contrasting knowledge with belief (and with opinion), not as taking knowledge to be a form or species of the latter. On the Kantian view thus understood, knowledge (essentially) has what belief and opinion (essentially) lack: certainty in the case of belief, and both conviction and certainty in the case of opinion. While knowledge, belief, and opinion each involve the holding of a judgment, knowledge is not a form of belief any more than belief is a form of opinion. Just because knowledge has subjective sufficiency as does belief, it does not follow that knowledge is a form of belief.

Accordingly, it is not clear (or incontrovertible) that Kant advances a clear-cut conception of the JTB conception of knowledge at least in the passages Shope cites. On the contrary, Kant can be plausibly read there as advancing a conception on which knowledge is *not* a form of belief. To be sure, if following Shope one takes Kant's notion of "judgement held with subjective sufficiency" to be an analogue of a belief condition, his notion of "validity" to be an analogue of a truth condition, and his notion of "objective sufficiency" to be an analogue of a justification condition, then a case can be made for thinking that Kant offers a view tantamount to an "in the ballpark" JTB conception of knowledge. But this view does not seem to cohere with an idea that Kant also seems to be advancing to the effect that knowledge (essentially) has what belief (essentially) lacks (namely, objective sufficiency).

4.2. Plantinga's Example from C.I. Lewis (1946)

Turning to Plantinga's example from C.I. Lewis (1946), we finally arrive at our first (and only) clear-cut cited example of the JTB conception of knowledge prior to Gettier,

though ironically one not mentioned by Gettier himself. Plantinga (1990, 46) correctly cites Lewis as defining knowledge as “belief which not only is true but justified in its believing attitude.” The context in which we find this passage makes it even clearer:

it is requisite that knowing be an assertive state of mind; it must intend, point to, or mean something other than what is discoverable in the mental state itself. Further, this believing attitude lays claim to truth: it submits itself to appraisal as correct or incorrect by reference to this something which it intends. Its status as knowledge is, by such intent, not determinable through examining the state of mind itself but only by the relation of it to something else. And again, no believing state is to be classed as knowledge unless it has some ground or reason. It must be distinguished from false belief but also from that which is groundless and from the merely fortunate hazard of assertion. Knowledge is belief which not only is true but is also justified in its believing attitude (1946, 9).

5. Russell, Woozley, and Price on Knowledge

We have seen above that in Lewis (1946) we find a clear-cut example of a pre-Gettier (1963) philosopher who held the JTB conception of knowledge. Though uncited by Gettier, Shope, and Plantinga, three others held conceptions that (arguably at least) fall in the ballpark of JTB conception, and in fairness to the KBG claim, they deserve notice. These are Russell (1912), Woozley (1949), and Price (1969)—the latter being the publication of Price’s *Gifford Lectures* given in 1960, thus predating Gettier (1963).²⁵

²⁵ A referee has pointed out to me that it is unclear that Russell, Woozley, and Price use the notion of having sufficient evidence in a normative sense whereas being justified is normative. The latter point is debatable as not all accounts of justification (*e.g.*, externalist ones) are normative. In any case, I shall

5.1. Russell (1912)

Russell (1912) offered what is (arguably at least) a version of the JTB conception when, in the context of discussing intuitive knowledge (knowledge of self-evident truths) and derivative knowledge (knowledge inferred from intuitive knowledge), he wrote:

it is evident that, both as regards intuitive knowledge and as regards derivative knowledge, if we assume that intuitive knowledge is trustworthy in proportion to the degree of its self-evidence, there will be a gradation in trustworthiness, from the existence of noteworthy sense-data and the simpler truths of logic and arithmetic, which may be taken as quite certain, down to the judgments which seem only just more probable than their opposites. What we firmly believe, if it is true, is called *knowledge*, provided it is either intuitive or inferred (logically or psychologically) from intuitive knowledge (139).

If we read Russell as taking a true belief that is intuitive (self-evident) or inferred from intuitive knowledge as entailing that it is justified, then it counts as an “in the ballpark” JTB conception of knowledge.²⁶

argue that *if* their sufficient evidence conditions entail a justification condition, then they offer “in the ballpark” JTB conceptions of knowledge. The referee also notes that Gettier explicitly targets a notion of justification compatible with false belief whereas having conclusive evidence presumably is, so either Gettier disagrees with Russell, Woozley, and Price on what justification requires or else they are talking about different things. Unfortunately, resolving this exegetical question requires more space than I have available. I think the first option is correct, but at any rate I am making the conditional point that *if* their sufficient evidence conditions entail a justification condition, Russell, Woozley, and Price offer “in the ballpark” JTB conceptions of knowledge.

²⁶ Russell (1913) noted that “unfortunately the definition of knowledge is very difficult, and it seems highly probable that it must involve self-evidence” (156). Defining self-evidence as “a property of judgments, consisting in the fact that, in the same experience with themselves, they are accompanied by acquaintance with their truth” (166), Russell averred that by means of this definition, we have a “means of making a beginning of knowledge as opposed to mere belief; for the definition shows that self-evident judgments are by nature incapable of falsehood, and therefore deserve the name of knowledge” (166). As a referee has pointed out to me, it is not clear that Russell (1912) would have granted that justified false belief is

5.2. *Woozley (1949)*

Woozley (1949) advanced an account of knowledge that also falls (arguably at least) in the ballpark of the JTB conception. According to Woozley, knowledge “is not something generically different from belief,” but is “the limiting case of belief, something the belief becomes when the evidence is good enough” (186). On his analysis of knowledge: “[k]nowing p will consist of surely believing p where p is true, and the belief being due to having conclusive evidence for p . Having conclusive evidence for p will consist either in explicitly attending to it and consciously treating it as evidence, inferring p from it, or in being able, if called on, to attend to it explicitly, etc. in the possibility of inferring p ” (186). It should be noted that what Woozley meant by “surely believing” is believing with full conviction (the highest degree of belief). Surely believing entails believing, so even if believing does not entail surely believing, Woozley’s view entails a belief condition (albeit quite a stringent one). Moreover, if his condition of having conclusive evidence for believing that p entails being justified in believing that p , then his view entails a justification condition (albeit quite a stringent one once more). It thus seems reasonable to classify his account as an “in the ballpark” JTB conception of knowledge.

5.3. *Price (1969)*

Price distinguished between derivative and immediate knowledge that p , the former being inferential knowledge and the latter non-inferential knowledge—knowledge

possible if a belief’s being self-evident entails that it is justified. It should be noted that Russell (1926) later evinced considerable scepticism concerning whether knowledge can be adequately defined in terms of belief. By contrast, Russell (1948) took it to be clear that “knowledge is a sub-class of true beliefs” (154). But when considering whether sound evidence must be added to true belief to have knowledge, Russell contended that there are “various unsatisfactory features in this traditional doctrine, though I am not sure that, in the end, we can substitute anything better” (155). It’s interesting to notice how Russell here describes as “the traditional doctrine” the idea that knowledge is true belief with sound evidence. A referee has brought to my attention that, earlier in the book (141), Russell took Descartes, Hegel and Dewey to be proponents of three points of view (foundationalist, coherentist, and pragmatist) on how to understand the “sound evidence” requirement for knowledge.

“verified or falsified directly by experience” (89). Immediate knowledge that *p*, Price averred, “cannot be defined in terms of belief” and is a kind of knowledge for which it is “pointless to ask for reasons” (89). Thus, Price did not hold that a JTB conception properly applied to *all* knowledge that *p*. When considering, however, the conception of knowledge on which it consists in “having a firm belief on sufficient evidence (for sufficient or conclusive reasons) with regard to a proposition which is in fact true,” Price wrote that we “must admit that there are some sorts of knowledge, or some usages of the word ‘know’, to which this definition does apply very well: that is, we must admit that there are some sorts of knowledge which can be defined, with suitable precautions, in terms of belief” (91).²⁷ These precautions are that the following conditions be satisfied: (a) that the proposition believed be true, (b) that the believer have conclusive reasons for it, and (c) that he believe it with full conviction (91). Note that condition (c) here entails a belief condition for knowledge (although quite a stringent one). If (b) is taken as entailing a justification condition (although again quite a stringent one), Price’s conception of *inferential* knowledge counts as an “in the ballpark” JTB conception.

6. Taking Stock

In considering Gettier’s original examples of the JTB conception of knowledge, we have found (rather surprisingly) that none is a clear-cut example thereof, nor is Shope’s example from Kant. Depending however on how we interpret them, each may be read as falling in the ballpark of this supposedly traditional conception. The only clear-cut example is Plantinga’s from C.I. Lewis (1946). Though uncited by Gettier, Shope, and Plantinga, Russell (1912), Woozley (1949), and Price (1969) offered conceptions of

²⁷ Derivative knowledge is his main example of such knowledge.

knowledge that (arguably at least) also fall in the ballpark of the JTB conception of knowledge.

At this point, you may have noticed something curious about this exegetical situation: if the KBG claim were true as appears widely believed by post-1963 epistemologists, one would expect that cited (or at least citable) examples would abound of pre-1963 philosophers adhering to the JTB conception of knowledge. Instead, we find the opposite: a paucity of cited (and citable) clear-cut examples of philosophers who actually adhered to this conception.

Interestingly, the poverty of the evidential basis of the KBG claim reveals itself even more when we read works published just a few years prior to the publication of Gettier's article. Consider two cases in point.

In Thomas Hill's comprehensive *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* published in 1961, in which he surveys and critically discusses theories of knowledge from the late 19th century to the late 1950s, it's fascinating to find Hill making no mention *at all* of the JTB conception of knowledge, neither in the index nor in the body of the text. Even when discussing C.I. Lewis's account, Hill does not discuss it as a JTB conception, but rather focuses on how, for Lewis, the function of knowledge is the prediction and control of future experiences for the attainment of what is valued.²⁸ Hill emphasizes throughout this work knowledge of things in the world, and does so without the post-Gettier (1963) preoccupation with knowledge that *p*.

As another case in point, take Harold Titus's introductory textbook *Living Issues in Philosophy* of which the 3rd edition appeared in 1959. Though he discusses the nature

²⁸ See in particular Chapter 12 of this work.

of knowledge in some depth, like Hill he emphasized knowledge of things in the world, not knowledge that *p*. There again we find no mention of the JTB conception of knowledge either in the index or in the body of the text.

We would not expect the JTB conception to go completely unmentioned in such texts if it truly were, as on the KBG claim, the “traditional” or “standard” or “classical” conception of knowledge prior to Gettier. Yes, Plantinga’s example of C.I. Lewis does give us *one* clear-cut case of someone who adhered to this conception (and a few others fall in its ballpark), but this constitutes quite a poor evidential basis for the generalization contained in the KBG claim. Worse yet, a number of historical examples give us grounds for being sceptical about this generalization. To these we turn next.

7. Some Historical Counter-Examples

As I noted earlier, Antognazza (2015) and Dutant (2015) each marshal compelling evidence (particularly from prior to the 20th century) for rejecting the KBG claim, and I do not aim to rehash their evidence here. I aim rather to attend to some important historical counter-examples from works of pre-Gettier (1963) twentieth century Anglo-American philosophers. I do not pretend, of course, to offer definitive interpretations of the historical views discussed below, and I acknowledge that, as with almost any philosophical view, there may be rival interpretations. I aim to show, however, that there are significant grounds for being sceptical that these views can be properly characterized as versions of the JTB conception of knowledge. These views include those of Cook Wilson, Prichard, Coffey, Dewey, Kneale, Ryle, and Austin.

*7.1. Cook Wilson (1926)*²⁹

²⁹ The editor of this journal has helpfully pointed out to me that this work of Cook Wilson’s was published ten years after his death in 1916, and was based on lectures he had been giving since the 1890s. The editor notes that Cook Wilson’s conception of knowledge as *sui generis* was quite dominant in the early

Cook Wilson (1926) argued that no account of the genus consciousness, and its species knowing, can be given in terms of anything but themselves. As he put it:

The attempt in such cases to give any explanatory account can only result in identical statements, for we should use in our explanation the very notion we professed to explain, disguised perhaps by a change of name or by the invention of some new term, say cognition or some similar imposture (39).

For Cook Wilson, knowledge being *sui generis* cannot be defined in terms of belief:

“Belief is not knowledge and the man who knows does not believe at all what he knows; he knows it” (100). It follows from his position on the *sui generis* nature of knowledge that Cook Wilson did not adhere to the JTB conception; his position thus provides a counter-example to the KBG claim.

7.2. Prichard (1909)

In his critical discussion of Kant’s epistemology, Prichard (1909) took Kant to task for (among other things) implicitly supposing that the nature of knowledge could be explained by means of something other than itself.³⁰ As he put it:

The fact seems to be that the thought of synthesis in no way helps to elucidate the nature of knowing, and that the mistake in principle which

twentieth century, and that he influenced a host of later philosophers, especially at Oxford, including Prichard, Ryle, Price, and Austin although the latter never acknowledged it. This view has also informed the views of McDowell and Williamson. See Kalderon and Travis (2013). As to the question of the origins of Cook Wilson’s view, the editor suggests that it may go all the way back to Aristotle as all the early twentieth century philosophers in Oxford emerged through studying ‘Literae Humaniores’ which involved a close reading of Aristotle in particular.

³⁰ Prichard had been a student of Cook Wilson’s at Oxford, and Prichard’s work in epistemology bears Cook Wilson’s influence. See Marion (2010).

underlies Kant's view lies in the implicit supposition that it is possible to elucidate the nature of knowledge by means of something other than itself. Knowledge is *sui generis* and therefore a 'theory' of it is impossible. Knowledge is simply knowledge, and any attempt to state it in terms of something else must end in describing something which is not knowledge (245).

Given his conception of the *sui generis* nature of knowledge, and hence of its indefinability in terms of anything but itself, Prichard did not adhere to the JTB conception of knowledge, and his position provides a counter-example to the KBG claim.

7.3. Coffey (1917)

Like Prichard (1909) whom he approvingly quotes, Coffey (1917) adhered to the view that knowledge was of a *sui generis* nature. In Coffey's words:

By *cognition* (L. *cognitio*) we mean simply the act or process of knowing. By *knowledge* we mean the result of this process, or sometimes—according to the context—the process of cognition itself...We may notice here that knowing, cognition, knowledge, is *sui generis*, that therefore it cannot be properly speaking defined, or explained in terms of anything other than itself...Nothing is more intimate to us than knowing. Hence there is no necessity for defining it even if we could; but we cannot (25).

We thus find in Coffey (1917) yet another counter-example to the KBG claim.

7.4. Dewey (1938)

Dewey did not defend a conception of knowledge according to which it amounts to justified true belief; he defended rather the thesis that “knowledge is the outcome of competent and controlled inquiry” (8). As he puts it:

The position here taken holds that since every special case of knowledge is constituted as the outcome of some special inquiry, the conception of knowledge as such can only be generalization of the properties discovered to belong to conclusions which are outcomes of inquiry. Knowledge, as an abstract term, is a name for the product of competent inquiries. Apart from this relation, its meaning is so empty that any content or filling may be arbitrarily poured in. (8)

He adds:

The general conception of knowledge when formulated in terms of the outcome of inquiry, has something important to say regarding the meaning of inquiry itself. For it indicates that inquiry is a *continuing* process in every field with which it is engaged. The "settlement" of a particular situation by a particular inquiry is no guarantee that *that* settled conclusion will always remain settled. The attainment of settled beliefs is a progressive matter; there is no belief so settled as not to be exposed to further inquiry. It is the convergent and cumulative effect of continued inquiry that defines knowledge in its general meaning.

Given Dewey’s conception of knowledge as “the convergent and cumulative effect of continued inquiry,” we have reason to be sceptical that he adhered to the JTB conception of knowledge.

7.5. Kneale (1949)

Cook Wilson's view of the *sui generis* nature of knowledge is echoed by Kneale (1949) who wrote:

The result of our analysis is a very simple account of the relations between knowledge and belief. In the past some philosophers have grouped these together as kinds of judgment, and they sought vainly for differentiae by which to distinguish them. Others, protesting against this confusion, have assumed that there are two or more faculties (loosely called cognitive) whose exercise may lead to the affirmation of a proposition. According to the view presented here, knowledge is *sui generis* and the two varieties of belief are to be defined by reference to it. (18)

Kneale continues:

The belief we call taking for granted is behaving as though one knew when one does not in fact know, and the belief we identify with opinion is either knowing or taking for granted probability relations. Each of the terms 'knowledge', 'taking for granted', and 'opinion' can, of course, be used either in an actual or a dispositional sense, but the dispositional sense must be defined by reference to the actual sense. Actual knowledge, that is to say, noticing or realizing, is therefore the fundamental notion in the study called theory of knowledge. (18)

Given how he took knowledge to be *sui generis* and took belief to be definable in terms of it (and not the other way around), Kneale did not subscribe to the JTB conception of knowledge.

7.6. Ryle (1949)

Ryle (1949), though discussing knowledge that *p* in some depth, nowhere advocated a conception of it as justified true belief that *p*, and this work provides grounds for being sceptical that he adhered to this conception. He contended that epistemologists are apt to “perplex themselves and their readers over the distinction between knowledge and belief,” and that part of this “embarrassment is due to their supposing that ‘know’ and ‘believe’ signify occurrences, but even when it is seen that both are dispositional verbs, it has still to be seen that they are dispositional verbs of quite disparate types” (133).

According to Ryle:

‘Know’ is a capacity verb, and a capacity verb of that special sort that is used for signifying that the person described can bring things off, or get things right. ‘Believe’, on the other hand, is a tendency verb and one which does not connote that anything is brought off or got right.(...)Roughly, ‘believe’ is of the same family as motive words, where ‘know’ is of the same family as skill words; so we ask how a person knows this, but only why a person believes that (134).

Ryle conceded that belief that *p* and knowledge that *p* “operate, to put it crudely, in the same field,” for “the sorts of things that can be described as known or unknown can also be described as believed or disbelieved, somewhat as the sorts of things that can be manufactured are also the sorts of things that can be exported” (134). Moreover, belief

“might be said to be like knowledge...in that it is ‘propositional’; but this, though not far wrong, is too narrow” (134). For instance, a person who knows that the ice is thin and cares that it is so will be apt to act and react in ways similar to those of someone who believes that the ice is thin, but “to say that he keeps to the edge, because he knows that the ice is thin, is to employ quite a different sense of ‘because’, or to give quite a different sort of ‘explanation’, from that conveyed by saying that he keeps to the edge because he believes that the ice is thin” (135).

As seen above, Ryle’s tendency to repeatedly contrast knowledge and belief gives us grounds to be sceptical that he adhered to the JTB conception of knowledge.³¹

7.7. *Austin (1961)*

Austin (1961) nowhere endorsed the JTB conception of knowledge, and raised considerations that give us grounds for being sceptical that he accepted it.

First of all, Austin noted what he took to be an oddity of understanding the concept of knowledge in terms of the concept of belief. He pointed out that we do not ask the same questions with regard to knowledge statements and belief statements, and different forms of challenge pertain to each:

There is a singular difference between the two forms of challenge: ‘*How* do you know?’ and ‘*Why* do you believe?’ We never seem to ask ‘*Why* do you know?’ or ‘*How* do you believe?’ And in this, as well as in other respects to be noticed later, not merely such other words as ‘suppose’, ‘assume’, &c., but also the expressions ‘be sure’ and ‘be certain’ follow the example of ‘believe’, not that of ‘know’ (46).

³¹ According to the editor of this journal, Ryle once described himself as “a fidgety Cook Wilsonian” and had been much influenced by Cook Wilson.

Moreover, Austin contended that if he challenged a knowledge claim of yours by asking ‘How do you know?’ he thereby challenges the existence of your alleged knowledge, but if he challenged a belief statement of yours, he does not thereby challenge the existence of your belief (46).

Austin also took ‘I know’ to be analogous to ‘I promise’ in that both do not describe an action, but rather *perform* an action. “When I say ‘I know’, I *give others my word: I give others my authority for saying* [italics in original] that ‘S is P’” (67). “To suppose that ‘I know’ is a *descriptive phrase* [italics in original], is only one example of the descriptive fallacy, so common in philosophy” (71).

In light of these considerations, we have ample reason to be sceptical that Austin accepted the JTB conception of knowledge.³²

8. Concluding with a Puzzle

We have seen above that the KBG claim, though widely held by contemporary epistemologists since Gettier (1963), enjoys surprisingly little in terms of support from textual evidence, and important grounds based on historical counter-examples call its generalization into doubt.

This state of affairs thus presents us with what we may call the “Puzzle”: why has this poorly supported historical claim attained the rarified status of a near-consensus view in contemporary epistemology, a field renowned for its lack of consensus? In a related vein, how did it become the case that, as Plantinga (1990, 45) once put it, the “inherited lore of the epistemological tribe” is that the “JTB account enjoyed the status

³² In fact, Green (1971), in arguing that knowledge cannot be understood in terms of belief, took Austin (1961) to be arguing for the same view.

of epistemological orthodoxy until 1963, when it was shattered by Edmund Gettier with his three-page paper ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?’

I do not have space here to solve the Puzzle, but can say that it merits considerably more attention than it has so far enjoyed in the literature.³³ In light of the considerations adduced in this article, I can also say that we have good reason to think that those who accept the KBG claim do so without sufficient appreciation of the variety and diversity of pre-Gettier (1963) conceptions of knowledge. As Dutant (2015) has noted, the KBG claim (or the “Legend” as he calls it) is not widely accepted because it has been powerfully defended (it has hardly been defended at all), but rather because no better picture has been available. More attention needs to be devoted to providing one.³⁴ It seems clear that epistemologists would benefit from more fully and non-anachronistically engaging with the history of their field, a point that Antognazza (2015) has wisely emphasized.

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³³ See though Turri (2015) for a critical discussion of the major role that Gettier cases have played in Anglo-American analytic epistemology over the past fifty years. His discussion has some bearing on understanding how the KBG claim became entrenched in the field. See also Dutant (2015) for a discussion of how he thinks the “Legend” became so entrenched.

³⁴ Dutant (2015) and Antognazza (2015) are a helpful beginning.

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