Gettiered Belief

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Gettiered beliefs are ones that fall short of knowledge in the way illustrated by Gettier Cases: cases like those Gettier (1963) employed to show that justified true belief doesn’t suffice for knowledge. Here’s a pair of familiar Gettier Cases I’ll call ‘the Classics’:

**Pocket Change:** Smith knows that Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Smith also has strong evidence that Jones will get the job they’ve both applied for. Smith infers that the successful candidate has ten coins in his pocket. In fact, it’s Smith who will get the job. And having just grabbed a handful of loose change, Smith happens to now have ten coins in his own pocket. (adapted from Gettier 1963)

**Sheep Rock:** Using his reliable perceptual faculties, Roddy… forms a true belief that there is a sheep in the field before him… Unbeknownst to Roddy, …the object he is looking at in the field is not a sheep at all, but rather a sheep-shaped [rock] which is obscuring from view the real sheep hidden behind. (Pritchard 2012: 251; adapted from Chisholm 1977)

Smith’s inferential belief is gettiered, as is Roddy’s perceptual belief. What, exactly, has happened to a belief that falls short of knowledge in the way such cases illustrate? We’ll focus on two leading substantive answers, what I’ll call the **Ease of Mistake Approach** and the **Lack of Credit Approach**. The former says that a gettiered belief is justified and true, but held in such a way that its subject could easily have believed something *false* instead. The latter says that a gettiered belief is justified and true, but such that its *accuracy* isn’t sufficiently creditable to the subject’s cognitive ability. In §I, after further explaining the Ease of Mistake Approach, I’ll present examples establishing that it’s both too weak *and* too strong. In §II, after showing how the counterexamples to the Ease of Mistake Approach motivate the Lack of Credit Approach, I’ll explain two versions of the
latter and then present examples establishing that each version is both too weak \textit{and} too strong. In §III, I’ll introduce and assess two additional, less prominent approaches to gettiered belief—one of which, I’ll argue, shows real promise of properly handling all the cases that bedevil competing accounts.

Before diving in, I need to highlight a thesis that frames this paper’s project.\footnote{Along with the Classics, I’ll classify as Gettier Cases certain “fake barn” examples (Goldman 1976) \textit{and} certain “hidden helper” cases (wherein one agent makes environmental changes to ensure that another believes accurately).} Given my definition of ‘Gettier Case’, so classifying all these examples commits me to

\textbf{Omnipresence:} There’s a common ignorance-inducing phenomenon present in the Classics as well as in certain “fake barn” and “hidden helper” cases.

If Omnipresence turns out to be no more plausible than its denial, I’ll lose one or another of my objections to requirements that the Ease of Mistake and Lack of Credit Approaches impose on gettiered belief. But if I lose one or another of those objections, the account of gettiered belief I plump for in §III won’t be motivated as well as it would be otherwise. So it behooves me to ask: What reasons might one have to accept Omnipresence?

First, prior to any serious theorizing, all the relevant cases might strike you as involving a common ignorance-inducing phenomenon.\footnote{Start with a variant of \textit{Sheep Rock} wherein Roddy concludes that there’s a sheep in the field, from the (false) proposition that the object he sees there is a sheep. Roddy doesn’t know that there’s a sheep in the field; why not? Intuitively, this is because Roddy holds his inferential belief in a way that’s \textit{liable to mislead} on its particular subject matter (cf. Plantinga 1996: 316)—viz., the presence/location of nearby sheep. This rough, intuitive diagnosis of Roddy’s ignorance should be about as uncontroversial as claims come in this neck of the epistemological woods. The diagnosis is consonant with each of the main “general recipes” for constructing Gettier Cases,\footnote{\textit{and} with each of the leading accounts of gettiered belief introduced}
above. Indeed, all these views about gettiered belief can plausibly be understood as different attempts to spell out, more fully and precisely, the intuitive diagnosis of ignorance offered above.

Let’s now bring that diagnosis to bear on the Classics. Given the similarities between *Pocket Change* and the “inferential” variant of *Sheep Rock*, what we said about the latter applies also to the former: Smith fails to know the successful candidate has ten coins in his pocket because he holds this belief in a way that’s liable to mislead on its particular subject matter (including, at least, the number of coins in the successful candidate’s pocket). Moreover, since the basis for Roddy’s perceptual belief in *Sheep Rock*—viz., his *nonveridical* visual experience as of a sheep—seems as liable to mislead (on the pertinent subject matter) as the basis for his belief in the “inferential” variant, what we said about the variant applies also to the original: Roddy lacks perceptual knowledge that there’s a sheep in the field because he holds this belief in a way that’s liable to mislead on its particular subject matter.

We’ve reached an important lemma: there’s a common ignorance-inducing phenomenon present in the Classics—roughly, holding a belief in a way that’s liable to mislead on its particular subject matter. To continue arguing toward Omnipresence, compare *Sheep Rock* with a variant wherein someone secretly activates a wireless fence that prevents the sheep from leaving the field. In this “hidden helper” variant of *Sheep Rock*, the basis for Roddy’s perceptual belief that there’s a sheep in the field (again, his *nonveridical* experience as of a sheep) is liable to mislead on its particular subject matter (again, the presence/location of nearby sheep). Finally, compare *Sheep Rock* with another variant wherein both the sheep-shaped rock and the sheep are in Roddy’s visual field; Roddy’s gaze just happens to settle on the sheep; and he comes thereby to believe that there’s a sheep in the field. In this “fake barn” variant of *Sheep Rock*, the kind of ground on which Roddy bases his belief—viz., visual experience as of a sheep—doesn’t reliably indicate the presence/location of sheep in the field. Hence, with respect to both the “hidden helper” and “fake barn” variants of *Sheep Rock*, it’s plausible that the way Roddy holds his “sheep” belief—viz., directly in response to visual experience as of a sheep—is liable to mislead on its particular subject matter. And since a belief’s being so held keeps it from constituting knowledge in the Classics, it’s plausible that Roddy also fails
to know there’s a sheep in the field in both the “hidden helper” and “fake barn” variants of Sheep Rock. And that brings us all the way to Omnipresence.

Naturally, I find the argument for Omnipresence developed over the last few paragraphs persuasive. But there’s a second, simpler argument for Omnipresence worth considering, one you might accept even if you have doubts about one or another of the steps in the first argument. Suppose you at least agree that each of the relevant cases—Pocket Change along with Sheep Rock and its three variants—seems to involve some or other odd, ignorance-inducing phenomenon (such a sense should be widely shared). Now, we want to avoid unnecessary complexity in theorizing knowledge. To avoid such unnecessary complexity, we should avoid needlessly multiplying odd, ignorance-inducing phenomena. To avoid such needless multiplication, we should accept Omnipresence absent good objections to it. In this way, considerations of theoretical simplicity can support grouping all the relevant cases together—at least until we confront good reasons against such assimilation. We’re back at Omnipresence, by a somewhat different route.

I’ll continue discussing Omnipresence in each of the next two sections, by defending it from two salient countervailing considerations. I hope that, sooner or later, many (if not most) readers will deem Omnipresence at least somewhat more plausible than its denial. Those who can’t bring themselves to so deem Omnipresence may regard this paper as aiming for the following conditional conclusion: if Omnipresence is true, the account of gettiered belief I eventually settle on in §III shows more promise of being right than any of the previously considered competitors. Even if so recast, the project should still retain enough interest to justify our efforts.

I. The Ease of Mistake Approach

First, a couple stipulative definitions. Say that possible world \( W_1 \) is close to world \( W_2 \) before time \( t \) iff \( W_1 \) is no more than slightly different from \( W_2 \) up to (but not including) \( t \). And say that S could easily have had property \( Q \) at \( t \) iff, in some world that’s close to the actual world before \( t \), S has \( Q \) at \( t \). These definitions enable a relatively precise statement of the
Ease of Mistake Approach (EMA): S’s belief B that P, held in way W, is gettiered at t iff (B is justified and true but) S could easily have believed a falsehood similar to P, in a way like W, at t. (cf. Engel 1992; Hawthorne 2004; Pritchard 2005, 2007, 2012)

EMA gets the Classics right: each of the salient beliefs could easily have been false, while held in the same way, at the relevant time. Starting with *Pocket Change*: Let t be a time when Smith holds his “successful candidate” belief, and let t* be the period when Smith grabs (and drops in his pocket) ten coins. Now consider a world, β, that’s identical with the actual world, α, before t except for this: during t*, Smith grabs (and drops in his pocket) only nine coins. β is only slightly different from α before t. But in β, Smith *falsely* believes at t that the successful candidate has ten coins in his pocket. So, in some world close to α before t, Smith’s belief is false yet held in the same way at t. EMA’s right-to-left conditional therefore implies that Smith’s belief is gettiered.

Turning to *Sheep Rock*: Let t be a time when Roddy holds his “sheep” belief, and let t* be the period when Roddy’s gaze settles on the sheep-shaped rock. Consider a world, β, that’s identical with the actual world, α, before time t except for this: during t*, the sheep is slipping just beyond the field’s boundaries. β is only slightly different from α before t. But in β, Roddy *falsely* believes at t that there’s a sheep in the field. So, in some world close to α before t, Roddy’s belief is false yet held in the same way at t. EMA’s right-to-left conditional therefore implies that Roddy’s belief is gettiered.

Alas, its smooth treatment of the Classics notwithstanding, EMA is false. Indeed, EMA is both too weak and too strong. To see that EMA is too weak, consider the following case:

**Coffee Cup**: The “nondeterministic” interpretation of quantum mechanics is correct. Accordingly, there is just before noon a nonzero—albeit *infinitesimally small*—objective chance that the particles composing John’s coffee cup will soon behave in such a bizarre way that they no longer compose a cup, but instead a mere cup façade. At noon, the cup is still there. Out of deeply-ingrained habit, John looks at the cup then and forms a (justified true) belief that there’s a cup on the desk. (adapted from Hawthorne 2004)
At noon, John could easily have had a false “visual” belief that there’s a cup on the desk. More fully: in some world that differs no more than slightly from the actual world before noon, the cup façade scenario obtains at noon, and John then has a false “visual” belief that there’s a cup on the desk. So EMA’s right-to-left conditional classifies John’s belief as gettiered. But many will find it plausible that John knows there’s a cup on the desk. And even the more skeptically inclined should at least find it plausible that John’s belief isn’t gettiered. So this case refutes EMA’s claim of sufficiency for gettiered belief. With Coffee Cup in hand, we can conclude that EMA is too weak.

EMA is also too strong, as reflection on the following case reveals:

Religious Sheep Rock: God has always firmly intended that Roddy form a justified true “sheep” belief—while actually viewing a sheep-shaped rock—at a specific time, on a specific day. God ensures that Roddy forms such a belief (and no related false ones!) at the appointed time by creating, and leading Roddy into, a region whose fields are peppered with sheep-shaped rocks. Each of these rocks obscures its own morbidly shy sheep that infallibly detects approaching human observers and immediately hides behind its assigned rock. Looking at one of the rocks, Roddy forms a justified true belief that there’s a sheep in the field. (adapted from Stone 2013)

Given all the divine intervention, Roddy couldn’t easily have been mistaken about a similar (to the content of his “sheep” belief) proposition, in a way similar to how he actually holds his belief. So EMA’s left-to-right conditional classifies Roddy’s belief as ungettiered. But given Omnipresence and the clear similarities between Religious Sheep Rock and the “hidden helper” variant of Sheep Rock sketched in the introductory section, it’s plausible that Roddy’s belief is gettiered. So Religious Sheep Rock impugns EMA’s claim of necessity for gettiered belief.

Objection (cf. Pritchard 2012): This argument against EMA invokes Omnipresence. It’s time to challenge that claim—specifically, the thesis that what induces ignorance in the Classics is also present in “hidden helper” cases. The subject in a “hidden helper” case is ignorant only because his believing accurately isn’t at all creditable to his own cognitive ability. By contrast, subjects in the
Classics hold beliefs whose accuracy is to at least *some* extent creditable to their cognitive abilities. Hence, what induces ignorance in “hidden helper” cases is *not* present in the Classics (and vice versa). So Omnipresence is false, and the above argument against EMA fails.

**Reply** (inspired by Kelp 2013): Assuming s/he doesn’t mean to go in for radical skepticism, the objector’s position is untenable. Since *Religious Sheep Rock* is clearly a “hidden helper”-type case, the objector must say that Roddy’s true belief there isn’t *at all* creditable to his own cognitive ability. Moreover, given the objector’s general diagnosis of ignorance in “hidden helper” cases, s/he must say that a belief constitutes knowledge only if its truth is to at least *some* extent creditable to the subject’s cognitive ability. Call this the **Minimal Creditability Requirement**. Now obviously, Roddy’s cognitive abilities (e.g., his powers of vision) play at least *some* role in his believing accurately that there’s a sheep in the field. Indeed, Roddy’s cognitive abilities seem to play at least as large a role in his holding the relevant true belief as do those of subjects in everyday examples of relatively easily acquired perceptual, introspective, memorial, rational, and testimonial knowledge. Thus, to avoid a radical skeptical position, the objector must also deny the Minimal Creditability Requirement—which of course makes for an incoherent overall position. The objector’s position therefore turns out to be untenable, and this objection to Omnipresence accordingly fails.

I conclude that *Coffee Cup* and *Religious Sheep Rock* together cast real doubt on EMA. Let’s see how these cases can point the way toward a main competitor.

**II. From Ease of Mistake to Lack of Credit**

Reflection on the counterexamples to EMA raises an important question: What distinguishes *Religious Sheep Rock* from *Coffee Cup* so that only the former involves gettiered belief? Here’s an appealing answer, inspired by much recent work on virtue-theoretic accounts of knowledge:

In *Religious Sheep Rock*, Roddy’s getting it right that there are sheep in the field has a lot more to do with God’s purposes and plans than with Roddy’s cognitive ability. Likewise in the Classics: for each of the relevant beliefs, while its *existence* may be sufficiently creditable to its agent’s cognitive abilities, its *accuracy* is not so creditable to those abilities (cf. Riggs
2007, Sosa 2007, Zagzebski 2009, Greco 2010, Turri 2011). By contrast, in Coffee Cup, John gets it right as to whether there’s a cup on the desk by seeing the cup, and thus through his powers of vision.

Such reflection on these four cases naturally suggests the

**Lack of Credit Approach (LCA):** S’s belief B in P is gettiered iff (B is justified and true but) B’s truth isn’t sufficiently creditable to S’s cognitive abilities.

Sosa (2007: 23) provides a very clear statement of this view: “Beliefs can be true… independently of the believer’s competence in so believing, as in Gettier cases.” So does Greco (2010: 74): “In Gettier cases, S believes the truth, and S believes from an ability, but S does not believe the truth because S believes from an ability.” As does Turri (2011: 7): “Gettier subjects believe the truth, so they succeed in a sense, but this success… does not manifest their competence.”

As these quotations indicate, there are two main ways to understand LCA’s “sufficient creditability” relation. We can understand it in terms of either explanatory salience (e.g., Greco 2010) or power manifestation (e.g., Sosa 2010). We’ll consider both versions of the approach.

**A. Explanatory Salience**

There are two main strains of the “explanatory salience” version, both of which are suggested by Greco:

**Strain 1:** S’s belief B in P is gettiered iff S’s cognitive ability is not a salient part of the explanation of B’s truth. (Greco 2010)

**Strain 2:** S’s belief B in P is gettiered iff S’s cognitive ability is not among the most salient parts of the explanation of B’s truth. (Greco 2003)
If S’s cognitive ability isn’t a salient part of the explanation of B’s truth, then it’s not among the most salient parts of that explanation. But the converse is false: even if S’s cognitive ability isn’t among the most salient parts of the explanation of B’s truth, it might still be a somewhat salient part of that explanation. Strain 1’s right-hand-side is therefore logically stronger than Strain 2’s. So Strain 1 makes a logically weaker claim of sufficiency for gettiered belief than Strain 2, which in turn places a weaker requirement on gettiered belief than Strain 1. Accordingly, we’ll look for a counterexample to Strain 1’s claim of sufficiency for gettiered belief, and a counterexample to Strain 2’s requirement on gettiered belief. Such a pair of cases would show that the “explanatory salience” version of LCA is both too weak and too strong.

As for Strain 1’s right-to-left conditional, consider this variant of a widely discussed case from Lackey (2007):

**Field Trip:** Morris is on a field trip to the Sears Tower. The group has just arrived at the train station in Chicago. Morris runs ahead of his class to ask directions from someone other than his teacher. Morris approaches the first adult passerby he sees and asks how to get to the Sears Tower. As it happens, all the adults in Morris’s vicinity are honest Chicago residents who know the city well and gain satisfaction from helping visitors reach their destinations. The knowledgeable, well-intentioned passerby provides Morris with perfect directions to the Tower by telling him it’s located two blocks east of the train station. Morris unhesitatingly forms the corresponding true belief.

How did Morris come to believe accurately as to the Tower’s whereabouts? Answer: He approached someone who was in fact a knowledgeable and well-intentioned Chicago resident, asked about the Tower, and believed the perfect directions that the resident provided. While Morris’s testimony-related abilities appear in this answer, they aren’t a salient part of it. Rather, what the answer makes salient are certain features of the Chicago resident: her knowledge of the city, intentions toward Morris, ability to convey directions, etc. We should therefore say, in line with the virtue-theoretic treatment of the Classics sketched above, that while Morris’s testimony-related abilities may be a
salient part of the explanation why he now has a belief about the Tower’s location, Morris’s abilities aren’t a salient part of the explanation why he now believes accurately as to the Tower’s location (cf. Lackey 2007). So Strain 1 classifies Morris’s belief as gettiered. But many will find it plausible that Morris now knows where the Tower is. And even the more skeptically inclined should at least find it plausible that Morris’s belief isn’t gettiered. So Field Trip impugns Strain 1’s claim of sufficiency for gettiered belief. And recall that Strain 2’s claim of sufficiency is even stronger than Strain 1’s. So Strains 1 and 2 both misclassify Morris’s belief as gettiered. The “explanatory salience” version of LCA is too weak.

As for the requirement that Strain 2 places on gettiered belief, consider this case from Turri (2011):

**Hobbled:** A competent, though not masterful, inspection of the crime scene would yield the conclusion that the murderer limps. Holmes saw through it and had already deduced that Dr. Hubble, who doesn’t currently limp, poisoned the victim under pretense of treating her. Holmes also recognized that the scene would fool Watson, whose own inspection was proceeding admirably competently, though not masterfully. Greatly impressed by Watson’s competence, Holmes sprang into action. He disguised himself as a porter, strode across the street to where Dr. Hubble was, and kicked him so hard that Hubble was thereafter hobbled with a limp. Holmes returned to find Watson wrapping up his investigation, having just formed a justified true belief that the murderer limps.

How did Watson end up believing accurately that the murderer limps? Answer: His competent investigation so impressed Holmes that Holmes did something to ensure Watson’s impending belief about the murderer would be true. Watson’s cognitive ability is among the most salient parts of the explanation why he now believes accurately that the murderer limps. So Strain 2 implies that Watson’s belief that the murderer limps is ungettiered. But given Omnipresence and the clear similarities between Hobbled and the “hidden helper” variant of Sheep Rock sketched in the introductory section, it’s plausible that Watson’s belief is gettiered. So Hobbled impugns Strain 2’s
claim of necessity for gettiered belief. And recall that Strain 1’s claim of necessity is even stronger than Strain 2’s. So Strains 1 and 2 both misclassify Watson’s belief as ungettiered. The “explanatory salience” version of LCA is also too strong.

Field Trip and Hobbled together cast significant doubt on the “explanatory salience” version of LCA. Can the “power manifestation” version fare any better?

B. Power Manifestation

Following Sosa (2011), let’s suppose that a success can manifest its agent’s abilities even if exercising those abilities in the agent’s current environment won’t reliably meet with success. Suppose, in other words, that there can be environmentally unreliable abilities. The distinction between environmentally reliable, and environmentally unreliable, abilities yields two strains of the “power manifestation” version of LCA:

**Strain 1:** S’s belief B in P is gettiered iff B’s truth doesn’t manifest any of S’s cognitive abilities (not even environmentally unreliable ones). (cf. Sosa 2011, Turri 2011)

**Strain 2:** S’s belief B in P is gettiered iff B’s truth doesn’t manifest any of S’s environmentally reliable cognitive abilities. (cf. Carter 2013, Kelp 2013)

If B’s truth doesn’t manifest any of S’s cognitive abilities, then it doesn’t manifest any of S’s environmentally reliable cognitive abilities. But the converse is false: even if B’s truth doesn’t manifest any of S’s environmentally reliable cognitive abilities, it might still manifest some of S’s environmentally unreliable cognitive abilities. Strain 1’s right-hand-side is therefore logically stronger than Strain 2’s. So Strain 1 makes a weaker claim of sufficiency for gettiered belief than Strain 2, which in turn places a weaker requirement on gettiered belief than Strain 1. As before, we’ll look for a counterexample to Strain 1’s claim of sufficiency for gettiered belief, and a counterexample to Strain 2’s requirement on gettiered belief. Such a pair of cases would show that the “power manifestation” version of LCA is both too weak and too strong.
Starting with Strain 1, we can concede that *Field Trip* doesn’t clearly refute its claim of sufficiency for gettiered belief (cf. Orozco 2010, Kelp 2013). While Morris’s belief about the Tower’s location isn’t gettiered, perhaps its accuracy manifests Morris’s fledgling testimony-related abilities. After all, in acquiring his true belief about Tower, Morris exercises somewhat cultivated “source selection” and “content monitoring” abilities. If we allow that the truth of Morris’s belief manifests his testimony-related abilities while sticking to our earlier claim that those abilities aren’t a salient part of the explanation why Morris believes accurately, then we’ll be committed to this general thesis: an outcome’s manifesting an ability doesn’t entail that the ability is a salient part of the explanation why the outcome occurred. But that general thesis is plausible, as the following kind of case from Pritchard (2012) illustrates: A wine glass falls on a hard tile floor and shatters. The glass’s shattering manifests its fragility. But the glass’s fragility isn’t a salient part of the explanation why the glass shattered: the glass shattered because it struck the hard tile floor.

So it’s plausible enough that while *Field Trip* shows that the “explanatory salience” version of LCA is too weak, it doesn’t also establish that the “power manifestation” version is too weak. But there are other cases that arguably do show this. Consider, e.g., a possible case involving a divine testifier and a human testifiee:

*Divine Revelation:* God directly causes a true belief that God exists to be formed in a thinker, Paul, without using any states internal to Paul as intermediate causes of Paul’s newly acquired theistic belief. The input that nondeviantly causes Paul’s theistic belief is some state or activity in God, and so is wholly external to Paul. (adapted from Bergmann 2006)

When Paul forms his theistic belief in response to the relevant divine input, he exercises an ability to respond to such input, thereby satisfying (what I earlier called) the Minimal Creditability Requirement. But—as proponents of the “power manifestation” version of LCA will agree—the mere fact that some ability, A, of S’s plays a role in S’s acquiring a certain true belief, B, doesn’t entail that B’s truth manifests A. That Paul’s theistic belief results from an ability to respond to relevant divine input therefore leaves it wide open whether the truth of Paul’s belief manifests said ability.
Our question, then, is this: Does Paul’s believing accurately that God exists manifest some cognitive ability of Paul’s? Arguably, no. In *Divine Revelation*, Paul doesn’t get it right as to whether God exists through some “God-detection” ability of his own; rather, Paul gets it right as to whether God exists through God’s powers of self-revelation. So Strain 1 of the “power manifestation” version of LCA classifies Paul’s belief as gettiered. But many epistemologists—especially those with broadly “externalist” sympathies, theists and non-theists alike—will think that knowledge acquisition via divine revelation is at least possible (cf. Lackey 2007). And even those who are skeptical about the possibility of such knowledge acquisition should at least find it plausible that Paul’s belief isn’t gettiered. So *Divine Revelation* impugns Strain 1’s claim of sufficiency for gettiered belief. And recall that Strain 2’s claim of sufficiency is even stronger than Strain 1’s. So Strains 1 and 2 both misclassify Paul’s belief as gettiered. In light of *Divine Revelation*, we can see that the “power manifestation” version of LCA is too weak.

To see that this version is also too strong, consider the following case:

**Fake Fruits:** The Fruit Lovers Association meets for dinner at Doctor Orange’s house. In the middle of Orange’s dining room table sits a clear glass bowl. In the middle of the bowl sits one real apple. There have never been, and will never be, any fake apples in the region where Orange lives. Fake apples were globally banned years ago, and haven’t been available anywhere since. But there are no similar bans on other kinds of fake fruit. Now, unbeknownst to his friends, Orange is an inveterate practical jokester. Nestled around the real apple are several counterfeit citruses: two fake oranges, a fake grapefruit, three fake lemons, and two fake limes. A member of the Association, Sara—who knows nothing about the aforementioned ban on fake apples—casts her eyes upon the bowl and forms the belief that it contains an apple. (adapted from Gendler and Hawthorne 2005)

Call Sara’s “apple” belief B. We can understand *Fake Fruits* so that B’s truth manifests Sara’s ability to visually identify apples. Moreover, Sara’s visual apple-identification ability seems to be environmentally reliable: even in her overall relatively misleading current circumstances, Sara would
definitely believe accurately as to whether there’s an apple present were she to form such a belief through her ability to visually identify apples. So, since B’s truth manifests environmentally reliable cognitive ability, Strain 2 classifies B as ungettiered. But given Omnipresence and the clear similarities between *Fake Fruits* and the “fake barn” variant of *Sheep Rock* sketched in the introductory section, it’s plausible that Sara’s belief is gettiered. So *Fake Fruits* impugns the requirement that Strain 2 places on gettiered belief. And recall that Strain 1’s requirement is even stronger than Strain 2’s. So Strains 1 and 2 both misclassify Sara’s belief as ungettiered. The “power manifestation” version of LCA is also too strong.

**Objection** (cf. Turri 2011): The time has come to challenge the part of Omnipresence that the above argument relies on—viz., the claim that subjects in “fake barn”-type cases lack knowledge. We start with an argument that Sara *does* know that there’s an apple in the bowl after all. Consider a variant of *Fake Fruits* wherein, simply to spite Doctor Orange (who recently beat her in the Fruit Lovers Association presidential election), Sara aims her DX4 weapon at the bowl on Orange’s table and vaporizes the apple (Sara knows that apples are Orange’s favorite food). Here, Sara *knowingly* destroys Orange’s apple. And one knowingly does an act of type A only if one knows that one is A-ing—call this the **Knowledge Requirement on Acting Knowingly** (*KRAK*). So, in this variant of *Fake Fruits*, Sara knows that she’s destroying Orange’s apple. But if Sara knows in this variant that she’s destroying Orange’s apple, then she knows in the original case that the bowl contains an apple. So, in *Fake Fruits*, Sara knows that there’s an apple in the bowl. And note, finally, that we can run the same kind of argument for any “fake barn”-style example, thereby defeating whatever “ignorance” intuition one may initially have had about the case. Hence, Omnipresence is false, and the above argument against the “power manifestation” version of LCA fails.

**Reply** (cf. Coffman 2013): The objector’s dependence on *KRAK* is unfortunate, for there are plausible counterexamples to it. Suppose that a sharpshooter, Gunnar, knows that 99 of his (rather large) revolver’s 100 chambers contain live rounds; the remaining chamber contains a blank. Given the similarities between firing live and blank rounds, Gunnar can’t know that he’s fired a *live* round unless he can see what happens to his target. Gunnar is now aiming his revolver into a very small, dark room where his sworn enemy, Ridley, is chained tightly to a wall. Given his skill and
circumstances, Gunnar knows that Ridley will die if he simply fires a live round in the direction he’s now aiming. So Gunnar gleefully pulls the trigger. Sure enough, the round is live, and Ridley is fatally wounded. Gunnar just killed Ridley, and seems to have done so knowingly. At least, this is what we should say so long as we accept the objector’s premise that Sara knowingly vaporized Orange’s apple, since Gunnar’s killing Ridley seems at least as strong a candidate for act done knowingly as Sara’s vaporizing Orange’s apple. Intuitively, though, Gunnar doesn’t (yet) know that he killed Ridley. In light of such examples, the objector should give up KRAK, and with it the above KRAK-dependent objection.⁷

We’ve now seen that EMA and LCA face some serious difficulties. In the next section, I’ll introduce and evaluate a couple of less prominent—but apparently more promising—approaches to gettiered belief, each of which arises naturally from a little more reflection on the introductory section’s intuitive diagnosis of ignorance in the Classics.

III. Two “Risky” Approaches to Gettiered Belief

Recall the intuitive diagnosis of ignorance in the Classics: in each case, the subject holds his belief in a way that’s liable to mislead on its particular subject matter. A little more reflection reveals that there are in fact two different senses—one psychological, one normative—in which the subject’s belief-forming/sustaining method is liable to mislead on the relevant subject matter.⁸ We’ll consider the psychological sense first. Roughly, in each of the Classics, the subject’s holding his belief as he does actually creates—or at least, could easily have created—a “psychological push” toward many falsehoods similar to his actual belief’s content. More precisely: the subject holds his belief in a way that could easily have disposed him to believe many falsehoods similar to his actual belief’s content.⁹

Starting with Pocket Change: Let P be [The successful candidate has ten coins in his pocket], and let W be deduction from [Jones is the successful candidate] and [Jones has ten coins in his pocket]. Smith could easily have had fewer coins in his pocket at the relevant time. If he’d had fewer coins in his pocket, Smith would have been disposed by W to believe many P-like falsehoods—e.g., P, [The successful candidate has more than nine coins in his pocket], [The successful candidate has a
double-digit, even number of coins in his pocket], etc. So Smith could easily have been disposed, by W, to believe many P-like falsehoods.

Now for **Sheep Rock:** Let P be [There’s a sheep in the field], and let W be Roddy’s visual experience as of a sheep. Presumably, W actually disposes Roddy to believe many P-like falsehoods—e.g., [There’s a *seen* sheep in the field], [There’s a *seen* medium-sized woolly mammal in the field], etc. Moreover, the sheep could easily have slipped outside the field before Roddy came to believe P. If the sheep *had* slipped outside the field before Roddy came to believe P, Roddy would have been disposed by W to believe many P-like falsehoods—e.g., P, [There’s a medium-sized woolly mammal in the field], etc. So Roddy could easily have been disposed, by W, to believe many P-like falsehoods.

So there’s a clear *psychological* sense in which the Classics’ subjects’ doxastic methods are liable to mislead on the relevant subject matter. But there’s also a *normative* sense in which those subjects’ methods are liable to mislead. Roughly, the subject’s holding his belief as he does actually creates—or at least, could easily have created—a “normative push” toward many falsehoods similar to his actual belief’s content. More precisely: each subject holds his belief in a way that could easily have *justified him in believing* (or, *given him sufficient reason to believe*) many falsehoods similar to his actual belief’s content.10

Starting with **Pocket Change:** Let P be [The successful candidate has ten coins in his pocket], and let W be deduction from [Jones is the successful candidate] and [Jones has ten coins in his pocket]. Smith could easily have had fewer coins in his pocket at the relevant time. If he’d had fewer coins in his pocket, Smith would have been justified by W in believing many P-like falsehoods—e.g., P, [The successful candidate has more than nine coins in his pocket], etc. So Smith could easily have been justified, by W, in believing many P-like falsehoods.

Now for **Sheep Rock:** Let P be [There’s a sheep in the field], and let W be Roddy’s visual experience as of a sheep. Presumably, W actually justifies Roddy in believing many P-like falsehoods—e.g., [There’s a *seen* sheep in the field], [There’s a *seen* medium-sized woolly mammal in the field], etc. Moreover, the sheep could easily have slipped outside the field before Roddy came to believe P. If the sheep *had* slipped outside the field before Roddy came to believe P, Roddy would
have been justified by W in believing many P-like falsehoods—e.g., P, [There’s a medium-sized
woolly mammal in the field], etc. So Roddy could easily have been justified, by W, in believing
many P-like falsehoods.

In each of the Classics, then, there’s both a *psychological* and a *normative* sense in which the
subject’s doxastic method is liable to mislead on the relevant subject matter. Having recognized this,
we can start sketching two corresponding accounts of gettiered belief. What I’ll call the **Risk of
Misleading Dispositions Approach** says, roughly, that your (justified true) belief that Q is gettiered
just in case you actually are—or at least, you’re at real risk of being—*disposed to draw* a largely
inaccurate map of the world’s “Q-related” fragment. And what I’ll call the **Risk of Misleading
Justification Approach** says, roughly, that your (justified true) belief that Q is gettiered iff you
actually are—or at least, you’re at real risk of being—*justified in drawing* a largely inaccurate map
of the world’s “Q-related” fragment. In what follows, we’ll consider some more precise statements of
these approaches.

In light of some tough cases for EMA and the point that each subject in the Classics holds his
belief in a way that could easily have disposed him to believe many relevant falsehoods, I recently
proposed (something like) the following strain of the Risk of Misleading Dispositions Approach (cf.
Coffman 2010):

**RMDA:** S’s belief B that P held in way W is gettiered at t iff (B is justified and true but) S
could easily have been disposed at t, in a way like W, to believe many P-like falsehoods.

Arguably, RMDA correctly classifies Roddy’s belief in *Religious Sheep Rock* as gettiered, thereby
gaining an advantage over EMA. Given all the divine intervention, Roddy couldn’t easily have
*believed any* falsehoods similar to [There’s a sheep in the field]. Presumably, though, Roddy’s visual
experience as of a sheep actually has—and so, could easily have—disposed him to believe many such
falsehoods, such as [There’s a *seen* sheep in the field] and [There’s a *seen* medium-sized woolly
mammal in the field]. Unlike EMA, then, RMDA correctly classifies Roddy’s belief in *Religious
Sheep Rock* as gettiered.
Unfortunately, I missed (at least!) two important things when I proposed that earlier account of gettiered belief. First, RMDA suffers the same fate as EMA when it comes to cases like *Coffee Cup*. It could easily have happened that there was only a cup façade on John’s desk at noon. If there had been only a cup façade on John’s desk at noon, John would then have been disposed—by his visual experience as of a cup—to believe many falsehoods like [There’s a cup on the desk]. So John could easily have been disposed, by his relevant visual experience, to believe many falsehoods like [There’s a cup on the desk]. Like EMA, RMDA misclassifies John’s “cup” belief as gettiered.

Second, we can easily convert *Religious Sheep Rock* into a counterexample to RMDA’s left-to-right conditional. For we can add this detail to the original case: beyond ensuring that Roddy’s visual experience as of a sheep doesn’t prompt him to actually form any relevant false beliefs, God also ensures that Roddy’s visual experience doesn’t even dispose him to believe any relevant falsehoods. In response, one might try defending RMDA by arguing that, contrary to initial appearances, such cases really aren’t possible. The envisaged argument would invoke a principle like this:

\[
\text{Necessarily, if } S \text{ has a visual experience as of an } X, \text{ then (other things equal) } S \text{ is at least } \text{disposed to believe } \left[ \text{There's a seen } X \right].
\]

But such a principle is ultimately untenable. For one thing, it’s plausible that a thinker who lacks the concept of objectual seeing may nevertheless have visual experiences. Assuming one is disposed to believe P only if one grasps all P’s conceptual components, such a creature constitutes a counterexample to the above principle: our thinker has visual experiences but, due to conceptual impoverishment, isn’t disposed to believe any propositions of the form [There’s a seen X]. And even if we grant that any host of visual experience can believe propositions of the relevant form, there will still be persuasive counterexamples to the above principle. Imagine, e.g., a relatively immature or unsophisticated thinker who lacks facility with the concept of objectual seeing; as a result, s/he isn’t disposed—merely by having visual experiences—to believe any propositions of the form [There’s a seen X].
So RMDA turns out to be both too weak and too strong. Might some version of the Risk of Misleading Justification Approach fare better, at least relative to Coffee Cup and Religious Sheep Rock? I think so. To begin working toward a version of the approach that correctly classifies both examples, let’s invoke a somewhat stronger notion than that of easy possibility. Say that S could well have had property Q at time t iff, in a wide class of possible worlds that are close to the actual world before t, S has Q at t. With this stipulative definition of ‘S could well have had Q at t’, we can get our first strain of the Risk of Misleading Justification Approach:

**RMJA**: S’s belief B that P held in way W is gettiered at t iff (B is justified and true but) S could well have been justified at t, in a way like W, in believing many P-like falsehoods.

RMJA issues the right verdict on Coffee Cup. John isn’t in fact justified—by the relevant visual experience, at noon—in believing many falsehoods similar to [There’s a cup on the desk]. And while it could easily have happened that there was only a cup façade on John’s desk at noon, it’s false that this could well have happened then. That is, it’s false that there’s just a cup façade on John’s desk at noon in a wide class of possible worlds that are close to the actual world before noon (remember, the objective chance of the cup façade scenario is “infinitesimally small”). So RMJA correctly classifies John’s belief as ungettiered.

Moreover, RMJA can also correctly classify Roddy’s belief in Religious Sheep Rock as gettiered. For it’s plausible that Roddy’s visual experience as of a sheep could well have justified him in believing many falsehoods similar to [There’s a sheep in the field]. That is, in a wide class of worlds that differ no more than slightly from the actual world before the time when he forms his belief, Roddy’s relevant visual experience justifies him in believing many falsehoods similar to [There’s a sheep in the field]—e.g., [There’s a seen sheep in the field], [There’s a seen medium-sized woolly mammal in the field], [There’s a sheep in that spot] (where ‘that spot’ denotes the sheep-shaped rock’s location), etc.

Here, we should pause to ask whether an analogue of the amplified version of Religious Sheep Rock that refuted RMDA might impugn RMJA. Can we coherently add to Religious Sheep Rock...
Rock the detail that God ensures Roddy’s visual experience doesn’t justify him in believing such propositions as [There’s a seen sheep in the field]? Arguably, no. To see this, consider the relevant analogue of the above principle that I discussed in connection with RMDA:

Necessarily, if S has a visual experience as of an X, then (other things equal) S is at least justified in believing [There’s a seen X].

This principle has two advantages over its analogue whose consequent concerns being disposed to believe a proposition of the form [There’s a seen X]. First, this principle isn’t impugned by cases involving hosts of visual experience who lack the concept of objectual seeing. For it’s plausible that one can have justification to believe a proposition one can’t currently believe due to cognitive limitations (cf. Feldman and Conee 1985). Second, the above principle enjoys support from a plausible general claim about the justificatory power of perceptual experience (cf. Pryor 2004): When one has a perceptual experience as of an X, it feels to one like one is perceiving an X, and this feeling gives one (prima facie) justification to believe both [There’s an X] and [There’s a perceived X] (even if one currently lacks the concept of objectual perceiving, and so can’t now form a justified belief that there’s a perceived X). The above putative sufficient condition for being (prima facie) justified in believing propositions of the form [There’s a seen X] is therefore quite plausible. But if that principle is true, we can’t coherently add to the original case the detail that God ensures Roddy’s visual experience as of a sheep doesn’t justify him in believing propositions of the relevant form. For the above principle plus Roddy’s having the relevant visual experience (and the stipulation that ceteris are indeed paribus) entails that Roddy has justification to believe such propositions.

So: RMJA₁ can issue the correct verdicts on both Coffee Cup and Religious Sheep Rock. Sadly, though, there are cases showing that RMJA₁ is too strong. Consider this example from Hawthorne and Lasonen-Aarnio (2009: 104-5; cf. Skyrms 1967):

**Pyromaniac:** A pyromaniac [Pi] is about to strike a match. At a time t prior to striking the match she infers, and thereby comes to believe, that it will light when struck from her
knowledge that it is a dry match of a brand that has always lit for her when dry and struck. There is a small chance that the particular match she holds will not light by friction when struck. And, in fact, the match does not light by friction. But it lights nevertheless, because of a burst of rare Q-radiation.

At t, Pi’s belief that the match will light when struck is gettiered. But it’s false that Pi’s inductive reasoning could well have justified her in believing many falsehoods similar to [The match will light when struck]. For, in almost all possible worlds that are close to the actual world before t, Pi’s match subsequently lights by friction, as usual. And in any such “normal” world, Pi’s inductive reasoning doesn’t at t justify her in believing many falsehoods similar to [The match will light when struck]. RMJA_1 therefore places too strong a requirement on gettiered belief.

The obvious—albeit somewhat inelegant—fix is to “go disjunctive”:

\[ \text{RMJA}_2: \text{S’s belief } B \text{ that } P \text{ held in way } W \text{ is gettiered at } t \text{ iff (} B \text{ is justified and true but) } S \text{ either actually is at } t \text{ justified, in a way like } W, \text{ in believing many } P\text{-like falsehoods or could well have been so justified then.} \]

RMJA_2 correctly classifies Pi’s belief as gettiered. For Pi is in fact justified at t, by her inductive reasoning, in believing many falsehoods similar to [The match will light when struck]—e.g., [The match will light by friction when struck], [It’s false that the match will light when struck due to rare radiation], etc.

Likewise with respect to the subjects in our four remaining key examples of gettiered belief, which we’ll take in order of appearance:

**Pocket Change:** \( P = \text{[The successful candidate has ten coins in his pocket]}, W = \text{deduction from [Jones is the successful candidate] and [Jones has ten coins in his pocket].} \) Smith could well have had fewer coins in his pocket at the relevant time. If he’d had fewer coins in his pocket, Smith would have been justified by W in believing many P-like falsehoods—e.g., P,
[The successful candidate has more than nine coins in his pocket], etc. So Smith could well have been justified, by W, in believing many P-like falsehoods.

Sheep Rock: \( P = \) [There’s a sheep in the field], \( W = \) visual experience as of a sheep. Presumably, \( W \) actually justifies Roddy in believing many P-like falsehoods—e.g., [There’s a seen sheep in the field]. Moreover, the sheep could well have slipped outside the field before Roddy came to believe \( P \). If the sheep had slipped outside the field before Roddy came to believe \( P \), Roddy would have been justified by \( W \) in believing many P-like falsehoods—e.g., \( P, \) [There’s a medium-sized woolly mammal in the field], etc. So Roddy could well have been justified, by \( W \), in believing many P-like falsehoods.

Hobbled: \( P = \) [The murderer limps], \( W = \) abduction from crime scene evidence. Watson’s abductive reasoning could well have—and, on a natural interpretation of the case, actually has—justified him in believing many falsehoods similar to [The murderer limps], including: [The murderer had a limp], [The murderer was physically handicapped], etc.

Fake Fruits: \( P = \) [There’s an apple in the bowl], \( W = \) visual experience as of an apple. Sara could well have believed, on the basis of a visual experience like \( W \) (e.g., a visual experience as of an orange), that the bowl contained the corresponding kind of fruit (e.g., an orange). If Sara had so believed, she would have been justified by a visual experience like \( W \) in believing many P-like falsehoods—e.g., [There’s non-apple fruit in the bowl], [There’s citrus fruit in the bowl], etc. So Sara could well have been justified, in a way like \( W \), in believing many P-like falsehoods.

Upshot: RMJ\(_{A_2}\)’s right-to-left conditional correctly implies that all four salient beliefs are gettiered.

Let’s return, finally, to our two remaining key examples of ungettiered belief—viz., Field Trip and Divine Revelation (we already discussed Coffee Cup above). For each case, there’s not even an initially plausible reason to think its subject could easily have been justified, in a way similar to
how he formed his relevant belief, in believing many falsehoods similar to his belief’s content. *A fortiori*, there’s not even an initially plausible reason to think either of those subjects actually is, or could well have been, so justified. RMJA₂ therefore correctly classifies all our key ungettiered beliefs as such.

RMJA₂ improves significantly on the previously discussed accounts of gettiered belief by properly handling all the key examples we’ve considered. Of course, one can be no more than *very* cautiously optimistic about the long-term prospects of any substantive account of gettiered belief. RMJA₂ has some additional benefits (e.g., it can help explain the superiority of knowledge to gettiered belief) but also some potential costs (e.g., it’s unclear whether it properly handles certain so-called “epistemic Frankfurt cases” [Comesana 2013]) that merit discussion. But I’m out of space, and so must close by simply commending RMJA₂ to interested readers for further consideration. ⁸, ¹³

References


Comesana, J. 2013. “Sosa on Safety and Epistemic Frankfurt Cases.” In J. Turri (ed.), *Virtuous


Thanks to Rodrigo Borges and Georgi Gardiner for urging me to emphasize and justify this thesis.

Those who group “fake barn” and “hidden helper” cases with the Classics include Plantinga (1993), Hiller and Neta (2007), Stone (2013), Freitag (2014), and Schafer (2014). Theorists who group “fake barn” cases with the Classics include Howard-Snyder, Howard-Snyder, and Feit (2003), Lackey (2009), Reed (2009), Turri (2012), and Pritchard (2012). Theorists who group “hidden helper” cases with the Classics include Turri (2011) and Greco (2012).

3 Here I have in mind the “double luck” recipe (Zagzebski 1994) and the “disconnect between justificatory and truth-making factors” recipe (Howard-Snyder, Howard-Snyder, and Feit 2003).

4 Incidentally, Coffee Cup strikes me as a more promising attempted counterexample to “safety” theories of knowledge than the literature’s leading candidates (cf. Hawthorne and Lasonen-Aarnio 2009). See Bogardus (2014) for a defense of safety theories from attempted counterexamples due to Neta and Rohrbaugh (2004), Comesana (2005), and Kelp (2009), along with a novel but (in my view) highly problematic attempted counterexample to such theories.

5 Similar cases include Levy’s Young Jack* (2011) and Pritchard’s Temp (2012).

6 This expresses what Pritchard (2012) calls the ‘ability intuition’, which I’m happy to accept.

7 Sosa (2010) defends ascribing first-order knowledge in “fake barn”-type cases by arguing that the contrary intuition is in fact a mistaken response to a lack of second-order knowledge. For persuasive criticism of this kind of defense, see Kelp (2013).

8 Crisp (2000: 48) seems to detect these two senses, but doesn’t pause to disentangle them.

9 Typically, S’s believing that P in way W will dispose S to believe many propositions like P. For ground-breaking discussion of dispositions to believe and their relation to dispositional and occurrent beliefs, see Audi (1994).

10 To further clarify: the epistemic notion in play here is what epistemologists typically label ‘propositional justification’, the relation expressed by ‘P is justified for S’ (as opposed to, say, ‘S justifiedly believes P’). For more discussion, see §1.3.2 of Ichikawa and Steup (2012).

11 Thanks to Kirk Ludwig and Jennifer Nagel for helpful discussion.

12 Notably, proponents of RMJA can ascribe inferential knowledge from a false premise to thinkers in cases like those that Warfield (2005), Klein (2008), and Fitelson (2010) describe. A representative example from Warfield (2005: 407-8): ‘Counting with some care the number of people present at my talk, I reason: ‘There are 53 people at my talk; therefore my 100 handout copies are sufficient.’ My premise is false. There are 52 people
in attendance—I double counted one person who changed seats during the count. And yet I know my conclusion.” This example’s protagonist—call him ‘Fritz’—is justified in believing many falsehoods similar to the content his false “premise” belief about the number of people in attendance. Still, we can understand the case so that Fritz isn’t justified in believing many falsehoods similar to the content of his true “conclusion” belief that he’s got enough handouts for everyone in attendance; nor need it be true that he could well have been so justified at the time in question. RMJA_2 is therefore consistent with the claim that Fritz’s true “conclusion” belief amounts to knowledge. (Thanks to Rodrigo Borges for urging me to consider RMJA_2’s bearing on such cases.)

13 This essay draws from chapters 3 and 4 of Coffman (2015). Thanks to participants in the Midwest Epistemology Workshop (2013) for helpful discussion of an earlier draft. Special thanks to Robert Audi, Rodrigo Borges, Claudio de Almeida, Matthew Frise, Georgi Gardiner, Sandy Goldberg, Scott Hagaman, Brian Kim, Peter Klein, Maria Lasonen-Aarnio, Kirk Ludwig, Jack Lyons, Chad Marxen, Jennifer Nagel, and Tom Senor.