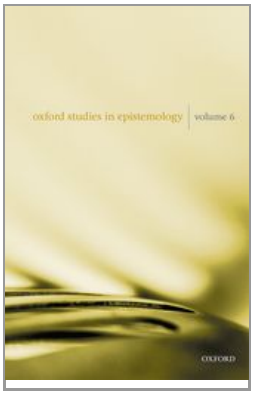

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Clarifying Pragmatic Encroachment

A Reply to Charity Anderson and John Hawthorne on Knowledge, Practical Adequacy, and Stakes

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter addresses concerns that pragmatic encroachers are committed to problematic knowledge variance. It first replies to Charity Anderson and John Hawthorne's new putative problem cases, which purport to show that pragmatic encroachment is committed to problematic variations in knowledge depending on what choices are available to the potential knower. It argues that the new cases do not provide any new reasons to be concerned about the pragmatic encroacher's commitment to knowledge-variance. The chapter further argues that concerns about knowledge-variance are not limited to the pragmatic encroacher, but come up for traditional purist invariantism as well.

Keywords: pragmatic encroachment, knowledge, invariantism, stake, practical reason, purism

1. Two Pragmatist Theses

According to Charity Anderson and John Hawthorne, proponents of pragmatic encroachment present their view in at least two different ways. Sometimes, Anderson and Hawthorne claim, pragmatic encroachment is understood as the thesis that knowing that *p* entails that *p* is "practically adequate," that is, that the gap between your strength of epistemic position with respect to *p* and perfect strength makes no difference to what you should do. In Fantl and McGrath (2002), we argued for this view.[1] At other times, they claim, pragmatic encroachment is presented as the thesis that knowledge is in some way dependent on stakes. Jason Stanley (2005) heavily emphasizes the difference

in how we attribute knowledge in high-stakes versus low-stakes cases, even naming his cases "High Stakes" and "Low Stakes." And in our (2009: 27) we argue that "What is mad is the idea that whether you are in a position to know could be affected by stakes. But that is precisely what the pragmatist approach requires."

Thus, we have two "pragmatist" theses—what we'll call the practical-adequacy thesis and the stakes thesis:

Practical-adequacy thesis: knowledge requires practical adequacy.

Stakes thesis: knowledge depends on the stakes.

In their contribution to this volume, Anderson and Hawthorne raise two questions about these theses: are they equivalent? and is either of them plausible, when we examine cases? They take their answers to these questions to be bad news for pragmatic "encroachers." Regarding the first, they argue, pragmatic encroachers have wrongly blurred the distinction between the theses. Based on a plausible conception of stakes, they argue that practical adequacy and stakes-dependence don't line up—the two theses are not equivalent. They **(p.259)** then consider the prospects of the two divergent construals of pragmatic encroachment, expressing skepticism about both a stakes-based approach and the practical-adequacy approach. They back up their skepticism with an array of problem cases.

We agree that a fleshed-out "pragmatist" epistemology shouldn't assume a problematic account of stakes, and shouldn't confuse how stakes relate to practical necessary conditions on knowledge. We also agree that there are apparently troubling examples for pragmatic encroachers. However, we think Anderson and Hawthorne have misunderstood how encroachers, or at least how we ourselves, conceive of the relation between stakes and practical necessary conditions on knowledge, and how we think of pragmatic encroachment. We also think the prospects for pragmatic encroachment when properly understood are not as bleak as Anderson and Hawthorne suggest. The array of problem cases raises important questions but does not undermine pragmatic encroachment. Or so we will argue.

It will be useful, as we proceed, to work with some terminology going beyond that of Anderson and Hawthorne's chapter. Pragmatic-encroachment theorists typically affirm a practical condition on knowledge. Just what this condition is varies. We now (in our 2009) prefer a reason-theoretic conception of the practical condition on knowledge. You know that *p* only if *p* is warranted enough to be among your reasons for action. Stanley and Hawthorne (2008) proposed a practical condition concerning *reasoning*, namely you know that *p* only if *p* is appropriate to use as a premise in practical reasoning. In general, all of the candidate practical conditions seem to develop in different ways the core idea of *reliance on p*.[2] If you know that *p* is true, you can rely on *p*. Just what reliance is, and what 'can' amounts to, require elucidation, and this is where the various encroachers or the same encroachers over time might differ. But it is important to bear in mind the general schema and not assume that Anderson and Hawthorne's conception of practical adequacy is the core notion. Even in our 2002, we started with the intuitive idea that if you know that *p* you can act as if *p* is true—you can rely on *p*—and we attempted to spell this out in terms of practical adequacy. Reliance comes first; practical adequacy is just one semi-technical way of spelling out reliance. Thus, a more basic pragmatist principle than the practical-adequacy thesis is what we'll call the reliance thesis:

Reliance Thesis: If you know that *p*, you can rely on *p*.

We will therefore investigate not only the relationships between the practical-adequacy thesis and the stakes thesis but between the more basic reliance thesis and the stakes thesis.

(p.260) 2. Are the Two Pragmatist Theses Equivalent?

Anderson and Hawthorne show that if we understand stakes in terms of the maximal regret of a decision under some state, stakes and practical adequacy can come apart in the following ways. First, there can be high-stakes cases in which the relevant proposition is practically adequate for the subject and low-stakes cases in which it is not. Second, there can be cases alike in their stakes but across which practical adequacy varies. They conclude that such cases undermine the following claims about the relations between stakes and practical adequacy:

> HIGH STAKES
>
> In general, if there is a merely practical mismatch for *p* between a pair of cases and also a stakes mismatch between those cases, it will be the higher-stakes case where the subject's epistemic position for *p* is practically inadequate.
>
> EVEN STAKES
>
> In general, if the stakes between a pair of cases match, then there will be no merely practical mismatch for *p* between those cases.

Anderson and Hawthorne conclude that the two pragmatist theses are in tension: if the practical-adequacy thesis is true, the stakes thesis isn't.

We grant that HIGH STAKES and EVEN STAKES are false, if stakes are understood in the regret-theoretic way, and for the reasons that Anderson and Hawthorne give. But we don't see this as a problem for pragmatic encroachers. This is for two reasons. First, and most importantly, pragmatic encroachers do not, or at least *we* do not, understand stakes-dependence to amount to the idea that the higher the stakes the harder it is to know.[3] Rather, we have always claimed that knowledge is stakes-sensitive in the sense that there are cases across which knowledge varies because of a variation in the stakes and where strength of epistemic position is held fixed. Second, pragmatic encroachers do not, or again at least we do not, take the practical-adequacy thesis—or any of the relevant knowledge-reliance principles—to be equivalent to the stakes thesis (even when the latter is understood in the appropriate way). Rather, the relationship is this: there is a good argument from the practical-adequacy thesis (or generally a knowledge-reliance principle) to the stakes thesis, but one which employs a nontrivial premise. There is nothing inconsistent about affirming the reliance thesis, or even the practical-adequacy thesis, while denying the stakes thesis.

(p.261) We now explain both of these reasons in more detail, beginning with the first. Anderson and Hawthorne write that a "key thought [for pragmatic encroachers] is that the higher the stakes, the harder it is to know." However, we know of no pragmatic encroachers who would endorse this claim, stated so baldly. *We* have never affirmed it, and we doubt that any encroachers have, when speaking carefully. Rather, our claim has always been

that there are pairs of cases that differ in knowledge because of a difference in stakes. Notice that this is an existential claim: *there are pairs of cases*. All that is needed to show it is true is to show that varying stakes in *certain ways* leads to variations in knowledge. Bank-type cases, for instance, turn the trick. This doesn't imply any blanket claim that the higher the stakes the harder it is to know.

Second, we don't take the practical-adequacy thesis—let alone the reliance thesis—to be equivalent to the stakes thesis. The theses are related, not by equivalence, but by there being a good argument from the former to the latter, one which employs a nontrivial premise. Here are the primary steps in the argument from the reliance thesis to the stakes thesis:

1. Knowing that *p* requires having a strength of epistemic position for *p* that is good enough for appropriate reliance on *p*.
2. Whether a strength of epistemic position for *p*, even one compatible with knowing *p*, is good enough for appropriate reliance on *p* can vary with the stakes.
3. So, knowledge that *p* can vary with the stakes.

In our original article, since we understood reliance in terms of practical adequacy, the steps are:

1. Knowing that *p* requires having a strength of epistemic position for *p* that is practically adequate.
2. Whether a strength of epistemic position for *p*, even one compatible with knowing *p*, is practically adequate can vary with the stakes.
3. So, knowledge that *p* can vary with the stakes.

One can consistently accept (1) while rejecting (3), by rejecting (2). Suppose one insists that knowledge requires a perfect epistemic position—probability 1, for instance. Call this *infallibilism* about knowledge and its negation *fallibilism*. The infallibilist might well reject (2) on the ground that the only strength of epistemic position compatible with knowledge is perfect strength, and perfect strength is of course both practically adequate and good enough for appropriate reliance.[4]

Is the reliance thesis (or the practical-adequacy thesis) equivalent to the stakes thesis modulo fallibilism? Even here we are doubtful. Even if there is a trivial—or obvious enough—argument from the conjunction of fallibilism and either of those theses to the stakes thesis, there are still ways to block the other direction. For example, one might accept a "particularist" thesis to the effect **(p.262)** that, although there are no general practical necessary conditions on knowledge (such as reliance or practical adequacy), there are cases in which knowledge varies owing to variations in the stakes.[5]

So, we don't think the two theses, let alone all three pragmatist theses, are equivalent. The relations between the three are as follows. The practical-adequacy thesis is but one way the reliance thesis might be true. And, there is a good argument from either of those theses to the stakes thesis. The argument appeals to the crucial premise of fallibilism, which is neither a logical nor an obvious truth.

Because the theses are not equivalent, it is best to reserve 'pragmatic encroachment' for one of them only. Our practice has been to reserve it for the stakes thesis. As we see it, the price of the attractive reliance thesis is the

counterintuitive stakes thesis. If infallibilism were defensible, we would be glad to give up the stakes thesis. The trouble is that we don't know of an adequate defense of infallibilism, and so, reluctantly, we accept pragmatic encroachment. We are not reluctant in our endorsement of the reliance thesis.

3. Problem Cases for Pragmatic Encroachment

Anderson and Hawthorne maintain that if the practical adequacy thesis and the stakes thesis diverge, then the pragmatic encroacher does best to cleave to practical adequacy. They then give an array of cases meant to collectively raise doubts about the practical-adequacy thesis. The cases do not present direct counterexamples. They are not, or at least are not claimed to be, cases in which it intuitively seems a person knows a proposition which is not practically adequate for them. Rather, they are pairs of cases across which practical adequacy varies but where it is hard to believe that knowledge varies. Some are simply different cases; others are pairs of cases across time.

We will not survey all their problem case pairs. But two patterns emerge.

Pattern #1: Take as Case 1 a standard bank style high-stakes case, in which practical adequacy fails and in which it is not implausible to think the subject doesn't know. Then create Case 2 by altering Case 1 in ways such as:

- Making the cost of not acting on *p* (i.e, taking the "safe" act in Case 1) higher. For example, you'll miss your child's birthday party if you stand in line on Friday.
- Providing a reward for acting on *p* (i.e., taking the "risky" act in Case 1). For example, you'll get Superbowl tickets if you board the risky train.
- Taking away the "risky" option, leaving only the "safe" option.

Pattern #2: Take as Case 1 a standard bank-style low-stakes case in which practical adequacy is satisfied and in which it is not implausible to think the subject knows. Then create Case 2 by altering Case 1 in ways such as:
(p.263)

- Making the cost of not acting on *p* lower. For instance, make double-checking free.
- Providing a reward for acting on *p*.
- Adding an option which beats the "acting on *p*" option. For instance, add that you know that there is another branch of the bank nearby which you know to be more likely to be open Saturday.

The general idea is to affect practical adequacy by adding rewards and punishments for acts positively and negatively related to *p*, or by adding or subtracting options. Surely, the claim is, knowledge doesn't vary with those kind of changes.

> "But isn't it totally bizarre to suppose that [Jones] comes to know that the bank is open Saturday by learning that his son's birthday party is on Friday?" (250 ff.)

> "It seems bizarre to suppose that the announcement by the attendant [that it will cost $500 to have a question answered] induces knowledge in the passenger." (252)

Because the least intuitive cases are those in which knowledge is added via such changes, we initially focus on those, though our remarks will generalize to cases in which knowledge is lost via such changes. We want to consider two sorts of responses. The first argues that pragmatic encroachers aren't committed to the kind of knowledge-variance in question. The second argues that in those cases in which pragmatic encroachers are committed to knowledge-variance, we shouldn't necessarily trust intuitions that such variance is unacceptable. We consider the responses in turn.

First, Anderson and Hawthorne take their problem cases to present trouble for pragmatic encroachers because although practical adequacy shifts between the cases our attributions of knowledge do not. But it is by no means clear that their cases present problems once we move from practical adequacy to other and we think better notions of reliance—e.g., *having sufficient warrant to have* p *as a practical reason* or *having sufficient warrant to properly use* p *in practical reasoning*. Our knowledge judgments don't happily sway with changes of the sort Anderson and Hawthorne discuss, but neither do our judgments of whether the subject has sufficient warrant to have propositions as reasons or to use propositions in practical reasoning.[6] Consider:

> "Oh, my son's birthday party is on Friday? Then I can assume that the bank is open on Saturday."
>
> "Well, if you're charging me $500 to answer that question, I guess that I do have a reason to board the train: it goes to Foxboro. I didn't have this reason before I knew you would charge me so much for an answer."

(p.264) These seem counterintuitive. Moreover, it seems that if Jones could properly rely on the bank being open Saturday, then Jones could properly base all sorts of attitudes on this proposition, whereas in fact Jones can't properly do so. When we rely on propositions, for example, we often *rest content* that they're so and *are relieved* that we don't have to check further. But in the examples in question, Jones and the passenger, respectively, can't rely on the relevant propositions in these ways. But if they can't rely on the relevant propositions in these ways, then pragmatic encroachers are not committed to the claim that they can know the relevant propositions.

This is not to say that pragmatic encroachers aren't committed to the possibility of intuitively problematic variance, for example in the following situations: you don't know whether the train stops in Foxboro, and then get word that your interview is canceled. You don't know whether the bank is open on Saturday, and then are told that you don't need the money until the following Thursday. Is it intuitive to suppose that knowledge is regained in these cases? Unless pragmatic encroachers have some other mechanism to explain why knowledge isn't regained, they're stuck with the consequence that it is.

Likewise with cases in which knowledge is lost. You know that the bank is open on Saturday, and then you get word that the check absolutely needs to be deposited by Sunday. You know that the train goes to Foxboro, and then get word that you have an important interview there in two hours. In all such cases, pragmatic encroachers are committed to the claim that knowledge is lost. Analogous results might follow if the option of zero-cost checking is added to a Low Stakes case in which you have knowledge of some relevant proposition.

The pragmatic encroacher cannot undercut these counterintuitive consequences by insisting that in the Low Cases, you cannot rely on the relevant proposition. That's the very step toward skepticism that pragmatic encroachers

hope to avoid. So there will be some counterintuitive consequences to pragmatic encroachment. But these are just the counterintuitive consequences that have been harped on in the literature from the beginning. Easy variance in the presence of knowledge, it is claimed, is counterintuitive. How seriously should we take those intuitions?

Consider a similar worry that might be raised for a standard purist account of knowledge according to which whether you are in a position to know that *p* is a function only of your strength of epistemic position with respect to *p*. On such a view, you can gain knowledge by gaining evidence for *p* and lose knowledge by gaining evidence that *p* is false. But it can feel intuitively "off" to say that the subject who finds out that counterevidence is misleading returns to a state of knowledge. Suppose, for example, you know that some politician you support has not personally taken money from her Foundation. If an anonymous e-mail-hacking organization then releases a collection of emails purportedly from your favored politician in which she discusses how to funnel money from the Foundation into an offshore bank account, this may well count as counterevidence strong enough to defeat your prior knowledge. What **(p.265)** happens if, subsequent to the release of the hacked e-mails, it is discovered that the e-mails were complete forgeries? You might, at that point, say, "Well, I guess that's that. I know that my candidate was completely above-board after all," and return to full confidence. And you might be correct to do so, and correct that you know. Indeed, on a purist invariantist account of knowledge, it's very difficult to see what could stop you from regaining your knowledge and being justified in returning to full confidence.

What are our intuitions about your claim to re-know that your candidate is completely above-board? What about our intuitions about your return to full confidence? Speaking for ourselves, there is something that feels too quick about it; intuitively, you can't so easily re-know that your candidate is above-board and that your return to full confidence is justified. To be clear, we think that these intuitions are misleading; we grant that as a matter of fact, in such a situation you do regain knowledge and you can justifiedly return to full confidence. But there is something that feels off about just being able to so quickly put the now-discovered-to-be-misleading counterevidence in the rearview mirror and happily return to your state of full confidence.

What explains this queasiness of intuition? One possibility is that, even after the evidence is discovered to be fraudulent, the salience of the possibility of error remains. As is well known, salience of the possibility of error can result in intuitions that subjects lack knowledge. Contextualists might well take that salience to have implications for the truth-conditions of your knowledge-attributions and denials. If you are an invariantist, you will probably think that the salience of that possibility is a source of error in intuition. But the point we want to make here is that, however the purist wants to handle the intuition that that there is something problematic about a return to full confidence—whether they go contextualist and say that the salience of the possibility of error prevents you from being truly said to know, or go down an error-theoretic route and say that the intuition is misleading and that you really do know—all such strategies are available to the pragmatic encroacher to explain the queasiness we feel when subjects lose or regain knowledge when other options are added or removed, or costs are attached to or removed from those options.

Therefore, on the one hand, it is open to pragmatic encroachers who want to accept the practical adequacy thesis to claim that, in those cases in which knowledge does vary with the various shifts, this is not a devastating result. This is what pragmatic encroachers have said all along. But Anderson and Hawthorne present what are supposed to be

new cases in which the knowledge-shift is supposed to be particularly problematic. In these cases, on the other hand, it is open to the pragmatic encroacher to claim that knowledge does not vary with the various shifts in the way Anderson and Hawthorne seem to assume. The way to do this, as we've argued, is to adopt other notions of reliance on *p*—ones which we think better capture the intuition that you can **(p.266)** rely on what you know in any case—and thus deny that knowledge varies in the problematic ways across the cases. We see no additional difficulty, then, for pragmatic encroachment from Anderson and Hawthorne's new problem cases.[7]

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Notes:

([1]) In particular, we argued that if you know that *p*, you are rational to act as if *p*, where this amounts to the claim that what you are in fact rational to do is the same as what you are rational to do conditional on *p*.

([2]) There are other English expressions in the vicinity of "reliance on *p*," all of which might be used with varying degrees of accuracy to capture the core notion pragmatic encroachers appeal to: when you know that *p*, then you can take *p* for granted, assume *p* is true, count on *p* being the case, take it as settled that *p*, etc.

([3]) That said, there might be some ways for the pragmatic encroacher to salvage the loose slogan, "the higher the stakes, the harder it is to know." As long as there is some tendency, as the stakes get higher on whether *p* is true, for it to become improper to rely on *p*, then it will be harder in some sense to know as the stakes get higher. For, 1) if "harder" means less likely, and 2) if the higher the stakes, the less likely it is that you can rely on *p*, and 3) if you know that *p* then you can rely on *p*, then 4) the higher the stakes, the harder it is to know that *p*.

([4]) One proponent of this sort of infallibilism is Wayne Davis (2007).

([5]) One philosopher sympathetic to this line is Nick Hughes (manuscript). See also (Weatherson 2012 84).

([6]) See McGrath (2018) for an extended development of this argument. McGrath argues that all fallibilists face problems of the sort pragmatic encroachment theorists face: which practical reasons we have doesn't seem intuitively to vary with the stakes (or indeed with the sorts of factors Anderson and Hawthorne mention), but unless we're infallibilists about the epistemic warrant needed for *p* to have *p* as a reason, we seem to be committed to such variation. That is: whatever you say about knowledge, you have to solve the pragmatic encroachment problem for having practical reasons.

([7]) In our 2002, we do not merely affirm the practical-adequacy thesis. We affirm a stronger thesis relating knowledge to preference, namely that if you know that *p*, you are rational to prefer as if *p*. Call this thesis *preferential adequacy*. Accepting it opens the door to responding to some of Anderson and Hawthorne's cases by claiming that even if there is variation in practical adequacy there is no variation in preferential adequacy, and thus no reason to think there is variation in knowledge. For instance, even if you are told it will cost $500 to obtain an answer from the conductor about the destination of the train, you might not be rational to prefer *boarding without inquiring should the conductor relent* to *inquiring further should the conductor relent*, whereas you would be rational to have this preference given that the train is going to Foxboro.

As we noted in our 2002, the preferential adequacy thesis must be restricted. In a Low Stakes train case, you will prefer *inquiring further should the stakes become high* to *boarding immediately should the stakes become high*, but you won't have this preference given the train goes to Foxboro; and yet you do know the train goes to Foxboro. The problem is that if you were faced with the choice of making one of those states of affairs true, you *wouldn't* know. Your knowledge, that is to say, is not robust with respect to that choice between states of affairs. Thus, the restriction we give in the paper (closely enough) is this: if you know that *p*, and if you are rational to prefer A to B given *p*, then so long as you would still know *p* were you to face the choice of whether to make A and B true, you would be rational to prefer A to B. Of course, the hard question is then which choice situations would strip you of knowledge. We take ourselves in that paper to show that some High Stakes cases would have this effect. If you were faced with the choice of boarding or not boarding when the stakes are as they are in the High Stakes train case, then you shouldn't board. In other cases, for instance, involving the removal or addition of options, or the addition of payoffs or penalties for the "safe" action, we have no solid argument beyond intuition that you know. Nevertheless, we can say this: someone who agrees with Anderson and Hawthorne that the sorts of shifts they consider cannot affect knowledge could embrace the preference thesis and argue that knowledge *doesn't* vary after all across the cases they consider.