

JUSTIFICATION AND TRUTH CONDITIONS IN THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE

Dale JACQUETTE

ABSTRACT: The traditional concept of propositional knowledge as justified true belief (JTB), even when modified, typically in its justification condition, to avoid Gettier-type counterexamples, remains subject to a variety of criticisms. The redefinition proposed here puts pressure more specifically on the concept of truth as redundant in light of and inaccessible beyond the most robust requirements of best justification. Best-J is defined as justification for believing in a proposition's truth where there is no better countermanding justification for believing instead the proposition's negation. A pragmatic perspective argues that truth is unnecessary and unattainable as a condition of knowledge beyond the requirement for practically attainable best justified belief. The key argument with respect to the eliminability of the truth condition in favor of a properly tailored justification condition is that there is nothing we do or can do in trying to satisfy the truth condition for knowledge beyond considering the epistemic merits of the justification that a believer accepts in coming to believe that the proposition is true.

KEYWORDS: Gettier problem, epistemic justification, knowledge, pragmatic epistemology, truth

Ob ich etwas *weiß*, hängt davon ab, ob die Evidenz mir recht gibt, oder mir widerspricht. (Whether I *know* something depends on whether the evidence backs me up or contradicts me.) — Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit* §504

1. Knowledge as Justified True Belief

The conceptual analysis of propositional knowledge as justified true belief (JTB) originates with Plato's dialogues *Meno* and *Theaetetus*.¹ The definition admittedly captures something essential to the concept of knowledge, but remains problematic in any recognizable Platonic formulation, even when it is modified, generally by qualifying justification condition J as a reformulated J*, in a fortified (J*TB) analysis intended to avoid Gettier-type counterexamples.²

¹ Plato, *Meno* 97e-98a; *Theaetetus* 201d-e.

² Edmund L. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121-123. Roderick M. Chisholm typifies the reaction to Gettier's counterexamples to the traditional analysis of the concept of knowledge in strengthening the justification condition in JTB to 'nondefective'

We may motivate the introduction of a justification condition in analyzing the concept of knowledge, not by invoking Socrates' metaphor of true belief as a valuable statue that runs away if it is not chained down by good reasons, but by considering epistemic scenarios in which a proposition is believed that may also happen to be true, but that intuitively does not constitute knowledge. A gullible person who sincerely believes what he or she is told by a fortune teller, even if the proposition turns out to be true, is not generally regarded as having knowledge. Something more is needed, a distinctively epistemic requirement that we should support our belief with justification, proof, evidence, warrant, reasoning, and the like, in order to know that a given proposition is true.

A major difficulty in the Platonic JTB or J*TB definition of knowledge is the inclusion of a truth T condition independently of the best justification of which we are capable, and of the comparatively weak, even when Gettier-proofed, unqualified justification condition J or J*. I propose eliminating truth T as a *condition* of knowledge altogether in favor of a strengthened *best justification* (Best-J) condition, defined as a humanly attainable requirement to provide a standard for a belief's constituting knowledge in a strengthened Best-JB definition of knowledge. By the proposed definition, the best justified (Best-J) beliefs are beliefs in the truth of whatever propositions we are (a) justified in believing to be true, (b) when there is no better countermanding justification for their negations. We can think of Best-J as a suggested replacement for both J or J* and T in an analysis in an analysis of propositional knowledge. Among its other virtues, as explained below, Best-J offers an intuitively satisfying forestallment of Gettier counterexamples. The idea is not merely to replace J*TB by Best-JTB, but rather by Best-JB, eliminating T altogether, and thereby effectively reducing the contribution of the truth condition in the traditional and Gettier-proofed definitions of knowledge to best justification condition Best-J. The account preserves truth as a *concept*, even if it does not make truth a *condition* of knowledge. It is moreover compatible with the anti-skeptical expectation that truth is a potentially attainable goal for epistemic justification. If we choose, we can preserve the traditional concept of truth in an analysis of knowledge as Best-JB. We are free to suppose that truth is nothing more than the descriptive aptness of a proposition linguistically representing a corresponding existent truth-making state of affairs. Truth is nevertheless a semantic concept, rather than epistemic in

justification. Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd edition (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1989, previous editions 1966, 1977), 90-99.

the usual sense; so arguably, as others have also charged, truth philosophically has no business as a condition of knowledge.³

Significantly, in our actual epistemic practice, we do not invoke the transcendental truth of our beliefs as a condition of knowledge. We do not need to treat our knowledge of truth as existing independently of, and as though we had direct access to what is true and what is false above and beyond our judgments as to which propositions admit of the best available justification. Justification does the heavy lifting in discovering knowledge and supporting knowledge claims. Truth as a property of propositions transcending what we can learn from the best justification practically available to us is a condition that can only be satisfied by a godlike transcendent intelligence. If we want to bring epistemic theory into line with epistemic practice, then arguably we should give up justification-independent and justification-transcending truth as a requirement for knowledge in favor of another condition that accomplishes the same purpose as that of best justification. By trading in JTB or J*TB for Best-JB, we bring epistemology back down to earth, eliminating truth as a condition of knowledge independently of the best justification of which we are capable, but without stepping away from the concept of truth as an attainable goal in the pursuit of best justification. Then we can actually acquire knowledge of as well as belief in true propositions, for a recommended use of 'knowledge' and its cognates in a nonredundant subcategorization of true as well as best justified belief. Part of the point is that we also thereby avoid *epistemic hypocrisy*, failing conscientiously to practice what we preach in demanding truth of knowledge while relying entirely on assessments of best justification to settle all questions as to a proposition's truth.

2. Knowledge and Knowledge Claims

John Hick writes in *Faith and Knowledge: A Modern Introduction to the Problem of Religious Knowledge*: "knowledge cannot (by definition) be erroneous; but it is always possible for a knowledge claim to be erroneous."⁴

³ Ansgar Beckermann makes this point eloquently in "Wissen und wahre Meinung," in *Die weite Spektrum der analytischen Philosophie: Festschrift für Franz von Kutschera* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 24-43. Jay F. Rosenberg quotes and translates the most telling passages from Beckermann, p. 42 in his *Thinking About Knowing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 202-207. That Beckermann's position remains at odds with both Peircean pragmatic epistemology and the analysis of knowledge as Best-JB is indicated in this selection, p. 41 (cited in Rosenberg, *Thinking About Knowing*, 204): "Truth is the goal, and justification only a means or a criterion. What we aspire to are *true beliefs*. Whether a belief is *justified* interests us only because as a rule its truth is not obvious."

We distinguish between being epistemically justified in making a *knowledge claim*, in circumstances where we have the right epistemically to claim that we know something, and the *content of the knowledge claim* itself being epistemically justified. It appears that we can only make progress toward deciding what is actually known and what is only believed or claimed to be known on grounds of best justification. Pragmatically speaking, the way we actually validate knowledge claims in practice is by appealing to whatever we take to be the best justification for the truth of whatever propositions are supposed to be known. If the evidence bears out the knowledge claim, as Wittgenstein maintains in the motto quoted at the beginning of the essay, then we judge it to constitute genuine knowledge. If not, then we withhold classifying the belief as something that is actually known.

As we define best justification, it is relative ultimately to the available explanations and the state of scientific findings and method at a particular time. There are cultural historical conditions both for being justified in making a knowledge claim and in judging whether or not a knowledge claim is true, whether or not the conditions for genuine knowledge are actually satisfied. Thus, I may be epistemically justified in 1830 in claiming to know that space is Euclidean, rectilinear, and infinitely extensive and divisible, even if the proposition considered more timelessly or in light of today's improved relativity physics based on non-Euclidean geometry, is no longer epistemically justified. Responsible epistemic practice dictates that finite epistemic agents like ourselves should avoid claiming access to a proposition's transcendental truth, independently of whatever best justification we are actually capable of achieving, in order to support the belief that a proposition for which knowledge is claimed is actually true.

We seek knowledge by trying to justify a proposition's truth or falsehood (the truth of its negation), in the course of which we strive to accept only the most strongly justified beliefs. When we are confident in our ability to provide convincing epistemic justifications for our findings, then we publish knowledge claims to the effect. If there is no stronger countermanding evidence for the negation of what we claim to know, then we are justified at least in making such knowledge claims and judging them to be true. We never break outside the bounds of knowledge *claims* anyway, even if with excellent justification we claim to know that we know that a relevant proposition and corresponding knowledge claim is true. If stronger countermanding evidence should arise, as judged, for example, by the evolving standards, theories, methods and instrumentalities of

⁴ John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge: A Modern Introduction to the Problem of Religious Knowledge*, second edition (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 208.

epistemically self-improving science, then it may turn out that an original knowledge claim is false after all, that the subject did not possess genuine knowledge, and that our judgments upholding the truth of the knowledge claim at the time have also failed to be supported in the long run by what later appears to be better justification.

If we are serious about the practical requirements of knowledge and knowledge claims, and hence about the available justifications for each, then we should not lose sight of the epistemic fallibility of finite epistemic agents. What any finite epistemic agent believes to be true, no matter how ardently, authoritatively or forcefully expressed, need not actually be the case. Absolute transcendent truth, independent of the best justification of which we are capable, is a condition suitable only for a godlike subject's knowledge. We approach truth by managing our best justified beliefs expressed also as knowledge claims. If immediate access to justification-transcending truth were within the reach of any cognitive subject, the effect would be to make any justification condition obsolete in defining the concept of knowledge, reducing knowledge to true belief. An ideal godlike epistemic agent with direct justification-independent access to a proposition's truth never stands in need of any type of justification in making and assessing the truth or falsehood of knowledge claims.

3. Fallibility and Pragmatically Best Justification

An alternative to JTB and J*TB analyses of the concept of knowledge involves a more exact definition of best justification or Best-J. The concept is intended to provide a strengthening or qualification of justification condition J in the traditional Platonic definition of knowledge, and of condition J* in beefed-up J*TB variations designed to forestall Gettier counterexamples to JTB. Like the original analysis, these sometimes kludgy stop-gate efforts still require truth T as a condition for knowledge.

To avoid epistemic hypocrisy, to bring epistemology back down to earth, to make knowledge claims more susceptible of confirmation and disconfirmation, and for the sake of still further advantages, we eliminate truth as a condition of knowledge and replace it with best justification, defined in this way:

Best-J: Doxastic subject *S* is best (albeit defeasibly) justified (Best-J) at time *t* in believing proposition *p* =df (a) *S* is justified at time *t* in believing proposition *p*, and (b) there is at *t* no countermanding better or stronger justification available in practice for any doxastic subject to disbelieve proposition *p* or any proposition invoked in justifying belief in the truth of proposition *p*, or to believe instead the negation of proposition *p* or at least one proposition invoked in justifying belief in the truth of proposition *p*.

Best justification is the best epistemically that we can do, and therefore the best that we should be expected to do. The revised analysis of the concept of knowledge as Best-JB depends on the best justification for belief in a proposition's truth. It demands strong justification for a subject to believe that the proposition is true, if the belief is to constitute knowledge and for the corresponding knowledge claim to be correctly judged true, and where there is no better justification practically available at the time to support the contrary evaluation that the relevant proposition is false.

Accordingly, we do not need to speak of best justification in a sense requiring successively more tests or iteratively collaborative evidence of a proposition's truth in an endless pursuit of the absolutely 'best' justification. Such expectations can only be associated instead with another more ideal sense of the concept than we propose. We consider instead the qualitative condition of satisfying the highest prevalent standards of justification practically available to a subject in arriving at a knowledge claim. We are then invited to entertain our own knowledge claims or meta-claims about the truth or falsehood of these knowledge claims. The point is that Best-J must actually be practically available to the epistemic subject in issuing or validating a knowledge claim. Impractical extremes of justification imagined are excluded by the concept of best justification. We say only that a proposition is best justified if it is justified in the usual sense and there is no better justification for its negation. That is a demanding but still attainable condition that we can and often do satisfy in our practical knowledge verifying and amplifying activities.

We decide upon the best epistemic justification in practice as whatever we deem to provide the maximally practically attainable reason for accepting a proposition as true. Otherwise, we risk the possibility that there may exist better justification for the proposition's negation. We are well advised in seeking Best-J beliefs to take as our guide the most strongly corroborated work in observational and experimental science and proto-science. The concept of truth is needed for the concept of knowledge, even if truth is eliminated as a condition of knowledge, since truth is plausibly identified as the goal at which epistemic justification aims.

The revised Best-JB (minus T) analysis of the concept of knowledge must itself be true if it is to have any ultimate philosophical significance. But as for any other knowledge claim, we are not required to establish its truth independently of its corroboration by the best justification of which we are capable, in order to know, if and when we reach that point, that the Best-JB analysis of the concept of knowledge is adequate. A pragmatic perspective argues that transcendent truth is unnecessary and unattainable as a condition for knowledge anyway, because, as

the terminology indicates, it looks beyond the requirements for a best or maximally practically attainable justified belief. What from a pragmatic perspective we do not strictly need in knowledge theory, on the contrary, is the pretense of applying a justification-independent, justification-transcending condition of absolute truth in order for a belief to constitute genuine knowledge.

4. Argument for Truth in Knowledge

It might nevertheless be objected that truth is strictly needed for the concept of knowledge. The argument is that if we do away with the truth condition, then by default we allow false propositions to count as knowledge.

The criticism can be answered in several ways. First, we emphasize that, when in doubt about a proposition's truth, rational epistemic agents inevitably appeal to the best justification available for a proposition's truth or that of its negation, and not to any justification-independent grasp of the proposition's justification-transcending truth. We might say as shorthand in rejecting a knowledge claim that the proposition in question is not true. What we mean by this, upon consideration, and if we are entitled to assert it at all, is generally that there is no best justification for the proposition. In that case, then, there is either nothing we are willing to count as justification for the proposition, or there is better countermanning justification instead for the proposition's negation, in support of its negation.

The fortune teller example is a good case in point. We visit the fortune teller, who, thanks to our gullibility, instills in us a belief in the truth of a certain proposition that turns out actually to be true, but which does not seem to constitute knowledge. Under traditional JTB, the fortune teller case ought to count as knowledge, because there is a true belief for which there is justification in the watery sense that the fortune teller's presumed authority offers a reason to believe. It is just not very good justification or a very good reason for accepting the belief. The traditional JTB definition seems to imply that fortune teller inspired belief is knowledge, because it does not discriminate between different kinds or degrees of justification, but requires the knower only to be in possession of 'justification' without further qualification. The alternative is to argue that consulting a fortune teller does not constitute justification of any kind or in any sense for belief in a prophesied proposition's truth. To exclude fortune telling as epistemically justificatory is to rely on potentially controversial substantive background assumptions contradicting the thesis that fortune tellers have knowledge of the future. More significantly, it is also to depart from the informal description of epistemic justification as having a reason for believing a

proposition's truth. For the gullible person in the relevant sense has a reason for believing what the fortune teller says. If you ask the gullible believer, "Why do you believe that?" or "What is your reason for believing that?," the gullible believer will answer, "Because the fortune teller told me it would happen." The answer is likely to be widely accepted at face value as an epistemic justification, and not misconstrued as an effort at identifying the belief's origin or cause. It is a reason for the gullible person to believe, although it is evidently not a very good reason; a justification, but not a good justification and certainly not the best.

Is there then better justification for the negation of whatever proposition the fortune teller has induced the gullible believer to accept? The way in which common sense treats the example is to argue that fortune tellers generally are unreliable in forecasting the future. When they get it right, in any case, there is no connection between whatever hocus-pocus they perform and the state of the world from which knowledge of a future state might be more reliably predicted. If some people could simply 'see' into the future, finding patterns in tea leaves or in the depths of a crystal ball, then our negative assessment of the justification status of fortune telling might be softened. Since we do not believe this on independent grounds, we generally reject fortune telling as epistemically justificatory. If we consider the chain of reasons by which the gullible believer tries to justify the fortune teller's deliverances, then, even if the proposition which the fortune teller foretells happens to be true, we reject the mere fact that a fortune teller has made such a pronouncement as Best-J best justification for the proposition's truth. The gullible believer's chain of reasoning is this:

- (1) The fortune teller said that a certain future event E will occur.
- (2) Fortune tellers reliably accurately predict the future.
- (3) I am justified in believing that event E will occur, more or less as the fortune teller said.

The epistemically weak but inferentially indispensable link in the chain is (2). If we think that there is better justification for the negation of (2), for the proposition instead that fortune tellers do not reliably accurately predict the future, then we will have cut the ground from under the gullible believer's justification. In criticizing the fortune teller example we are not obligated to raise doubts about the best justification of the whatever it is that the fortune teller has prophesized, which we agree all along will turn out accidentally to be true. We will then have shown that there is better justification for the negation of something essential to what the gullible believer believes by reference to which belief in the content of the fortune teller's pronouncement is finally supposed to

be justified, and hence by extension that the gullible believer lacks Best-J best justification for believing in the truth of the hypothetically but accidentally true proposition that event E will occur.

Appealing to best justification is always good enough in making and judging knowledge claims. We can do no better in practice when questions of truth arise. We seek and can reasonably expect no other arbiter of whether or not a given proposition is true than whether or not it satisfies a best justification condition. This makes the T truth condition in JTB and J*TB not only redundant but pretentious and hypocritical in light of the Best-J condition. Unlike ideal godlike epistemic agents, we finite thinkers, independently of the best methods of justification, have no direct access to the justification-transcending truth of propositions involved in justifying and evaluating knowledge claims. The semantic truth condition T in JTB, or the Gettier-resistant J*TB analysis of the concept of knowledge, is objectionable as well because it does no distinct work apart from that shouldered by a properly interpreted and properly applied epistemic justification condition. We address these difficulties in the proposed Best-JB analysis of the concept of knowledge by substituting the best justification Best-J condition for both unqualified J or Gettier-resistant justification condition J* and truth condition T in JTB and J*TB. We defend the pragmatic Best-JB analysis as offering significant improvements over ideal Platonic-Socratic JTB and Gettier-proofed J*TB definitions of the concept of knowledge.

5. Advantages of Best-JB over JTB and J*TB

Altogether, we can call upon at least eight theoretical advantages of Best-JB over JTB and J*TB in defending the analysis of propositional knowledge as Best-JB. We consider the following reasons as contributing to the philosophical case for Best-J and Best-JB, by virtue of: (1) Ockham's razor. (2) Avoiding epistemic hypocrisy in theory and practice. (3) Projecting a practically attainable ideal of best justification, and hence of knowledge according to the analysis, bringing epistemology pragmatically back down to earth. (4) Making justification scientific. (5) Avoiding what we shall call flimsy Borgesian 'anthill' justifications. (6) Avoiding Gettier counterexamples without *ad hoc* provision. (7) Explaining reversals of knowledge claim validations. (8) Offering at least an equally good solution to the problem of universal ignorance when compared with condition T in JTB and J*TB.

Dale Jacquette

Advantage 1: Ockham's Razor

By eliminating truth condition T from JTB and J*TB, and replacing justification condition J or J* with best justification condition Best-J, the Best-JB analysis of the concept of knowledge is conceptually more economical and arguably simpler in its analysis and application. We aim at truth in knowledge-seeking, even when it proves to be a moving target. For finite epistemic agents the implication is that, informally speaking, we can only seek the best justification for a proposition's truth of which we are practically capable in our historical circumstances. Knowledge, in the sense of what we are best justified in claiming to know, is made relative in this way to the developmental state of our science and philosophy of scientific methodology. We can be justified in making a knowledge claim under these circumstances when we believe ourselves to be in possession of best justification for a particular proposition, even if it should eventually turn out that our belief that we know and what it is that we believe or claim ourselves to know are not sufficiently supported by what turns out afterward to be best justification, when scientific methods of justification are improved over time.

Advantage 2: Avoiding Epistemic Hypocrisy

By replacing conditions J and T in JTB (and J* in J*TB) with Best-J in Best-JB, we also avoid epistemic hypocrisy. Epistemic hypocrisy is preaching something other than we practice in defining or otherwise explaining what it takes for a belief to constitute knowledge. If we preach *ex cathedra* that *truth* is a *condition of knowledge*, but our actual epistemic practice does not involve direct access to justification-independent, justification-transcending truth, then we are guilty, as I define the phrase, of epistemic hypocrisy.

Best-JB avoids epistemic hypocrisy by eliminating justification-transcending truth condition T from the analysis of the concept of knowledge and replacing it along with J or J*. It does so in principled recognition of the fact that knowledge for pragmatically-contexted finite epistemic agents never reaches beyond the strongest historically available epistemic justification to directly embrace justification-independent, justification-transcending JTB or J*TB truth condition T. We avoid epistemic hypocrisy in the intended sense by not pretending that knowledge entails the satisfaction of a justification-transcendent truth condition, recognizing instead that in practice all our judgments of truth depend on whether or not we are in possession of a properly qualified justification for believing in the proposition's truth.

Epistemic hypocrisy occurs inevitably in the course of trying to apply the traditional Platonic or Socratic analysis of the concept of knowledge, often in a

Gettier-proof J*TB version of JTB. What we finite fallible epistemic agents actually do in practical situations when our knowledge claims are challenged is to invoke the conclusions of our best efforts at justification. What we think is true is precisely whatever we think is supported by the best justification at our disposal. Finite epistemic agents such as ourselves accordingly do not need to satisfy the JTB or J*TB *truth* condition T independently of satisfying a Best-J justification condition, in an explicitly strengthened Best-JB analysis of the concept of knowledge in competition with JTB and J*TB.

Since we make justification do the real epistemic work in deciding which beliefs to include in or exclude from the category of knowledge, and since it is only honest to admit that our judgment as to what constitutes truth is nothing other than our judgment as to whether a certain proposition meets the demands for best available epistemic justification, since in reality we do not and cannot appeal to truth independently of best justification, we should not continue to ascribe to JTB and J*TB principles that we do not actually follow in practice. We should instead work toward a Best-JB analysis of the concept of knowledge, in which T simply disappears as a justification-independent and justification-transcending condition, and acknowledge the vital role of best justification in our actual epistemological practice.

Advantage 3: Practically Attainable Epistemic Ideal

The concept of a godlike ideal epistemic agent with direct infallible access to the truth adds nothing of epistemic value or utility to our own best efforts to justify our belief in a proposition's truth. We can at best aspire to, as an ideal Kantian regulative principle, while no finite epistemic agent can actually attain, the immediate knowledge of justification-independent and justification-transcending absolute truth that is theoretically available only to an ideal JTB or J*TB epistemic agent.⁵

We are limited in our best judgments of the truth to what historically and cultural-contextually we deem to be the best practically attainable epistemic justification for the propositions we believe ourselves to know, recognizing that we are epistemically fallible, and that any such higher-order knowledge claims are

⁵ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), A179-180/B222-223. See A569/B597, where Kant describes the distinction between constitutive and regulative principles in these terms: "Without soaring so high [as to specify the unconditionally necessary qualities of a constitutive principle], we are yet bound to confess that human reason contains not only ideas, but ideals also, which although they do not have, like the Platonic ideas, creative power, yet have practical power (as regulative principles), and form the basis of the possible perfection of certain actions."

Dale Jacquette

themselves defeasible. Best justification, defined for present purposes as justification in a proposition's truth without better counterminding justification in the truth of the proposition's negation, in contrast, is a practically attainable ideal, because it is defined in pragmatic or instrumentalist terms as the maximally practically attainable justification for belief in a proposition's truth. Attainability of the ideal is already built-into the pragmatic concept of best justification understood as Best-J. The best epistemic justification of which epistemic agents are practically capable, like justification generally, is historically and culturally dependent and consequently ontically supervenient especially on the state of science and scientific method at the time of knowledge claim validation or invalidation efforts. As such it is attainable in part by virtue of being built upon a solid but defeasible foundation of epistemic justification that has already been attained.

Advantage 4: Best Justification (Best-J) is Scientific

What counts as best justification defined as Best-J, as already noted, is explained in relation to the current state of scientific development, scrutinized by philosophical criticism and subject to philosophical approval for specific epistemic applications. The pragmatic success of mathematics and of scientific methods involving observation and experimentation that have been developed and refined since ancient times, and with increasing momentum since the seventeenth century and European Enlightenment, appear to offer the best prospects with the greatest potential for pragmatic success in confirming or disconfirming knowledge claims, and hence for the discovery and authentication of genuine knowledge. (See also Advantages 5 and 7 below.)

Advantage 5: Borgesian 'Anthill' Justification Disallowed

There is something disconcerting in the traditional JTB analysis of the concept of knowledge in its slack permission of almost any consideration, any facts remotely related to the truth of a knowledge claim, in principle to count as satisfying JTB justification condition J. This is one way in which the Gettier counterexamples get their hold. We see the problem that results from relying too strongly on truth and not sufficiently emphasizing the justification condition of knowledge dramatized to the point of comic absurdity in the imaginary travels narrated by Jorge Luis Borges in his playful ficcione, *Broadie's Report*.

Justification and Truth Conditions in the Concept of Knowledge

The common people say they have the power to transform anyone they please into an ant or a tortoise; one individual who noted my incredulity at this report showed me an anthill, as though that were proof.⁶

If we strengthen justification J condition in JTB to Best-J, compensating for the loss of truth condition T, then we avoid flimsy 'justification' in validating knowledge claims that are manifestly unsupported by the best available justification, despite what the 'common people' in Broadie's report may believe themselves to know. The epistemic scenario Borges describes, exhibiting an anthill, does not represent the best justification for the tribe members' belief that they have the power to turn people into ants. Surely, in fact, there is no best justification in accord with scientific method for this bizarre belief, which ought not to count as knowledge against the background of established knowledge.

If we were to describe Borgesian 'anthill' justification in JTB (or J*TB) Land, we would need to note that Borges' tribe members' belief does not constitute knowledge because it is not true. As we more wisely recognize, in that case, what the tribe believes fails the traditional transcendental truth condition for knowledge, and only additionally and independently may not be very well justified. There is nevertheless some, albeit weak, justification for the truth of the proposition that the tribe is capable of transforming humans into ants, just as there seems to be in the fortune teller example, corroborated in this instance merely by the anthill's existence, perhaps because no anthills had ever been remarked prior to their collective efforts at turning humans into ants. Assuming that tribe members are sincere in their bizarre belief, the anthill then provides for them a reason, albeit a laughably weak one, to believe that they can effect such transformations.

If we were subsequently to describe Borgesian 'anthill' justification in our preferred Best-JB Land, we might begin by observing that Best-JB analysis implies that knowledge by the tribe's members is lacking because their belief that they can turn people into ants (or into a tortoise, none apparently being ready to hand for similar demonstration purposes as the fictional travelogue is narrated) is not supported by the best justification. This means in turn, as Best-J is defined, that both now and at the time when Borges' visitor is supposed to have encountered this doxastically eccentric tribe, there exists better scientific justification, practically available to others if not to the tribe members themselves, for accepting instead the negation of the belief that the tribe can turn people into ants, for believing instead that the tribe can do no such thing. Common sense and

⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, "Broadie's Report" (1970), in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 405.

Dale Jacquette

experimental science here coincide, as they often gratifyingly do, in ruling out palpably preposterous assertions as failing to constitute knowledge.⁷

Advantage 6: Gettier Counterexamples Solution

If we diagnose Gettier counterexamples to JTB as depending on a *thick* interpretation of what is to count as *justification* in meeting the terms of the traditional JTB analysis of knowledge, then we can avoid Gettier counterexamples without appealing to an ideal epistemic agent's justification-independent or justification-transcending access to a proposition's truth or falsehood by strengthening the justification condition to best justification Best-J.

In a composite Gettier-type counterexample to the traditional JTB concept of knowledge, Smith sees Jones drive an Audi TT every day and park it at his house. Smith concludes from this pattern of observation that Jones owns an Audi. Jones, coincidentally, does in fact own an Audi, kept at a distant location and never driven by Jones, although it is not the rented model Smith sees Jones drive. Smith, accordingly, has JTB, but not knowledge, as the Gettier counterexamples are usually interpreted. The JTB analysis of the concept of knowledge fails precisely because of such Gettier-type scenarios.⁸

⁷If we eliminate truth condition T from JTB and J*TB, then we have departed from the classical Platonic-Socratic analysis of the concept of knowledge. The Platonic-Socratic approach by default permits justification of almost any kind or strength to satisfy the justification J requirement in JTB, on the grounds, presumably, that the truth of a true belief need only be supplemented by some kind of reason or warrant in order to constitute knowledge. Lulling knowledge seekers and claimants into a false sense of security concerning the strength of justification needed for knowledge on the assumption that what is known is after all true, might be called the *JTB Lullaby*. We playfully set this knowledge theory soporific to music, taking the first eight-plus bars of Brahms's lullaby (*das Wiegenlied* — Opus 49, No. 4) for the purpose, and adding the lyrics:

*Do not worry much about
strength of just-i-fi-ca-tion.
For as long as you have truth,
you don't need a lot of proof.*

The JTB Lullaby does not make sense for pragmatically-contexted finite epistemic agents, but at most only for godlike ideal epistemic agents. JTB, unsurprisingly, originating with Plato, analyzes the concept of knowledge accessible to a godlike ideal epistemic agent who is simply supposed to have justification-transcending direct access to truth as a condition of knowledge. JTB, as a result, and as we have emphasized, is not guaranteed appropriate for far-from-ideal finite epistemic agents such as ourselves.

⁸ Another approach to the Gettier problem is offered by Dale Jacquette, "Is Nondefectively Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Ratio* 9 (1996): 115-127.

If we describe Gettier in Best-J Land, we obtain something like the following picture. Smith does not have best justified Best-J belief that Jones owns an Audi, based merely on seeing Jones repeatedly drive such a car and park it at his home. The best justification for the truth of the proposition that Jones owns an Audi is in fact overturned by better justification for the proposition's negation. That Jones does not own an Audi, and in particular that Jones does not own the Audi that Smith sees Jones drive, is better justified by the rental agreement records for the Audi Smith sees Jones drive, and the lack of any authentic relevant purchase documents. It is *true* all along, we may suppose with Gettier, that Jones owns an (other) Audi, but it is equally true that Smith, on the basis of his meager justification of merely seeing Jones drive an Audi that turns out to be rented, does not on such a slender basis *know* that Jones owns an Audi.

What if the rental papers for the Audi TT are forged?⁹ This unlikely but conceivable circumstance is also readily accommodated by the Best-JB analysis. If the documents are forged, then of course they are not the best justification for either believing or disbelieving that Jones owns the Audi. If the papers are counterfeit, then either there exists or fails to exist evidence of their forgery. If the evidence exists, then it belongs to the collective best evidence that is practically available and that ideally needs to be consulted in rendering a verdict on whether or not Jones owns the car. If such evidence absolutely does not exist, and the living memories of all the persons involved in the necessary transactions have somehow been wiped out, as sometimes happens in philosophical parables, so that no one could ever come to know that Jones does not actually own the car he is frequently seen driving, then the epistemic situation reverts to that discussed in Advantage 8 below, involving a special application of the universal ignorance problem.

Advantage 7: Reversals of Knowledge Validations

We attain to best justification Best-J when we avail ourselves of the best science of our day. We determine to the best of our abilities the best practically attainable justification by critically screening and philosophically approving what appear to be pragmatically the most successful methods of science. We turn to scientific explanations, and the observationally and experimentally established empirical truths by which they are discovered and which they in turn support, in order to arrive at a sense of how the best practically available epistemic justification for a

⁹ I owe consideration of this problem to Richard Fumerton.

Dale Jacquette

given knowledge claim at a particular time and under particular circumstances should be understood.

We cannot fault a forensic scientist investigating a crime in 1941 for not using evidence of DNA analysis in order to identify a suspect. But we can and should fault another scientist investigating the same kind of crime in 2012 for not doing so. Suppose, then, that a scientist decides in 1941 on the basis of available evidence and techniques at the time that an actually innocent person is guilty of an illegal act. DNA evidence, unavailable in 1941, would have exonerated the accused. The best evidence today justifies our believing that the accused person did not commit the crime. By the standards science has since developed as arbiter of the best practically available epistemic justification, the evidence by which we now judge that the accused was not guilty is itself objectively justifiable as epistemically superior to the evidence by which in the past it was judged that the accused was guilty.

The imaginary scientist's knowledge claim may have been best justified in 1941, at least in the sense that the scientist was best justified in making the knowledge claim then, even if the content of the knowledge claim itself does not turn out to stand the test of time. It may have been believed at the time as a result to be known that the accused committed the crime. We suppose that new evidence that later comes to light implies that the scientist in 1941, satisfying the best practically attainable standards of epistemic justification at the time, did not actually know, and indeed, that we today do not know and should no longer believe, that the accused person actually committed the crime. To speak otherwise is to deny the obvious fact that we sometimes change our beliefs as to whether or not a given knowledge claim is true. When we do, we appeal ideally again to the best justification available at the time of the knowledge claim's evaluation. We do so because in fact we cannot do otherwise, unless we pretend to an occult justification-independent familiarity with absolute justification-transcendent truth, reintroducing a condition we have already discredited. Such judgments of a knowledge claim's truth value, satisfying the proposed analysis of propositional knowledge as Best-JB, as a rule are intuitively reasonable, plausible, and squarely in accord with common sense.

Advantage 8: Solution to Universal Ignorance Problem

What happens when everyone agrees throughout the entire history of the human species, past, present and future, that a knowledge claim $\exists sKsp$ is true when p is actually false? The answer in the Best-JB analysis of the concept of knowledge is that

in that case everyone was wrong, and went to their graves one and all defeasibly but manifestly not best justified in believing that p itself and $\exists sKsp$ are true.

There must then exist countermanding better justification for the contrary belief that not- p . Such justification must include and anyway depend on the corresponding nonexistence of the state of affairs whose existence is proposed by proposition p . It is hypothetically available in principle to knowledge seekers, but, as world events happen to transpire, it never occurs to any thinker in human history for consideration, despite being hypothetically timelessly true. The situation, then, is that we are supposing omnisciently and in other ways epistemically fictionally that better justification exists in fact for the negation of a universally believed proposition, even though no human being ever happens to become aware of the recalcitrant facts that make all contrary knowledge claims timelessly false. The objective facts of the world make the beliefs of knowledge seekers in the thought experiment timelessly false, without their ever happening to become aware of a discordance between the contents of their beliefs and the relevant actual state of affairs.

What, then, if there's an evil demon who always misdirects me, even when I supposedly have best evidence? Do I then have knowledge? This is similar to the universal ignorance case and should be treated as such on the more limited scale of a single individual's lifetime. The claimant does not then have knowledge, because, although unaware of it, despite being defeasibly best justified, the knowledge claim in question is assumed to be false. The evil demon does not add anything to or subtract anything from identical epistemic situations that can arise for different reasons without assuming the demon's epistemic devilry. I may believe that I satisfy the requirements for knowledge, in that case, but in fact I do not. If you are in a position to say that I do not know what I claim to know, then you must also have access to better justification than I do, in which case I do not after all have best justification in the Best-J sense. Otherwise, entertaining the logical possibility that the knowledge claim under attack is not actually best justified from a practical standpoint is theoretically and methodologically unintelligible beyond the pat acknowledgement that all best justification and hence all knowledge within the Best-J model is defeasible, and all cognitive subjects are fallible.

From the dialectical standpoint in which Best-JB is offered as a pragmatic replacement for the godlike ideal epistemic agent JTB or J*TB analysis of the concept of knowledge, thought experiments about a knowledge claim being false cannot be motivated or understood except on the assumption that, even if we are not practically in a position to provide it, there exists better justification for the knowledge claim's negation than our imagined justification for its truth. It is

always possible in principle for such an epistemic turnaround to occur, because the possibility is built into the concept of *defeasible* best justification that I do not know or do not know that I know what I believe myself to know. I may claim to know something, even with best justification in my judgment that my knowledge claim is true, from which it still does not logically follow that I actually know what I claim to know. In fact, or by hypothesis, it can happen that I do not know what I believe and judge myself to know, but falsely believe that I know. The philosophical point in relation to the proposed analysis of the concept of knowledge is that this situation is unintelligible also for the JTB or J*TB proponent in lieu of the assumption that there exists a better justification for the negation of a belief than for the belief itself, even if for circumstantial reasons we can never actually lay hands on it.

If it is asked in conclusion whether Best-JB is supposed to be an analysis of knowledge itself or only of best justified knowledge claims, the answer is that Best-JB analyzes the concept of knowledge, but that its applications, whenever we get down to individual cases, can only address the justification status of particular knowledge claims.

6. Objection to Best-JB: The Pregnancy Test-Kit Counterexample

We next address a criticism of Best-JB based on a thought experiment involving a pregnancy test. The test instructions are followed and the result says +, but in fact – is true instead, and there is at the time in some sense supposedly no better available justification for the contrary judgment that –. Does the kit user know that she is pregnant? Presumably not. If, however, we are supposing that – rather than + is true, then we must also be supposing that there exists at the time better evidence for + as the negation of –.

Such better countermanding evidence need not realistically be practically accessible to the kit user, even if only for such mundane reasons as financial, but could in principle include a doctor's examination, which, with the right equipment and procedures, would undoubtedly constitute better evidence than the kit user's drugstore test. The latter is likely to be neither as sensitive nor as accurate than the best that modern medical science can provide in deciding the question of a woman's pregnancy. Even the old fashioned blood test, hard as it was on the bunny population in those days, is presumably more definitive than an off-the-shelf box of test strips that might work reliably if used properly, but that can easily be mishandled in a number of ways that could invalidate the results, if the chemicals were to be contaminated or go prematurely stale, or the like.

If the fact is that $-$, then why would a properly manufactured chemical pregnancy test kit instead give the result that $+$? We must suppose at the same time that there is something defective about the pregnancy test kit, and that therefore, unknown to the kit user, the kit's evidence is not the best justification that the kit user is not actually pregnant. Again, the appearance of counterexample is fostered only by describing a situation in which the requirements for best justification may appear to be but are not actually met, and it is assumed as though from on transcendental high that the justified but not best justified belief is not actually true. If the best justification practically available to the kit user in the logically most narrow sense supports the truth of $-$ rather than $+$, or $+$ rather than $-$, then the kit user is anyway in the same narrow sense best justified in judging that she knows that she is pregnant, whereas under the transcendental counterexample assumption she does not know that she is pregnant.¹⁰

The reply is that if we can abstract from the kit user's actual epistemic situation to stipulate that what she claims to know on the basis of her home pregnancy test is that she is pregnant when she is not, then we ought in all fairness also to be able to abstract from her actual epistemic situation to remark that in that case, if her belief is actually false, then there must exist better justification for the negation of her belief. This information makes her justification *ipso facto* something significantly less than best, whether she knows it or not (defective kit, improper application or interpretation, etc.). Otherwise, the imagined counterexample is unintelligible, even on a JTB or J*TB analysis of the concept of knowledge. In general, these challenges pose no worse problems for Best-JB than they do for JTB or J*TB.¹¹

¹⁰ The home pregnancy test kit problem was suggested to me by Andrew Moon.

¹¹ Versions of this essay were presented under the same title at the Episteme Conference on "Justification Revisited," Université de Genève, Geneva, Switzerland, March 25-27, 2010; as "Against Epistemic Hypocrisy," at the Copenhagen-Lund Workshops in Social Epistemology, Copenhagen University, Copenhagen, Denmark, November 25, 2010; and as "Knowledge Without Truth," at the Philosophy Colloquium, Institut de philosophie, Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines, Université de Neuchâtel, Switzerland, November 16, 2010. My thanks to many participants at these venues for offering useful comments and criticisms.