CRITICAL NOTICES

IS JUSTIFIED BELIEF KNOWLEDGE? CRITICAL NOTICE OF JONATHAN SUTTON, WITHOUT JUSTIFICATION

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In *Without Justification*, Jonathan Sutton attempts to undermine the orthodox view that a justified belief need not constitute knowledge, develops a battery of arguments for the unorthodox thesis that you justifiably believe P iff you know P, and explores the topics of testimony and inference in light of the equation of justification and knowledge ($J = K$). This book is essential reading at epistemology’s cutting edge. In section I, we’ll take an extended tour of the book, raising various questions and objections along the way. In section II, we will assess Sutton’s three main arguments for $J = K$, which form the heart of his project.

I. A Tour of *Without Justification*

In chapter 1, Sutton clarifies $J = K$ and starts undermining resistance to it. He describes what he regards as the strongest apparent counterexamples to $J = K$: unknown unknown beliefs and known unknown beliefs. An unknown unknown belief is one that “would have constituted knowledge but for unfortunate circumstances” (p. 9), and whose subject would (on minimal reflection) mistakenly think the belief knowledge. The category of unknown unknown belief is exhausted by beliefs in Gettier cases, plus false beliefs that would have been knowledge had they been true.

A known unknown belief is one whose subject is positioned to know it falls short of knowledge. This category is exhausted by beliefs formed (a) on explicitly probabilistic grounds (e.g., your belief that your lottery ticket is a loser), or (b) through an inference to the best explanation that does not yield knowledge. While such a belief falls short of knowledge, its subject knows its content is probable for her. The fact that such a belief’s subject knows its content is probable for her largely explains why such beliefs strike us as justified. About the probability concept invoked here, Sutton says (pp. 12–3):

2. Consider, for example, your false belief that you’re seeing a barn in a “reversed” fake barn case where you are facing the only fake barn in the region.
Probability will function as something of a primitive for me—but not a metaphorical primitive. I will not talk about probability “out there in the world,” but probability as it occurs in the mind—in the content of beliefs...I simply take there to be a difference between the content of the belief that P and the belief that probably P—distinct propositions are believed in each case, one of which contains a concept of probability, and one of which does not...The relevant concept of probability that figures in such beliefs is certainly in some sense epistemic and also partially subjective...This degree of subjectivity means that the notion of probability that figures in the content of the kind of belief that probably P that will concern us is implicitly relativized to the believer himself...he believes and knows that P is probable for him.

Having described two apparent counterexamples to $J = K$ and the indicated probability concept, Sutton identifies three candidates for what $J = K$’s detractors mean when applying “justified” to unknown unknown and known unknown beliefs:

- **warrant**: the property that (a) converts mere true belief into knowledge and (b) yields a satisfying analysis of knowledge;
- **deontological justification**: the property a belief B has iff B’s subject is epistemically permitted to hold B; and
- **evaluative justification**: the property a belief B has iff B’s subject’s holding B is a good thing from the epistemic viewpoint.

Throughout chapters 1 and 2, Sutton defends $J = K$ from a variety of considerations, suggesting that some or other of these concepts have instances that aren’t knowledge. Starting with warrant, neither unknown unknown nor known unknown beliefs are instances of it. Since no true belief in either category has warrant (neither category comprises knowledge), it is hard to see how some false belief in one of the categories could have warrant. Sutton concludes we’ve no good reason to countenance warranted belief. The notion of warrant harbors no threat to $J = K$.

Next, Sutton undermines the view that a deontologically justified belief need not be knowledge. He considers three common reasons for holding this view:

- We can determine introspectively whether a belief meets the requirements for deontological justification.

Against this, Sutton describes a plausible externalist approach to deontological justification due to Kornblith. 3

- “[E]pistemic duties...play a role in how one forms one’s beliefs” (p. 20).

Here, Sutton argues that an externalist construal of epistemic duties, on which we can be mistaken as to whether we’ve fulfilled those duties, will allow such duties to play a suitably robust role in guiding belief formation.

• Deontologically justified belief requires no more than blameless belief.

Against this, Sutton distinguishes between your behavior’s violating an obligation and your being blameworthy for the behavior (p. 33), and attacks the above alleged sufficient condition with the plausible claim that “any purported epistemic goal that [e.g.] the [blameless] zodiacal believers live up to qua zodiacal believers is much too modest to be central to our epistemic lives” (p. 31).

Finally, Sutton impugns the view that an evaluatively justified belief need not constitute knowledge. The main support for this view is the common thought that “truth maximization and falsity minimization are a primary or the primary epistemic goal (or goals)” (p. 21). If that is right, then known unknown beliefs whose contents are known to be highly probable do well from the epistemic perspective, and so are evaluatively justified. As Sutton notes, though, since there is reason to think such known unknown beliefs are not evaluatively justified, “it . . . should not be uncontroversial that our primary epistemic goal is a combination of truth maximization and falsity minimization” (p. 22). Sutton aims to establish this alternative: “. . . it is knowledge that is the supremely good thing from an epistemic point of view . . . ” (p. 21). 4

Before leaving chapter 1, I want to express a concern involving (a) Sutton’s treatment of the new evil demon problem and (b) his primitive epistemic probability concept. Here is a brief statement of the former: 5 Your globally deceived internal twin is no less justified in his beliefs than you are in yours. So, assuming that you hold many justified beliefs, so does your deceived internal twin—notwithstanding the fact that his belief-forming (-sustaining) processes (faculties) are much less reliable than yours.

Theorists of many stripes accept this argument against simple reliabilism. Reflecting on it reveals a problem for Sutton. Given his endorsement of $J = K$, Sutton must explain away the widespread intuition underlying the argument’s comparative justification claim concerning your beliefs and those of your twin. I see two possible strategies; neither seems promising.

4. Let me briefly draw attention to an interesting line of argument I cannot do justice to here. In §1.3.3, Sutton argues that deontological justification is knowledge iff evaluative justification is knowledge. Assuming throughout that neither kind of justification requires more than knowledge, Sutton argues for the left-to-right direction of the thesis via the premise that its denial has an implausible consequence: there could be a belief such that your holding it is, from the epistemic perspective, impermissible yet good. As for the right-to-left direction, Sutton notes that its denial has this implausible consequence: there could be a belief such that your holding it is, from the epistemic viewpoint, permissible yet not good.

The strategy Sutton explicitly pursues is to liken your deceived twin to a “zodiacal believer,” then give an error theory in terms of blameless belief (pp. 30–1):

Better to say that blamelessness is one thing and justification another, and that to call a belief unjustified is not to call it blameworthy. The new evil-demon problem is generated by a failure to recognize the distinction... Blamelessness can hardly be taken to be a primary goal—any purported epistemic goal that the zodiacal believers live up to qua zodiacal believers is much too modest to be central to our epistemic lives.

This error theory is not satisfying: your deceived twin’s beliefs seem to have a positive epistemic status the zodiacal believers’ lack. Fortunately, Sutton has resources for a more promising error theory. Since he endorses \( J = K \) and denies that knowledge comes in degrees, Sutton must deny there is such a thing as comparative justification. He sketches a general error theory for comparative justification intuitions that could be applied to the first premise of the new evil demon argument: “[S]omeone who knows that it is extremely likely that \( P \) (but not categorically that \( P \)) can be said to have ‘more justification for believing that \( P \)’ than someone who merely knows that it is fairly likely that \( P \) . . .” (p. 127). Both you and your twin know (justifiably believe) it is probable there are hands (e.g.). This accounts for the comparative justification intuition. Nevertheless, since you know there are hands while your twin does not, you are justified in believing there are hands while your twin is not.

This second strategy faces a dilemma. In keeping with the book’s guiding vision—captured by the slogan “Knowledge First and Last” (p. 2)—Sutton characterizes his primitive probability notion in terms of knowledge: “[Knowledge that probably \( P \)] must be itself grounded in knowledge . . .” (p. 13). If Sutton employs his probability notion to account for the comparative justification intuition concerning you and your deceived twin, he can either keep or drop the above constraint on probabilistic knowledge. If he keeps it, the second strategy fails: arguably, your deceived twin lacks knowledge enabling her to know it is likely there are hands. But if Sutton drops the constraint—allowing, for example, that certain of your twin’s nondoxastic states make it likely for her that there are hands—then we should worry that his primitive probability notion smuggles justification back into the picture (with the constraint dropped, that notion seems distinct from knowledge yet also a plausible candidate for what \( J = K \)’s detractors mean by “justified”). I conclude that Sutton lacks a satisfactory error theory for our comparative justification intuition about you and your deceived twin. The intuition remains an obstacle to wholehearted endorsement of \( J = K \).

In chapter 2, Sutton develops three arguments for \( J = K \). He also further undermines resistance to \( J = K \) via a discussion of the semantics of belief ascription, uses those semantic claims to provide a solution to the preface paradox, defends functionalism about the concept of knowledge, and develops a novel argument against contextualism.
Section II will focus squarely on Sutton’s three arguments for \( J = K \). For now, we will restrict ourselves to Sutton’s other chapter 2 projects along with an additional argument—the Modesty Argument—for the weaker (than \( J = K \)) thesis that no known unknown belief is justified (pp. 54–6):

[Beliefs in probabilistic propositions such as \( \text{It's highly likely that my lottery ticket is a loser} \) are at least as good a guide to behavior as their bolder, nonprobabilistic counterparts from a third-person perspective and, more importantly, from a first-person perspective. One gains nothing . . . from believing immodestly that one will lose the lottery that one does not gain from believing modestly that one will very likely lose. This is not to say that believing that one is very likely to lose the lottery and believing that one will lose the lottery do not differ at all in their (potential) effects on a believer’s behavior. Believing categorically that one will lose the lottery will lead to the kind of behavior that is associated with greater confidence than its probabilistic counterpart. But such behavior will be the behavior of the irrationally overconfident . . . An optimal believer, whose beliefs are precisely as modest as is necessary to produce optimal behavior, who is neither overconfident nor underconfident in belief or subsequent action, is one who restricts his beliefs to what he knows. Such belief accords with primary epistemic goals, among which is, arguably, the optimal guidance of action—it is, then, justified in an evaluative sense.

We can summarize Sutton’s Modesty Argument like this:

1. S’s belief, \( B \), is justified only if \( B \) is an optimal guide to S’s behavior.
2. Known unknown beliefs lead to “irrationally overconfident” behavior.
   
C So: Known unknown beliefs aren’t justified.

Both premises are problematic. Starting with (2), it is a nonobvious empirical claim; indeed, the very categorical lottery beliefs Sutton highlights seem to rebut it. Surely, most lottery players think their tickets will lose. Yet few destroy their tickets before the winner is announced.6

As for (1), it commits Sutton to pragmatic encroachment on justification—the view that whether you are justified in believing \( P \) depends in part on your interests, on what is important to you.7 As is illustrated by (e.g.) DeRose’s (in)famous bank

6. Highly relevant here, I think, is the fact that the typical lottery player does not take himself to know he will lose—indeed, he regards himself as ignorant as to whether he will lose. This fact is at least the beginning of a plausible explanation why typical lottery players keep their tickets until the winner is announced, despite thinking all along they will not win.

7. Prominent proponents of pragmatic encroachment on epistemic concepts include J. Hawthorne, Knowledge and Lotteries (Oxford University Press, 2004); J. Stanley, Knowledge and Practical Interests (Oxford University Press, 2005); and J. Fantl and M. McGrath, Knowledge in an Uncertain World (Oxford University Press, 2009). Though this is not a particularly salient theme in the book, Sutton explicitly joins the pragmatic encroachment movement. He writes: “Hawthorne and others suggest that [examples like DeRose’s bank cases do] not show that ‘know’ in different contexts of knowledge attribution denotes more or less stringent characteristics that beliefs have. Rather, it always denotes the single characteristic of constituting knowledge, which is simply harder for a belief to possess in some cases than others, and one of the factors that can make it
cases, whether a given belief is an optimal guide to your behavior depends on your interests. If it is not at all important to you that your paycheck be deposited before Monday, your belief on Friday that the bank will be open Saturday may contribute to your sensibly bypassing the busy bank late Friday afternoon. By contrast, if it is important to you that your paycheck be deposited before Monday, it would not be sensible to bypass the busy bank late Friday afternoon—notwithstanding the fact that you then believe (just as firmly, and for exactly the same reasons, as you do in the “low stakes” scenario) that the bank will be open Saturday. So we have

(3) Whether B is an optimal guide to S’s behavior depends on S’s interests.

Premises (1) and (3) imply

(4) Whether S’s belief B is justified depends on S’s interests.

Now critics of pragmatic encroachment will point out that claims like (4) strongly suggest there are true readings of sentences like this (supposing Ann is in a “low stakes” scenario while Bob is in a “high stakes” scenario):9

(5) Bob’s evidence for thinking the bank will be open Saturday is just as strong as Ann’s; but while Ann is justified in thinking the bank will be open then, Bob is not.

Many theorists will reckon (5)’s apparently persistent falsity a serious problem for 1.

After presenting his main arguments for J = K (considered in §II below), Sutton continues undermining resistance to it. One especially interesting argument employs a plausible semantics of belief ascription to show that “unjustified beliefs . . . are not quite as common as one might suppose” they’d be on J = K (p. 64):

Utterances of the form ‘I believe that P’ and similar forms . . . often, I suggest, do not express belief in the proposition that P. They express, rather, a belief that P is probable . . . Consider a stranger who asks one where the post office is. One does not know, but has a vague idea that it is a mile to the right. Consequently, one says “I believe that it is a mile down that way.” This is a perfectly proper utterance; I suggest that it is also not literally true. One does not believe categorically that the post office is a mile to the right;
one believes that it is more likely there than not. Even if I make an explicitly probabilistic self-ascription of belief, such as ‘I believe that it is more likely than not that there are mice in the basement’, it is entirely proper to report my belief without a probabilistic modifier—“He thinks that there are mice in the basement”… Third-person belief ascriptions need not attribute belief in the proposition that an overly literal interpretation would suggest any more than their first-person counterparts. Since the qualified beliefs, which I suggest apparently bolder ascriptions of belief in fact express, do, in general, constitute knowledge for their holders, unjustified belief is a lot less common than an overly literal understanding of belief ascriptions would indicate. (pp. 64–5)

Sutton goes on to use the above semantics of belief ascription to provide a solution to the preface paradox (§2.4). On the basis of “respect for commonsense concepts” (p. 72), Sutton argues for functionalism about the concept of knowledge (§2.5.1–3). The following passage clarifies Sutton’s premise:

A commonsense concept . . . is one that is in universal or almost universal use among ordinary people . . . Respecting commonsense concepts involves a preservation of those concepts. One does not replace those concepts with other (allegedly) philosophically sophisticated concepts. One neither tries to define them in quasi-technical terms that are inevitably more obscure than the definienda, nor does one try to define commonsense concepts away in a similar fashion . . . Of course, none of this is to deny that plenty of interest can be said about knowledge . . . but just that what is said will itself ineliminably employ the concept of knowledge, and not in a merely preparatory fashion prior to a definition or elimination of knowledge. Commonsense respect for concepts does not demand an end to epistemology, just an end to epistemological analysis of concepts that are in perfect working order as they are.

Widespread ambivalence toward (e.g.) the best arguments for (a) knowledge skepticism and (b) the relative unimportance of knowledge (among cognitive states) inclines me to doubt Sutton’s suggestion that our concept of knowledge is “in perfect working order.” Instead of lingering over this worry, however, I want to highlight a tension between J = K and the “handwaving functionalism” Sutton thinks supported by respect for the commonsense concept of knowledge (pp. 78–9):

10. Briefly, the solution is this. If we use the expression “justified belief that P” strictly, then there is no paradox: depending on how we describe the case, either the author would not seem justified in believing each claim in her book or she would not seem justified in believing she made a mistake. On the other hand, if we use “justified belief that P” loosely, it means “justified belief that probably P.” But then there is no paradox, since on this interpretation the argument invokes the following obviously false epistemic principle: If you’re (i) justified in believing probably P and (ii) justified in believing probably Q, then you’re justified in believing probably (P and Q). Either way, there is no paradox: each interpretation involves some or other highly dubious claim.

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It is exceptionally hard to give a definition of knowledge that all [the putative instances of knowledge] satisfy. It is far more tempting for an epistemologist to base his definition of knowledge around some of the examples and argue that others are not really knowledge at all. . . Handwaving functionalism . . . enables us to accept the apparent diversity of knowledge at face value; such a definition is possible at most only in principle . . . Our commonsense beliefs concerning knowledge implicitly define knowledge in an ungraspsably complex fashion . . . It is more likely that knowledge really is as diverse as it looks than that any unifying definition that has to jettison the diversity is correct (so respect for commonsense concepts urges).

Sutton’s functionalism creates unacknowledged problems for $J = K$. Presumably, Sutton will want to count as knowledge various beliefs that many deem unjustified. Prominent examples include memory knowledge absent relevant evidence, idiot savant knowledge, and clairvoyant knowledge. Many reckon such beliefs counterexamples to $J = K$’s right-to-left direction. Since Sutton provides few resources for explaining away the intuition that unjustified knowledge is possible, his functionalism threatens to conflict with $J = K$. I think there’s significant unresolved tension here in Sutton’s overall position.

Sutton closes chapter 2 with this intriguing argument against contextualism (p. 81):

How is an inquirer whose goal is knowledge (that $P$, say) able to regulate his inquiry if contextualism is true? Let us suppose ‘I know that $P$’ is a sentence that, when uttered by S during his inquiry, is true in some contexts and false in others. S should stop his inquiry when he takes himself to know that $P$. The worry is that sometimes when he asks the regulative question, he will take himself to know that $P$ and conclude that he should pack up his investigation. At other times (when there has been a context shift)—perhaps when he has already suspended the inquiry—he will judge that he does not know that $P$ and so continue with the (perhaps temporarily terminated) inquiry. This is surely intolerable—continuing to act and ceasing to act are absolute matters . . . In cases in which how one acts and whether one continues to act depend on judgments as to how one should act and whether one should continue to act, those judgments about what one should do must have invariant truth-values if they are properly to regulate action. And when those judgments about how one should act are directly tied to self-ascriptions of knowledge, those knowledge ascriptions must also have invariant truth-conditions, pace contextualism.

Letting $S$ be an inquirer whose inquiry is properly concluded when—but only when—he can truly self-ascribe knowledge of a certain proposition $P$, we can restate Sutton’s anticontextualist argument as follows:

11. Throughout the book, Sutton assumes that knowledge requires justified belief, and thus focuses on apparent counterexamples to $J = K$’s left-to-right direction.
If contextualism is true, then whether S can truly self-ascribe knowledge that P can vary across ordinary conversational contexts.\textsuperscript{12}

If whether S can truly self-ascribe knowledge that P can vary across such contexts, then whether S can truly judge it proper to conclude inquiry can vary across such contexts.

Such contextual variance in the truth value of judgments about whether it is proper to conclude inquiry “is surely intolerable.”

\textit{C:} Contextualism is false.

No great fan of contextualism, I would like to see Sutton’s anticontextualist argument succeed. Unfortunately, it fails as currently developed.

In a nutshell, the problem is that (1) is incorrect as it stands, and the required fix will make (2) false. Start by noting that, throughout the argument, “knowledge” will express some or other epistemic relation, \( R \). According to (1), contextualism entails that whether our inquirer S can truly say he bears \( R \) to P can vary across contexts. But contextualism holds no such implication. All contextualism entails is that whether S can accurately apply “knowledge” to his epistemic relation to P can vary across contexts. So (1) requires revision. To preserve validity, we will then have to replace (2) with

\[(2^*) \text{ If whether S can accurately apply “knowledge” to his epistemic relation to P can vary across contexts, then whether S can truly judge it proper to conclude inquiry can vary across contexts.}\]

But (2*) is false. Our inquirer, S, can truly judge it proper to conclude his inquiry iff he bears \( R \) to P. The key contextualist thesis that “knowledge” can express different epistemic relations in different contexts (2*’s antecedent) is perfectly compatible with the claim that whether S bears \( R \) to P—and so, whether S can truly judge it proper to conclude inquiry—cannot vary across ordinary conversational contexts (the denial of 2*’s consequent).

We turn now to chapters 3 and 4, which investigate the topics of testimony and inference against the backdrop of the arguments defended in the book’s first half.

In chapter 3, Sutton explores the nature of justified and known testimonial belief (which, given \( J = K \), are identical). Here he argues for the \textit{KK view}:

\[ S’s \text{ testimonial belief that } P \text{ constitutes knowledge iff } S \text{ knows that the testifier knows that } P. \]

Sutton considers two alternatives to the KK view:

\textit{BK view:} S’s testimonial belief that P constitutes knowledge iff S believes truly—and has no reason to doubt—that the testifier knows P.

\textit{JBK view:} S’s testimonial belief that P constitutes knowledge iff S has a U-justified true belief that the testifier knows that P (Sutton calls a belief

\textsuperscript{12} In the above passage, Sutton sometimes incorrectly suggests that the contextualist—whose main aim is to develop a semantic theory of predicates like “knows that”—is in the somewhat different business of predicting when we actually will or would not employ such predicates.
Sutton offers two arguments against the BK view. The following passage sets out the first (pp. 94–5):

I might tell someone who has absolutely no philosophical expertise whatsoever that I am a better philosopher than someone than whom I know that I am a better philosopher. The individual to whom I testify is not just relatively clueless about philosophy itself, let us suppose, but he also has no idea which philosophers are better than others . . . I submit that he cannot know that I am a better philosopher than the poorer philosopher just because I told him that I was . . . The BK view cannot accommodate such a situation: if I know that I am the better philosopher, and the testifee believes me when I state that I am (believing at least implicitly that I know that I am the better philosopher), in the absence of reasons to doubt what I say, he will know that I am the better philosopher . . . There are many equally plausible candidates for knowledge that is much harder to transmit than the BK view seems to entail.

And here is Sutton’s second argument against the BK view (p. 98):

If I derive knowledge that P from testimony that P, then I in turn should be able to transmit that knowledge to others through testimony. Suppose that my belief that P does derive from a testifier who knew that P . . . If I do not justifiably believe that the testifier knew that P, then it will be, I suggest, epistemically irresponsible for me to believe that P and doubly irresponsible to tell another without qualification that P. Doubly irresponsible because my belief that P is not justified, and neither will be the belief of another that is derived from mine through my irresponsible testimony. If I did know that P through testimony that P, despite having no justification for believing that the testifier knew, then one who in turn receives my testimony that P ought to be in a position also to know that P and will know that P if he believes and does not have “stronger reasons” to doubt my testimony than to believe it. Such a chain of transmitted testimony . . . seems far too shaky to be a chain of transmitted knowledge. The BK view entails that it is just such a chain.

With these arguments in place, Sutton turns to the JBK view, describing a putative counterexample to its right-to-left direction. The example stems from the following famous case due to Harman:

A political leader is assassinated. His associates, fearing a coup, decide to pretend that the bullet hit someone else. On nationwide television they announce that an assassination attempt has failed to kill the leader but has killed a secret service man by mistake. However, before the announcement is made, an enterprising reporter on the scene telephone the real story to his newspaper, which has included the story in its final edition. Jill buys a copy of
that paper and reads the story of the assassination. What she reads is true, and so are her assumptions about how the story came to be in the paper.\textsuperscript{13}

Here is Sutton’s attempted counterexample to the JBK view:

If you read my newspaper or talk to me in unexceptional circumstances, you know what I report and you know that I know what I report. In these exceptional circumstances, however, we cannot say that. You do not know that the political figure has been assassinated (Harman’s original point), you merely have a [U-]justified belief that he has. You also have a merely [U-]justified belief that I know that the political figure has been assassinated, which, by hypothesis, I do. The JBK view is false . . . Just as a [U-]justified, true belief need not amount to knowledge, a [U-]justified, true belief that a testifier knows that P will not necessarily enable one to know that P even if one believes the testimony. The land of fake newspapers is the land of fake barns all over again. (p. 102)

Having laid out arguments against the BK and JBK views, Sutton closes chapter 3 by defending his KK view from various objections to the effect that it is too strong. He focuses on the following argument inspired by Coady:\textsuperscript{14} If we lack testimonial knowledge in childhood, then we do not have nearly as much knowledge in adulthood as we think. But if the KK view is correct, we lack testimonial knowledge in childhood. Thus, the KK view implies an implausible skepticism about both children and adults.

Sutton defends the KK view from this argument by attacking each of its premises. Against the first premise, he says (pp. 107–8):

It is not the case that one acquires later knowledge only if one’s childhood beliefs already constitute knowledge. Rather, one’s childhood beliefs are, at their genesis, unjustified; they do not constitute knowledge. The child adds more and more unjustified beliefs and, as the (initially unjustified) picture of reality is filled in, it gets closer and closer to being a justified picture of reality. A belief that was once unjustified becomes knowledge as one acquires further beliefs . . . Coherentists propose just this picture of knowledge. What makes a belief knowledge is how well it coheres with a sufficiently complete and coherent belief set, and that plausibly is a big factor in what makes many beliefs knowledge. The very same belief can fail to be a member of such a set at one time—in the mind of a child—and become a member of such a set as more beliefs are added and the child gets closer to adulthood.

And here is Sutton’s reply to the second premise (p. 110):

Perhaps it is easy for children to know that their parents know that that long-necked animal is a giraffe, and so to know themselves that that long-necked animal is a giraffe in accord with the KK view. It might be that their


status as children... is enough to make it easier to know that testifiers know... [T]here are a number of reasons that can explain why this might be the case. The kind of propositions that children learn are perhaps particularly easy to know by testimony; it is easy to know for this reason that one’s parents and teachers know much of what they know and testify to. A child’s access to testifiers is largely confined to those who have his epistemic interests at heart. Perhaps this also makes it easier to know that those testifiers know... . . .

While I think these defenses of the KK view succeed, I also think Sutton’s overall argument for the view fails. To begin, given the notorious variance across theorists of ignorance intuitions concerning “Harmanized” subjects, I do not find Sutton’s objection to the JBK view particularly strong. Further, Sutton’s arguments against the BK view do not support the disjunction of the JBK and KK views. Consider the additional (to the JBK and KK views) approach to testimonial knowledge Greco describes in this passage:

Often theories of testimonial knowledge are divided into two camps. On the first kind of theory, what is important for testimonial knowledge is that the source of testimony is in fact reliable. On the second kind of theory, it is also important that the believer knows, or at least justifiably believes, that the source is reliable. From a virtue-theoretic perspective, however, a third kind of theory becomes plausible. Namely, testimonial knowledge requires that the believer is a reliable receiver of testimony. That is, what is important is not so much that the testifier is reliable, or that the believer knows that he is, but that the believer herself is reliable in the way that she receives and evaluates testimony. This will plausibly involve reliable capacities for discriminating reliable sources of testimony from unreliable sources. 15

This reliable testifier requiring (RTR) approach can render the same verdicts as the JBK and KK views on Sutton’s counterexamples to the BK view. At best, then, those examples support the disjunction of the JBK and KK views with the RTR approach. To go one step further, since the RTR approach is simpler (it demands less) than the JBK and KK views, Sutton’s counterexamples to the BK view arguably support the RTR approach over the JBK and KK views. In any event, Sutton’s overall case for the KK view seems not to support that view uniquely well.

In the fourth and final chapter, Sutton derives from J = K an account of good inference, discusses both deductive and inductive inference, and derives, from J = K and his account of good inference, an account of evidence that (Sutton argues) has some clear advantages over certain competing accounts (specifi-

Sutton starts the presentation of his account of good inference by endorsing this “deliberately very vague and general” thesis: “a good inference has good premises and good reasoning, the combination of which is reliably associated with a good conclusion” (p. 116). Alternatively, “a good inference arrives at a justified belief in its conclusion” from justified beliefs in its premises (p. 119). Invoking J = K, Sutton derives this account (p. 119):

An inference from premises P1, . . . , Pn to a conclusion C is good if and only if the inferrer knows that P1, . . . , Pn and comes to know that C by inferring it from those premises.

In other words: “Good reasoning is reasoning that gives rise to knowledge when applied to knowledge, that leads from known premises to a known conclusion” (p. 120).

After articulating his account of good inference, Sutton draws on widespread intuitions about (e.g.) Vogel’s (in)famous car theft case18 to deny that knowledge is closed under known entailment (p. 123):

I know that my car is parked on Not Utterly Safe St. And I know that if my car is parked on that street, then it has not been stolen. If closure holds, I can know with great ease that my car has not been stolen. But it seems that I can know no such thing, although I might very well know that my car has probably not been stolen . . . There are numerous quotidian cases conforming to this pattern. Perhaps it is even the case that almost all contingent knowledge entails propositions that it seems that we do not know and infinitely many of them; although for each of them, it is plausible to suppose that we know . . . that it is very likely that the proposition is true.

Of great interest here is Sutton’s error theory for “pro-closure” conviction (pp. 123–4). As he sees it, such conviction has two sources:

(i) a worry that denying closure implies skepticism about much inferential knowledge we take ourselves to have;

and

(ii) the fact that modus ponens inferences specifically—and valid inferences more generally—preserve true belief.

17. I want to flag a very interesting section in chapter 4 I cannot do justice to here. In §4.4, Sutton uses his account of good inference to distinguish knowledge-yielding nondeductive inferences (e.g., an instance of universal generalization in which one’s knowledge of the premises enables one to know the conclusion) from probabilistic nondeductive inferences incapable of yielding knowledge (e.g., any “lottery” inference, no matter how probable it is that one will lose). Readers will profit considerably from Sutton’s helpful discussion of this distinction.
As for the first source of procllosure conviction, Sutton notes that denying closure has implausible skeptical consequences only if many of our actual inferences are relevantly similar to those involved in cases like Vogel’s. But “since people do not actually infer that their cars have not been stolen on the basis of their beliefs about where they are parked . . ., a denial of closure in the cases in question will not lead to a damaging skepticism about a good deal of quotidian knowledge” (p. 124). Here is what Sutton says about the second source of procllosure conviction (p. 124):

If . . . one grounds one’s conception of good inference in knowledge preservation . . . at the outset, then whether modus ponens is a form of inference all of whose instances with known premises are good depends upon whether all of its instances preserve knowledge. To suppose that modus ponens applied to known premises is the acme of good inference from the outset begs the question in favor of closure . . . Truth preservation is one thing . . . and good inference is another.

Sutton closes the book by deriving a theory of evidence from \( J = K \) and his account of good inference. I reconstruct the derivation as follows (pp. 128–9):

1. If E is evidence S has for H, then E justifies S in believing H.
2. If E justifies S in believing H, then E positions S to make a good inference to H.
3. If E positions S to make a good inference to H, then S knows E and this positions S to know H.\(^{19}\)
4. So: If E is evidence S has for H, then S knows E and this positions S to know H.
5. “Something counts as an element of one’s unqualified evidence just in case it is evidence for something or other” (p. 128).
6. So: If E is an element of S’s evidence, then S knows E and this positions S to know something or other.

Sutton recognizes that his account of evidence yields some counterintuitive results (p. 131)—in particular, that one cannot have evidence for (the content of) a belief which is either false or true but “Gettiered.” Sutton attempts (§4.5.1) to explain away the intuition that we can have evidence for such beliefs by distinguishing the strict use of “evidence that H” from two loose uses of that expression, on which it denotes (respectively) evidence that probably H or evidence that there’s some chance that H. Sutton argues that the “colloquial use of ‘evidence’ [and allied terms like ‘support’ and ‘confirmation’] is . . . a huge problem when engaged in by philosophers” (pp. 131–4).

I will conclude this section, and set the stage for the next one, by drawing out a problem for \( J = K \) and the theories of good inference and evidence that (let’s

\(^{19}\) According to Sutton, 3 follows from his account of good inference, which itself follows from \( J = K \).
concede to Sutton) follow from it. \(J = K\) has a significant liability Sutton does not recognize. \(J = K\) bars Sutton from acknowledging cases in which one derives inferential knowledge from unknown (because false, or true but “Gettiered”) premises.\(^{20}\) Now Sutton does not see this as a cost, for he thinks he can accommodate such cases (p. 122):

[I]t is possible to acquire inferential beliefs that constitute knowledge and yet do not arise from good inferences since they do not arise from good premises. An example that I take from Hawthorne (2004) is that of children who infer that they will receive gifts on Christmas Day on the basis of their false belief that Santa Claus will visit on Christmas Eve. I agree with Hawthorne that it is plausible that such children know that they will receive presents on Christmas Day even though their belief that they will is inferred from a false belief... A quite different example (not taken from Hawthorne) is provided by people who believe false but practically reliable scientific theories. A belief in Newtonian mechanics enables one to know how the physical world will behave in many respects despite the falsity of one’s Newtonian beliefs. We should not classify these inferences as good inferences since their premises are unjustified; nevertheless, they do yield knowledge.

Accepting the possibility of inferential knowledge from unknown premises wreaks havoc for \(J = K\). Supposing there can be such knowledge, \(J = K\) (plus the attendant theories of good inference and evidence) entails the following claims:

- There can be an inferentially known justified belief, for which one has no evidence, based solely on unjustified beliefs.
- A bad inference can yield what is “the supremely good thing from an epistemic viewpoint” (p. 21)—namely, knowledge.
- A bad inference can yield an epistemically obligatory belief.\(^{21}\)

These claims are hard to swallow. Assuming Sutton wants to keep \(J = K\), he can’t comfortably countenance inferential knowledge from unknown premises. But that is a significant cost: as Sutton himself acknowledges, it seems clear there can be such knowledge. Whether embracing \(J = K\) is worth the price of denying the indicated possibility depends largely on the strength of Sutton’s arguments for \(J = K\), to which we now turn.


\(^{21}\) Sutton maintains, on the basis of \(J = K\), that “[t]here is at least one positive epistemic obligation: if one would know that P were one to believe that P simply in virtue of so believing, one ought to believe that P” (p. 57).
II. Sutton’s Three Arguments for \( J = K \)

A. \textit{The Lottery Argument}

Sutton’s \textit{Lottery Argument} (§2.1.2) takes off from two epistemological puzzles: the knowledge and justification puzzles.\(^{22}\) Two propositions give rise to the former:

1. One could know that one will lose the lottery.
2. If one could know that one will lose the lottery, then one could know of each of the entrants that he will lose.

Propositions 1 and 2 entail the absurdity (under suitable assumptions) that one could know of each of the entrants that he’ll lose.

Three propositions generate the justification puzzle:

(A) One could justifiably believe that one will lose the lottery.
(B) If one could justifiably believe that one will lose the lottery, then one could justifiably believe of each of the entrants that she’ll lose.
(C) If one could justifiably believe of each of the entrants that she’ll lose, then one could justifiably believe the conjunction of the indicated “loser” propositions.

Propositions (A)–(C) entails the absurdity (again, under suitable assumptions) that one could justifiably believe everyone will lose.\(^{23}\)

The Lottery Argument’s key claim is that \( J = K \) yields a uniquely attractive solution to the above puzzles. By endorsing \( J = K \), you can solve both puzzles at once by rejecting 1 (\( = \) A). I will soon argue there is an alternative solution that has at least as promising a scorecard as Sutton’s. To set the stage for that argument, I need to secure two claims. Here is the first one:

• Respecting (C) is not a clear desideratum of a solution to the puzzles.

Proposition (C) is underwritten by

22. Sutton relies on formulations of the puzzles due to D. Nelkin, “The Lottery Paradox, Knowledge, and Rationality,” \textit{Philosophical Review}, 109 (2000), pp. 374–5. My formulations of the puzzles are simplified versions of Nelkin’s. Nothing important here hangs on using the above formulations instead of Nelkin’s more complicated ones. See the next note for my reply to a potential worry that something important \textit{does} hang on which formulations we use.

23. Readers familiar with Nelkin’s more complicated formulation of the justification puzzle (which, as we’ve noted, is the one Sutton relies on) may question whether her formulation really depends on (what I’ve called) C, and subsequently worry that something important here hangs on which formulation of the puzzle is used after all. Such readers may verify that Nelkin’s formulation does indeed depend on (C) by carefully considering the inference in her formulation from (what she calls) \((3*)–(6*)\) to (what she calls) \((7*)\). Briefly: “inconsistent things” in \((7*)\) should be understood to refer to the following two propositions: (P1) the conjunction of \((i)–(n)\) (these labels are introduced in 6*) \textit{and} (P2) the disjunction of the denials of \((i)–(n)\). So part of what \((7*)\) says is that Jim (the hero of Nelkin’s formulations of the puzzles) could justifiably believe (what I just called) P1. That claim about Jim follows from \((3*)–(6*)\) only if (C) is assumed. (Thanks to Aidan McGlynn for comments that led me to add this note.)
Multi-Premise Closure (MC): If one could justifiably believe each of propositions $P_1, \ldots, P_n$, then one could justifiably believe the conjunction of $P_1, \ldots, P_n$.

MC is controversial.24 Here’s the sort of case that casts doubt on MC:25

Each of a very large number of people flips a fair coin a billion times. The number of coin-flippers is so large that it’s objectively likely that at least one of them will toss heads a billion times in a row. I watch this event on film. I consider each flipper in turn, and come to justifiedly believe of him that he didn’t toss heads a billion times in a row. Knowing how many coin-flippers there are, though, I can’t justifiedly believe that none tossed heads a billion times.

The above case seems coherent, and is incompatible with MC. At best, MC is no more plausible than its denial. And the same will go for (C). Upshot: Respecting (C) is not a clear desideratum of a solution to our puzzles.

The second claim I need to secure is this:

• Failure to solve both puzzles at once is not a significant strike against a solution.

Sutton claims that “it is a clear desideratum of a solution to one [of the puzzles] that it can be applied to the other” (p. 50). Even if so, we need not regard failure to solve both puzzles at once as a significant strike against a solution. For one thing, the puzzles are not isomorphic: the knowledge puzzle does not comprise an analogue of the justification puzzle’s (C). Since knowledge is clearly factive, (1) and (2) clearly generate an absurdity. But since justification isn’t clearly factive, A and B don’t clearly generate an absurdity. When combined with (C), however, (A) and (B) entail the absurdity (under suitable assumptions) that one could justifiably believe everyone will lose.

We can now compare two competing solutions. The main benefit of Sutton’s is elegance: it solves both puzzles in one fell swoop. Its main cost is that it denies the plausible thought that one could justifiably believe one will lose the lottery (it rejects A). The main benefit of my alternative solution—which, eschewing $J = K$, rejects (1) and (C)—is that it respects the thought that one could justifiably believe one will lose the lottery. The main cost is that it is relatively piecemeal. But (as we have seen) being piecemeal is not a significant strike against a solution; I submit it is no worse than rejecting (A). Provided that is right, the alternative solution is (at least) as attractive as Sutton’s, and the Lottery Argument fails.

24. R. Fumerton, (“A Critique of Coherentism,” in L. Pojman [ed.], The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings [Wadsworth, 1999], pp. 245–50) goes so far as to say that “it just seems obviously fallacious to infer from the fact that I can justifiably believe $P$ and justifiably believe $Q$ that I can justifiably believe ($P$ and $Q$)” (p. 250).
25. The case is inspired by one due to J. Hawthorne, Knowledge and Lotteries, p. 185.
The following passage sets the stage for the Posterior Evaluation Argument (PEA):

If a belief that $p$ is one that would be justified were one to form it, and it is in one’s interest to have a belief in whether or not $p$, and one is capable of forming such a belief, then, in some intuitive sense, one should believe that $p$, although that ‘should’ is not purely a ‘should’ of epistemic obligation. It is rather a ‘should’ generated by prudential considerations of self-interest interacting with the epistemic goals that determine an evaluative notion of justification. This claim is clearly true if we read ‘would be justified’ as ‘would constitute knowledge’. I will argue that it is not true on any more expansive conception of evaluative justification . . . , casting doubt on such conceptions. (p. 57)

We can state the PEA as follows (pp. 57–9). Suppose, for reductio, that justification is not sufficient for knowledge. Then it is possible that $S$ fail to believe $P$ at a time when

- $S$ would have had a justified belief in $P$ had she then believed $P$,

but

- $S$ might not have known $P$ had she then believed $P$.

Now, whatever justification is, it is (epistemically) valuable. Thus, it could happen that one (epistemically) should have believed a proposition one failed to believe, where one might not have known the proposition had one believed it. But that is implausible: if one should have believed a given proposition, one would have known the proposition had one believed it. Thus, justification suffices for knowledge. Add the common view that knowledge requires justification, and we get $J = K$.

The PEA’s linchpin is (what I will call) the woulda been knowledge thesis (WBK):

For any proposition one (epistemically) should have believed, one would have known the proposition had one believed it.

Sutton successfully defends WBK from a couple alleged counterexamples (pp. 57–9). Unfortunately, I think he is overlooking some genuine counterexamples. In one such kind of case, one should have believed a certain proposition on the basis of nonveridical experience. I read Descartes’s *Fourth Meditation*, and become convinced that withholding belief is always permissible. I then see you vigorously displaying paradigmatic pain behavior. I am strongly inclined to believe you are in pain. Remembering Descartes, though, I try my hardest to withhold
belief; I somehow succeed. I should have thought you were in pain. But I would not have known had I believed: you were just pretending to be in pain.

In another kind of counterexample to WBK, one should have believed a proposition to which an acknowledged expert attested, though one would not have known had one believed. My son Zachary is sick, so I take him to the pediatrician. The pediatrician gains excellent grounds for thinking Zachary has Virus Y, and she confidently asserts as much. Being in an unduly skeptical mood, I try my utmost to withhold belief; I somehow succeed. I should have believed our pediatrician: I should have thought Zachary has Virus Y. But I would not have known had I believed. Zachary has Virus Y, all right, but he just contracted it from our pediatrician as she was examining him, and it played no causal role whatsoever vis-à-vis his relevant symptoms (which were instead caused by the distinct and unknown Virus Z). I submit that cases like those described in this and the preceding paragraph cast considerable doubt on WBK, and by extension the PEA.26

C. The Assertion Argument

Sutton summarizes his Assertion Argument with this: “. . . [T]he entailment from warranted assertibility to knowledge is inexplicable unless there is a similar entailment from justified belief to knowledge. One must: believe \( p \) only if one knows \( p \) . . .” (p. 44). The Assertion Argument can be unpacked as follows (pp. 44–8). Suppose, for reductio, that S has a justified belief that \( P \) that is not knowledge. If S’s believing \( P \) were in violation of some epistemic norm governing belief, then S’s belief that \( P \) would not be justified. So S’s believing \( P \) satisfies whatever epistemic norms govern belief. Now suppose S asserts that \( P \). Given that S’s believing \( P \) meets whatever epistemic norms govern belief, S’s asserting \( P \) must also be immune to epistemic criticism. So S’s asserting \( P \) meets whatever epistemic norms govern assertion. Crucially, though, S’s assertion does not meet the epistemic norms governing assertion: epistemically proper assertion requires knowledge. Thus, justification suffices for knowledge. As before, \( J = K \) follows given the common view that knowledge requires justification.

This strikes me as Sutton’s strongest argument for \( J = K \). Unfortunately, it employs a pair of problematic premises. One shaky (albeit fairly popular) step is the thesis that epistemically proper assertion requires knowledge—the knowledge rule for assertion (KR). On KR’s behalf, Sutton summarizes Williamson’s influential abductive argument for it.28 Many readers will be aware of the


27. Notably, Sutton expresses sympathy for a driving thought behind the above counterexamples to WBK (p. 55): “The vast majority of discussions of irrational belief and irrational believers focus on beliefs that believers form that they should not. Some irrational believers qualify as such because of the beliefs that they fail to form, however. Some . . . skeptics are too skeptical. They should form beliefs that they do not form.”

numerous prominent attempts to show that the data Williamson deploys do not uniquely support KR. Moreover, many theorists have collected data disconfirming KR. For example, recall (from one paragraph back) the pediatrician’s “Gettiered” assertion that my son Zachary has Virus Y. We can understand the example so that all the following conditions obtain: the pediatrician’s assertion expresses a belief based on grounds reliably indicating the truth of its content (e.g., Zachary’s symptoms and antibody levels); the pediatrician’s belief is produced by properly functioning, successfully truth-aimed cognitive faculties; the pediatrician could successfully defend her assertion against standard challenges used to expose unwarranted assertions (e.g., “How do you know?”); and so on. In light of such counterevidence and the numerous attempts to undermine the support Sutton cites for it, KR currently seems too weak to enable a strong argument for $J = K$.

There is a second problem with the Assertion Argument. To see it, focus on this key explicit premise: “[Assertions transmitting justified beliefs] have to meet the standards governing good assertion impeccably since they transmit impeccable beliefs” (p. 46). That premise depends on the following thought:

If you have an epistemically proper belief that $P$, then you are positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion that $P$.

Elementary reflection on the nature of belief and assertion calls such claims into question. Things happen when you assert that do not happen when you simply believe. First (and most obviously), when you make an assertion, you “propel a proposition out into a conversation with assertoric force.” Further, it is commonly held that in asserting $P$, you represent yourself as being in certain cognitive states relative to $P$—for example, you represent yourself as believing, and perhaps also as knowing, $P$. Finally, one plausible element of the dialectical model of assertion—on which an assertion is “a move in the game of giving and asking for reasons”—is that “by asserting a proposition, [you] commit [yourself] to defending the proposition when faced with challenges and counterarguments.” None of this happens when you simply believe $P$. Given these important differences, it is not at all clear that being well

29. Briefly, Williamson’s three main pro-KR data are:
   - You can challenge an assertion by asking a question like: “How do you know?”
   - Your evidence never positions you to make a lottery assertion (e.g., “I won’t win the lottery”).
   - You cannot properly assert a proposition of the form $P \& \neg \text{I don’t know whether } P$.


31. See especially J. Lackey, *Norms of Assertion*.


positioned enough relative to P to justifiably believe P ensures you are also well positioned enough relative to P to justifiably assert P. Since Sutton provides no subargument for this controversial sufficiency claim, the above explicit premise currently seems (like KR) too weak to enable a strong argument for J = K.\(^3\)

### III. Conclusion

At the end of §I, I suggested we should ask the following question about each of Sutton’s arguments for J = K:

Is the conjunction of its premises more plausible than the possibility of inferential knowledge from unknown premises?

I have now highlighted weaknesses in each of Sutton’s arguments for J = K. Those weaknesses incline me to conclude that the arguments do not justify rejecting the possibility of inferential knowledge from unknown premises. And so, my tentative verdict about the central arguments of Sutton’s fascinating book is that they do not ultimately justify us in accepting its main thesis, J = K.\(^3\)

34. For an extended version of this line of argument against the indicated sufficiency claim—as well as an application of it to some other recent work in epistemology (in addition to Sutton’s Assertion Argument)—see my “Two Claims about Epistemic Propriety,” *Synthese* (forthcoming).

35. Thanks to Nathan Ballantyne and Aidan McGlynn for comments on earlier drafts of material in this essay.