Scepticism[1]

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0. Introduction

To what extent are the answers to theological questions knowable? And if the relevant answers are knowable, which sorts of inquirers are in a position to know them? In this chapter we shall not answer these questions directly but instead supply a range of tools that may help us make progress here. The tools consist of plausible structural constraints on knowledge. After articulating them, we shall go on to indicate some ways in which they interact with theological scepticism. In some cases the structural constraints bear directly on whether one can know answers to theological questions. But the structural considerations are related to theological scepticism in other interesting ways as well; for instance we will also be using them to explore the significance of scepticism, by addressing questions such as 'To what extent does it matter whether or not we can *know* the answer to theological questions?'

In section 1, we will outline a list of plausible structural features of knowledge. Then beginning in section 2 we discuss each in connection with some and contemporary debates in theology. This is merely a preliminary sampling of the range of issues that might be fruitfully investigated in the framework we outline. While much more could be added beyond what we say here, we hope to show that careful thinking about knowledge is of interest to familiar

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epistemological debates in theology. Some of these results are friendly to a sceptical outlook, and others are not.

Our focus will be on sceptical concerns about knowledge, not about certainty or justification. Those who think that knowledge is to be illuminated via the concepts of certainty and/or justification might think that the most helpful way into scepticism is via one or both of those concepts. While we are not sympathetic to that outlook, we hope proponents of these alternative frameworks would nevertheless stand to benefit from our discussion, as many of the relevant structural issues will carry over.

1. Structural connections

We now present a range of foundational structural ideas about knowledge that we find somewhat plausible.

1.1 NO ERROR IN CLOSE WORLDS: Some paradigmatic cases where subjects lack knowledge are cases where they could easily have had a false belief. For instance subjects in typical Gettier cases have a (justified) true belief that is not knowledge owing to an accident of luck that renders the subject's justified belief true. It is natural to say in these cases that things could easily have gone differently so as to result in a false belief in the subject, and that the subject in the actual world doesn't know for this reason (Cf. Gettier 1963). The false belief in a nearby world doesn't have to be the *same* belief as in the actual world. If one forms mathematical beliefs about large sums by random guessing, and one happens to guess the sum of 85 and 24 correctly, there is no way for the belief that 85 + 24 = 109 to be false in nearby worlds. But by virtue of arriving at one's beliefs in sums by mere guessing, one will form similar (though not strictly

identical) false beliefs in nearby worlds. It is plausible that this kind of risk of error is incompatible with knowing the relevant sums. In what follows, we will call beliefs in actual or nearby counterfactual scenarios that are incompatible with a belief's being knowledge *bad companions* for that belief. (Thus, in our terminology, when in a nearby world one arrives at the false belief that 85 + 24 = 101 by guessing, that belief is a bad companion for one's actual true belief.)

1.2 SIMILARITY OF BELIEF-FORMING PROCESSES: Not just any nearby possibility of error is incompatible with knowledge. If a normally reliable informant told Betty that Jill is in Brazil, but Betty then happens to turn her head at the very moment Jill walks past a nearby window, Betty knows that Jill is not in Brazil. But there are nearby worlds where Betty fails to turn her head at that precise moment, and so continues to believe on the basis of testimony that Jill is in Brazil. One natural diagnosis of this case is that the belief-forming methods are too dissimilar—Betty's actual belief is formed on the basis of perception, while in the nearby worlds where she holds a false belief, it is formed on the basis of testimony. Our preferred way of implementing this diagnosis avoids the need to fuss about individuation of methods, and so doesn't put too much weight on the fact that Betty's actual belief can be described as formed on the basis of 'perception', while her belief in a nearby world is formed on the basis of 'testimony'. Rather what is important is that the fine-grained token causal processes leading up to Betty's beliefs are significantly dissimilar in the two cases. (Obviously this has something to do with the fact that one belief is formed on the basis of perception and the other on the basis of testimony. But ultimately the non-identity of the relevant coarse-grained methods is not what explains why Betty knows.) Since the token causal processes leading up to the false beliefs in nearby worlds are

sufficiently dissimilar, the nearby false belief isn't a bad companion for Betty's actual belief that Jill is not in Brazil. On this view, two beliefs formed on the basis of broadly perceptual faculties might count as sufficiently dissimilar since the fine-grained causal processes leading up to the beliefs needn't resemble each other to a high degree (see discussion of a similar principle in Williamson 2001).

1.3 CLOSURE and COUNTER-CLOSURE: Deduction is a means to extending one's knowledge. This is encoded in a familiar 'closure'-style principle which in refined form is as follows:

> CLOSURE: If one knows *p* and knows that *p* entails *q*, then if one deduces *q* on the basis of *p* while retaining knowledge throughout, then one knows *q*. (See Hawthorne 2004: 34)

As a companion to CLOSURE we might naturally accept a 'counter-closure' principle which claims that deduction does not produce knowledge from unknown premises:

> COUNTER-CLOSURE: If one doesn't know *p* then if one deduces *q* on the basis of *p* while lacking knowledge of *p* throughout, then one doesn't know *q*.

1.4 KNOWLEDGE-ENTAILING STATES: Timothy Williamson, Peter Unger and others have pointed to a wide range of propositional attitudes whose presence seems to entail the presence of knowledge (see Williamson 2001 and Unger 1979). For example, one can see that there is a bird on the sill only if one knows that there is a bird on the sill. It is easy to see that true justified belief formed via vision is not enough -- if one sees what is in fact a cleverly fashioned plastic bird on the sill, justifiably believes that there is a bird on the sill, but there is a bird elsewhere on the sill one does not notice, then one does not see that there is a bird on the sill. Plausible candidates for knowledge entailing attitudes include not only seeing

that *p*, but also remembering that *p*, regretting that *p* (though obviously not feeling regret at the thought that *p*), rejoicing that *p* and many others.

The presence of a certain kind of reason action also seems to entail the presence of knowledge. Here we have in mind paradigmatic uses of the possessive reason construction to explain a person's actions. For example: Jim's reason for racing towards the sill was that there was a bird on the sill. In the plastic bird version of the case, this would be false even if the belief that there was a bird on the sill induced racing. As a number of authors have noticed, it seems that it takes knowledge to make a fact available as a 'personal'/'motivating' reason (see Hyman 1999 and Hawthorne and Magidor MS).

1.5 IGNORANCE-ENTAILING STATES: The literature on knowledge also contains a large range of suggestions to the effect that certain states are incompatible with the presence of knowledge. We shall not pursue some of the more tendentious suggestions that have been made in this connection, which include 'uncertainty', 'opinion', 'doubt'. In what follows we focus on a suggestion that is not merely plausible but which has particular interest in a theological setting. We have in mind the state of risking that *p* (typically expressed in English by constructions of the form 'In phi-ing *x* risked that *x* would *F*'), as in: 'when breaking into the building, the burglar risked that he would be videotaped', or 'the investor risked that he would lose his life savings'. It seems clear that if the burglar knew that he wouldn't be videotaped, he didn't risk that he would and that if the investor knew that the stock would go up, he didn't risk that he would lose his life savings. Assuming this connection between risk and absence of knowledge, any state or activity that requires risk will in turn preclude knowledge.

1.6 NORMATIVE CONNECTIONS: We have gestured at entailment connections between knowledge and the presence and absence of other states. Arguably there are also interesting normative connections between knowledge and certain states such that even though there are no *entailment* connections, the presence or absence of knowledge instead has constitutive bearing on whether one *ought* to be in those states.

One plausible norm of this sort has been much discussed in the literature connects knowledge and assertion: One ought to assert *p* only if one knows that *p*. (And insofar as we are attracted to this norm, we might also consider extending it to 'inner assertions', states of judging and/or believing.) But in what follows we shall be especially concerned with a few plausible norms connecting knowledge and action. Let us begin with a norm articulated by Saul Kripke in his 'Two Paradoxes of Knowledge' (Kripke 2011: 43):

> KRIPKE: If *A* knows that taking an action (i.e., any action) of type *T* leads to consequence *C*, and *A* wishes above all else to avoid *C* (i.e., this is the only relevant issue), then *A* should resolve now not to take any action of type *T*.

(Kripke acknowledges that it is difficult to state the norm in a fully rigorous way but nevertheless makes it clear that he finds something along these lines attractive.) The principle certain does seem attractive. If a submarine commander knows that a certain military action will lead to nuclear war and wishes above all else to avoid nuclear war then it certainly seems that the commander ought to resolve not to undertake that action. And insofar as one finds this principle compelling there is a companion principle that seems prima facie compelling as well:

COMPANION KRIPKE: If *A* knows that taking any action of type *T* leads to consequence *C* and doesn't know of any action that is not of type *T* that it leads to consequence *C*, and *A* wishes above all else to secure *C* then *A* should resolve to perform an action of type *T*.

If one wants to conquer the enemy above all else and there is only one action that one knows of to do it, then it seems one ought to do that. (Again this is not fully satisfactory. For one thing, arguably both principles need some qualifications connected to what one is able to do. If one knows one can't but do any action of type *T*, then perhaps one shouldn't resolve to avoid *T*-actions even if one knows that doing *T*-actions have bad consequences. And if one knows that actions of type *T* have great consequences but is unable to do any of *T*-type actions then again perhaps one shouldn't resolve to perform any of them. And we shall later suggest other directions for refinement. We should also note in connection with these principles that they are only attractive when the 'ought' in play is a kind of subjective 'ought' since it turns on a subject's preferences and knowledge.)

With these structural features in hand, we can turn to a discussion of special issues that arise in the theological domain.

2. CLOSE WORLDS: Sensitivity arguments

One common argument against the possibility of knowledge begins from the observation many people arrive at their theological beliefs via a causal process that is *insensitive* to the truth of these beliefs. The origins of many theological beliefs can be traced to environmental and cultural factors—in a

simple case, it might be that the beliefs of one's parents and immediate community, plus a disposition to believe what one is taught, are sufficient to cause belief in a certain set of theological propositions. Assuming someone's theological beliefs were so caused, would it follow that the beliefs were not knowledge? One way of completing the argument for this conclusion is by pointing out that people who arrive at their beliefs in this way would have those beliefs *even if* they were false. The belief-formation process is, in other words, insensitive to the truth of these beliefs (see Nozick 1981). Here is the argument form:

From Insensitivity to Scepticism:

1 *X* believes *p*

2 *X* would believe *p* even if *p* were false

Therefore *X* does not know *p*

(We should note in passing that arguments of this sort are particularly problematic for necessary truths, especially on the view that counterfactuals with necessarily false antecedents are vacuously true. Still, there are many theological propositions that are continent by pretty much anyone's lights. It would be a significant skeptical result if many of those could be shown to be unknown by something like the insensitivity argument. Moreover proponents of arguments like this tend to refine them a little to take account of the structural observations of SIMILARITY. Perhaps premise 2 should read: *X* would believe *p* *using a relevantly similar method* even if *p* were false. What we say below can be adapted to these refinements.)

It is widely acknowledged that arguments of the form of *From Insensitivity to Scepticism* are pretty shaky. Many beliefs about the nature of our perceptual

experience—for instance, that it is the product of an external world rather than hallucination—similarly fail to be sensitive. After all, were our perceptual experience to be the product of hallucination, we would still believe that it wasn't. But unless we wish to go in for a quite far-reaching scepticism, we should not take this insensitivity to indicate a failure to know that our experience is the product of external objects—the false beliefs about our experience in hallucination worlds are not, in our phraseology, bad companions for our actual beliefs about the external world. In sum, the claim that theological claims cannot be known because they are insensitive carries consequences that those of us inclined to reject scepticism in other domains will reject (see for example Sosa 1999 for more discussion of sensitivity principles).

Plausibly the reason why the possibility where one falsely believes that one's perceptual experience is the product of an external world rather than hallucination does not supply a bad companion is that such a possibility is quite distant—there is no risk in one's actual circumstance that one's perceptual experiences are the produces of hallucination. (Note that it is not incumbent on the external world believer to show that such possibilities are distant. The standard insensitivity argument proceeds by trying to show that even if external world beliefs are true, they fail to be knowledge for reasons of insensitivity. But if insensitivity considerations have little bite when the possibilities of error are distant, then insensitivity alone is not a decisive indicator that knowledge is absent.) The deficiencies of insensitivity arguments could just as well have been illustrated using theological examples.

Insensitivity arguments will, for the reasons given, be an unreliable tool for securing sceptical conclusions against *either* the atheist or theist. Suppose an

atheist believes that there is no God on the grounds that were there all knowing omnibenevolent all powerful being, certain evils would not have occurred. It will not do to argue that were this counterfactual false the atheist would still believe it true. If the worlds where the counterfactual is false are remote possibilities, they will not supply bad companions, and insensitivity may be neither here nor there (for further discussion of similar arguments see White 2010).

3. CLOSE WORLDS: private interpretation

In the previous section we indicated, as a rough and ready heuristic, that errors at distant possibilities are irrelevant to the question whether one actually knows. Assuming this heuristic, many appeals to possibilities of error will be dialectically ineffective since the believer will reckon the possibilities too distant to matter. (And even if we were merely trying to satisfy ourselves on the question whether the believer knows, we could only settle on the import of the possibility of error once we have settled whether it is a distant possibility or a close one.) But restricting the errors that constitute bad companions to those that occur in nearby worlds does not render all theological belief immune to compelling sceptical challenges. As an illustration, consider someone who arrives at their theological beliefs by reading a sacred text and forming beliefs on this basis. Here there is plenty of room for arguing that there is a significant risk of error, and hence no knowledge.

One way of fleshing out this argument relies on an important difference between interpretation of sacred texts and ordinary cases of knowledge by testimony. One can typically come to know by trusting an informant who knows. But many instances of interpretation of sacred texts will not fit this simple

model, since the route from trusting the text to belief is more complicated. Suppose a text contains two kinds of sentence: those that make 'literal' assertions, which assert what is conventionally meant by the sentence, and those that make 'metaphorical' assertions, which do not assert the conventional meaning of the sentence, but rather some other claims that can be derived from the text as a whole plus facts about the context and intentions of the original author. (Thus the literal sentences are like a testifier who asserts 'there is a dog outside' to communicate that there is a dog outside, while the metaphorical sentences are like a testifier who says 'she's the cream in my coffee' to communicate that they have found a soulmate.) What should one believe if one trusts the text? Even granting that some interpreters do succeed in believing the literal content of the literal assertions and the metaphorical content of the metaphorical assertions, it is not implausible that they could easily have taken a metaphorical sentence as literal. If these mistakes result in beliefs in falsehoods, then even the true beliefs arrived at by textual interpretation will have bad companions and will not be knowledge. (The situation will be especially bleak for someone who is robustly disposed to take everything as literal in a completely flatfooted way. If there is in fact a mix of the literal and the metaphorical sentences in the text, any true belief based on literal interpretation will plausibly have some bad companion in the form of a belief based on a literal interpretation of a metaphorical sentence. Such a person may of course believe many truths. But the epistemic price for her fundamentalism may be that she knows next to nothing.)

We leave it to others to decide how much this simple case resembles an actual process by which some people arrive at their theological beliefs. Of course

the presence of a larger community engaged in joint interpretation of the text containing literal and metaphorical assertions will not help epistemologically, so long as the entire community could easily have mistaken metaphorical assertions for literal ones. It would however be a different matter if God directly guided the body of the Church in certain matters of scriptural interpretation and then individuals based their scriptural beliefs on trust in that authority. Beliefs formed in this way would plausibly be the results of rather different token belief-forming processes than those that rely on the happenstance of private interpretation, and so the possible presence of the latter will not serve as bad companions for the former. (See Aquinas on the `habit of faith', *ST* 2a2e Q.1 A.1, and discussion in Hawthorne 2013.)

Also there is an extra potential disanalogy with the testimony case. In cases where one gains knowledge by testimony, there is often a possibility that one mishears the testifier and arrives at a false belief. Imagine that Billy is talking with John on the telephone and as John utters the sentence 'I am not in Oxford today.' If the phone line is unreliable and there is a chance that the line momentarily cuts out just as John utters 'not', then there is a chance that all Billy hears is 'I am in Oxford today' and thereby forms the false belief that John is in Oxford. But assuming the line functions properly throughout the conversation, it seems absurd to say that Billy cannot know that John is not in Oxford.

This points to the need for the additional SIMILARITY constraint on knowledge. Errors in nearby worlds are compatible with knowledge if they are the products of sufficiently dissimilar belief-forming processes. This is exactly what is going on in the phone conversation between Billy and John: in the case where Billy comes to know from the conversation that John is not in Oxford, the

belief-forming process is one that, among other things, puts Billy in a position to know what John said. This is a very different process than the one that leads to Billy's belief in the case where the line cuts out at 'not', which does not even make available to Billy basic knowledge of what John was saying on the other end of the line.

SIMILARITY will, by contrast, be hard-pressed to explain how the interpreter of our text arrives at knowledge in those cases where she forms true beliefs: this is because it isn't guaranteed that the interpreter's belief forming process in the good case is one which enables her to come to know which sentences in the text are literal assertions, and which are metaphorical. (Of course, if she already knew what the text was saying, then she could come to know which sentences were the literal ones. But in the absence of a belief-forming process that allows her to know which sentences are literal, she will also find a belief-forming process that is relevantly dissimilar to the process in bad cases to be unavailable to her.) Not every process that issues in true belief is a knowledge-producing process, and it seems clear that there are at least some cases resembling our sacred text interpreter where, even though the interpreter gets everything right, her beliefs are plagued by bad companions.

4. SIMILARITY: the plurality of religions

One might attempt a variation on the sceptical argument in section 2 as follows. Given that environmental factors (including the beliefs of one's parents and surrounding community) largely determine what a person believes, there would seem to be cause for scepticism on the grounds that one could easily have been born into a different environment where one's parents and interlocutors

propound different beliefs. It seems natural to conclude from this that one could easily have formed false beliefs by a similar process, where the process in question is that of accepting the beliefs of one's immediate community. Thus, CLOSE WORLDS and SIMILARITY seem to imply that even if one happens to be born into an environment that produces true beliefs, those beliefs will have bad companions (see Goldberg 2014 for discussion of arguments of this kind).

We should not be too quick to count all of the possibilities just gestured at as containing bad companions. Consider by analogy mundane knowledge of the future. We know we will eat this evening. Now there are people who before this evening will get murdered out of the blue or die of brain aneurisms with no warning. While there is a natural sense in which we are disposed to assent to 'I could have easily been one of them', the criterion for closeness connected to bad companionship must be more demanding, at least if we are to be non-sceptics about mundane beliefs about the future. These cases will not count then as close in the epistemologically relevant sense. But if the beliefs of those people do not count as bad companions, why should beliefs of other religious communities count as bad companions? There is a risk that the theological sceptic will deploy a lax criterion of closeness that if used more widely would generate widespread scepticism. In short, it is not clear at all that the argument does not suffer from the same basic flaw as sensitivity, namely by relying on possibilities that are too distant to be epistemologically relevant.

Further, even granting that the cases are close, it is not clear that they pass the similarity test for bad companionship. Granted there is an obvious resemblance between the good and bad cases here: in each, one forms a belief in response to the prevalent beliefs in one's environment. But to think that this

suffices to make the bad cases bad companions to the good would be to ignore the need for fine-grained comparisons between the token belief-forming processes: merely identifying a general category like 'deference to one's parents' will not suffice to establish the needed similarity.

The latter approach, which is to be rejected, is akin to denying that true beliefs formed on the basis of perception are knowledge in cases where there is some nearby circumstance where a false belief is formed on the basis of perception. But a nearby false belief that is formed by *some* perceptual method isn't necessarily a barrier to knowledge: suppose there is a copy of *War and Peace* on the coffee table, and Sally looks at it from the side and concludes that *War and Peace* is long after seeing the size of the book. Suppose moreover that there is a nearby possibility where she doesn't see the book's profile but instead opens to the table of contents and looks at the page count. If the book's printer was careless with the table of contents and listed the Index as starting on page 54, then Sally could easily have formed the false belief that *War and Peace* is not long by looking at the table of contents.

This, however, is irrelevant to whether she knows by looking at the book's profile. Even though both her actual true belief and her nearby false belief are formed by broadly visual processes, this isn't sufficient to establish relevant similarity. The token belief-forming process of Sally's looking at the table of contents is intuitively very dissimilar from the token belief-forming process of Sally's looking at the book's profile, and this dissimilarity guarantees that Sally isn't prevented from knowing by a careless printer when she doesn't even open the book.

The argument from religious pluralism should fare even worse than an argument for the conclusion that Sally doesn't know in the case described above. The token causal processes by which people in rival religious communities arrive at their beliefs are likely to be at least as dissimilar as the token causal process that leads to Sally believing that *War and Peace* is long on the basis of looking at its profile is from the token causal process that would have lead her to the belief that it is not long if she looked at the table of contents instead (see Dunaway MS for more on the relationship between the etiology of beliefs and the epistemologically relevant similarity-relations between token processes).

5. CLOSURE: counterfactuals and evil

Assuming CLOSURE, if one possesses knowledge that entails an answer to a question, then one is in a position to knowledgeably answer that question (at least assuming suitable deductive competence). For example if one knows one has hands and the fact that one has hands entails that one is not a brain in a vat, then knowing that one has hands entails that one is in a position to know whether one is a brain in a vat. Even if one's didn't know that one isn't a brain in a vat already, one could in principle come to arrive at such knowledge by deduction.

Let us make a few more quick observations about the brain in a vat example just given. Competent deduction from the fact that one has hands may not be the most common or natural way to come to know that one is not a brain in a vat. But one shouldn't think either that in order to know that one has hands one must have already come to know that one is not a brain in a vat. After all, one

might come to know that one has hands even if one had never even considered wild sceptical hypotheses.

This structural observation has application to theological settings. As a case in point we will take the problem of evil. First, consider a warm up example.

Suppose a community believes some former people become tigers in later stages of their existence. They believe further that some of these people take on the form of invisible tigers and that, indeed, there are always invisible tigers right in front of us. (One Javanese population has beliefs along these lines concerning a supposed were-tiger named Buyut Cili--see Beatty 1999:53-54.) Now Jones, who hasn't considered any of this, forms the belief that if there were a tiger in front of him, he would flee (where the etiology of this belief is pretty much what one would expect for a typical New Yorker). Suppose moreover that the world is one where belief about invisible tigers are all wrong and couldn't easily have been true either. And while it is possible for a fleshy tiger to be right in front of him unnoticed (thanks to disguise, blindness or whatever), that couldn't easily have happened either. Jones' belief has impeccable credentials – by our lights, it is pretty obviously a case of knowledge.

But the truth of the proposition that if Jones had a tiger in front of him, he would flee entails the falsity of the proposition that Jones has an invisible tiger in front of him. (For since he doesn't flee, the truth of the tiger-religion would make for a counterfactual with a true antecedent and a false consequent. By standard counterfactual logic, including the 'strong centering' condition for counterfactuals as discussed in Lewis 1973, this entails the falsity of the counterfactual.) Given CLOSURE and Jones's knowledge that if there were a tiger in front of him, he would flee, Jones is then in a position to know by deduction that

the content of the tiger-religion is false. This example is an instance of a general pattern: very ordinary counterfactuals that do not encode religious ideology can nevertheless entail the falsity of various religious views. Moreover if we are in an environment where we know these counterfactuals, then CLOSURE guarantees that we will be able to know the falsity of these religious hypotheses.

Let us now turn to the problem of evil itself. Suppose someone who had never considered the views of the Judeo-Christian tradition encounters an awful crime scene. The person forms the counterfactual belief that if a good person had been able to prevent this crime that person would have. Now suppose we are in a world where the Judeo-Christian view is false and couldn't easily have been true. And while it is possible that ordinary fleshy people could have been good, been able to prevent the crime but had excellent reasons for not doing so, such possibilities are also rather distant in this case. Here, just as in the last case, the person's belief has impeccable credentials and counts as knowledge. But this person's knowledge entails that there is no omniscient, omnibenevolent, omniscient being. (Again, the reason is the same as in the tiger-religion case: since no one did stop the crime, the truth of the Judeo-Christian religion would make for a counterfactual with a true antecedent and false consequent, which by standard logic would make the counterfactual false.) And so, given CLOSURE, the person in such a situation is in a position to know the falsity of the Judeo-Christian tradition. (Indeed the person's knowledge about evil logically entails the falsity of that tradition – this suggests to us that the commonly made distinction between the 'logical' and 'evidential' problems of evil is not particularly helpful.)

The person's counterfactual belief is not expressed using the ideology of the Judeo-Christian tradition. But as before, we have a situation where a very mundane counterfactual entails that the religion is false. Moreover, as we have emphasized, there is a very strong case to the effect that the counterfactual is knowable in worlds where the Judeo-Christian tradition is false. This kind of case shouldn't seem excessively threatening to someone who believes in God—after all, the deduction described above is only available to someone who is in a world where the Judeo-Christian religion is false. (Similarly there is nothing especially threatening for the theist as such about granting that, were God not to exist, one could know that God doesn't exist. It should seem even more benign from the theist's perspective to grant that mundane counterfactual knowledge of the kind described above is available in such worlds.) But there are some theistic perspectives on evil which require one to be able to argue from a neutral position that there is no God on the basis of evil, and these are forced to deny either CLOSURE or the existence of mundane counterfactual knowledge in such worlds. (Such strategies are found in Wykstra 1984 and Bergmann 2001; see Benton, Hawthorne, and Isaacs forthcoming for critical discussion of those strategies as well as overlapping discussion of some of the ideas explored here.) Reflection on the soundness of the use of counterfactual knowledge to know the falsity of the tiger-religion from above suggests that these approaches needlessly overreach, even from a theistic perspective.

6. COUNTER-CLOSURE: shaky foundations

COUNTER-CLOSURE – a slightly more tendentious idea than CLOSURE – says that (roughly) one can't get knowledge from unknown premises. It is easy to find

myriad theological applications for this idea. Return to our fundamentalist from section 3. Suppose a large chunk of the bible is true but that the fundamentalist belief in any given sentence is based on the false belief that every sentence is the literal truth. Assuming COUNTER-CLOSURE it seems that the price of this false belief is that none of the true beliefs formed by reading the text count as knowledge. Further, all sorts of mundane non-religious beliefs about the world may be indicted by falsely believed and hence unknown religious foundations. For example, as a loved one leaves the house one might go on to base a belief that they will return on the false belief that it is a priority of God's to keep them safe. Even if one is in a position to know that they will return, one arguably fails to exercise this capacity by basing one's belief in a safe return on speculative theology. (Clearly, it is very easy to find all sorts of examples of cases where, assuming COUNTER-CLOSURE, knowledge failure is induced by a faulty theological basis.)

7. KNOWLEDGE-ENTAILING STATES: faith without belief

In response to worries about the possibility of knowledge in the theological domain, some have responded by proposing that the central propositional attitude in a religious context—faith—does not require belief. (See Howard-Snyder 2014.) One attractive feature of this approach in the face of sceptical worries is that it leaves space for a cognitive life that is religiously serious yet does not violate any epistemic requirements if one is not in a position to know theological claims. In particular this approach respects the relationship between knowledge and belief envisaged in NORMATIVE CONNECTIONS – if one ought to believe a proposition only if one is in a position to know it, then if faith requires

belief and one is not in a position to know theological claims, faith will be epistemically prohibited as well. Thus divorcing faith from belief (which need not involve holding that faith is compatible with outright disbelief) promises to protect faith from epistemic criticism if knowledge is difficult or impossible to come by.

Suppose, then, that one can rationally have faith without being in a position to know the relevant propositions (thus in the envisaged scenario one is not in a position to rationally believe these propositions). One might think that the disconnect is highly local: one can have faith without knowledge but the rest of one's cognitive life is left intact. But if, as KNOWLEDGE-ENTAILING STAES claims, knowledge is tied to myriad other notions, then the effects of the divorce will spread.

To take one example: suppose Tim has faith that God has told him to become a missionary. If we fill in the details of the case so that there is a God and God in fact told Tim to become a missionary, it is natural to say in this case that Tim's reason for becoming a missionary is that God has told him to do so. But given, as KNOWLEDGE-ENTAILING STATES claims, that having *p* as a personal reason requires knowledge of *p*, God's directions will be unavailable as Tim's reason for becoming a missionary. For if even if Tim's faith is epistemically uncriticizable, it can't on present assumptions be that Tim's reasons for becoming a missionary include that God told him to do so; Tim's faith is that of someone who isn't in a position know that God has issued the relevant directives. (Of course facts about God could be explanatory reasons why one does something but they cannot, according to KNOWLEDGE-ENTAILING STATES, be one's personal or motivating

reasons for doing anything.) It seems somewhat tragic to be deprived of using facts about God as one's reasons for acting.

On the faith-without-belief view, there will be other examples of the absence of knowledge spreading to other areas of one's cognitive and practical life as well. If seeing that *p* requires that one knows that *p*, then someone who has faith that God works wonders in the world won't be able to see that God has worked wonders. Or again, plausibly one cannot be happy that *p* unless one knows that *p*. Then, someone with knowledgeless faith cannot be happy that there is a personal loving God even if there is one.

8. IGNORANCE-ENTAILING STATES: risk and good will

We have been focusing on some potentially negative ramifications of a failure to know that there is a God; these, we have been emphasizing, will constitute perhaps unwelcome consequences of a kind of faith that is knowledge-free. But it is also important to see that a failure to know may contribute positively to our religious lives: some other practical and epistemic states require the absence of knowledge. We offer a few illustrations of this theme.

Our first illustration is inspired by Kant's own discussion of the hiddenness of God. (Here we will gloss over difficult problems with cashing out the thesis that God is hidden in knowledge-theoretic terms: if one's evidence just is what one knows, then a superficial gloss on the hiddenness of God according to which there isn't great evidence that God exists will be unsatisfactory. For either one can know that God exists, or one cannot know. The former option appears to entail that hiddenness is false because the evidential probability on one's evidence that God exists will be 1; on the latter option hiddenness directly

implies scepticism. This would be unfortunate for hiddenness theorists because many contemporary theists have been sympathetic to the idea that God is hidden but would not grant a claim that directly implies scepticism in this way. No doubt some will lean on a perceptual gloss instead -- one can after all know that something exists even if one can't perceive it -- but more will be done to work this out. We presumably don't employ perception to come to know the law of excluded middle, but there presumably isn't an analogous hiddenness phenomenon for logical truths.) It is a common thought that morally praiseworthy action not only requires doing the morally required action but also doing it for the right reason. Kant is an extreme example of this, where he held that only actions done from the motivation to do one's duty have moral worth. If the only reasons one can appropriately act for are things one can know, then by granting that one can know theological claims, morally good action may be difficult or even impossible.

Kant claims something along these lines when he says that if ``God and eternity with their awful majesty [stood] unceasingly before our eyes'' then ``most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear […] and the moral worth of actions […] would not exist at all'' (121-2). On one implementation of this idea, it will be at the very least psychologically very difficult to act form duty if, among the things one knows, are claims such as *those who act immorally will be eternally punished*, or *everyone who performs right actions will receive eternal reward*. If one knows these claims, then it is at least appropriate for these claims to be one's reason for action. When faced with an opportunity to help an old lady across the street, the threat of eternal punishment is available as a reason for helping. Moreover, it will be an especially psychologically salient one: someone

who genuinely knows that they are under the threat of eternal punishment will be hard-pressed to ignore this consideration when reasoning about whether to help. But in doing so they will deprive their action of genuine moral worth. The presence of a good will, at least in psychologically realistic individuals, may well be an ignorance-entailing state: perhaps the only way to secure the conclusion that we do act for the right reasons is to deny that we know what the eternal consequences of our actions will be.

A second illustration of this idea relies on the connection between knowledge and risk alluded to earlier. Suppose that, as we suggested in section 1, risking that *p* is incompatible with knowing that not-*p*. Then any states that require the presence of risk will also be incompatible with knowledge. Moreover a wide range of states that we think of as virtuous are, prima facie at least, states that do require the presence of risk. For example, because of its connection to risk, courage is naturally understood as requiring the absence of knowledge: one can't courageously enter a battle if one isn't risking anything by doing so. And one can't risk that would lose one's life in a fight (for instance) if when entering one knew that one would not die. Some have thought that the value of faith lies partly in the fact that it is a courageous cognitive act (cf. Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* where Abraham's faith is courageous and therefore praiseworthy precisely because he cannot know what to do because of the contradiction between religious and ethical requirements on his action). Rejecting theological scepticism makes this kind of praiseworthy cognitive act unavailable.

It is also somewhat natural to think that the kind of reliance distinctive of trust is one that includes risk, but we don't intend to take a stand on that here. Even if trust doesn't require risk, it is arguable that *commendable* trust does.

Similarly it is arguable that hoping that *p* requires at least some risk that not-*p* and hence requires not knowing that *p*. Insofar as one wishes to make these ignorance-entailing states available in practical and religious life, one may be forced to deny that we can know theological claims.

9. NORMATIVE CONNECTIONS: dogmatism

Let us return to the knowledge-action connections, *viz.*:

> KRIPKE: If *A* knows that taking an action (i.e., any action) of type *T* leads to consequence *C*, and *A* wishes above all else to avoid *C* (i.e., this is the only relevant issue), then *A* should resolve now not to take any action of type *T*.

> COMPANION KRIPKE: If *A* knows that taking any action of type *T* leads to consequence *C* and doesn't know of any action that is not of type *T* that it leads to consequence *C*, and *A* wishes above all else to secure *C* then *A* should resolve to perform an action of type *T*.

As Kripke is aware, the connection he cites yields a prima facie case for dogmatic resolutions (on the part of a knower) to ignore powerful counterevidence. The idea is that if one knows *p* then (at least if one knows one believes *p*) one knows that one has a true belief that *p.* But if one really wants a true belief that *p* and knows that paying attention to powerful counterevidence will induce loss of belief, then it is natural to think that according to KRIPKE one should resolve not to pay attention to powerful counterevidence. The KRIPKE principle has particularly forceful application in the religious case. After all, when it comes to very ordinary beliefs it may be that by paying attention to powerful

counterevidence one gains new true beliefs even if one loses an old true belief when counterevidence comes in (one will, at the very least, be able to know what the counterevidence was). And there won't be anything that special about the original true belief that makes it especially important to secure it. But in the religious case it is plausible that certain people care more than anything else about retaining a true belief in God and would be more than happy to sacrifice the opportunity to learn about other subject matters in order to retain it.

Here is one straightforward application of COMPANION KRIPKE to this kind of case. To make this especially dramatic, let us imagine that someone who knows that theism is true is given the opportunity of taking a pill that she knows ensures that, come what may, she will belief that theism is true. Given COMPANION KRIPKE and a suitable valuation priority for believing in God, it seems that the person should take the pill—taking the pill is the only action she knows of that will produce the consequence of continued belief in God, and this is by hypothesis what she wants above everything else.

(The same point can be made a little more precise by running the whole discussion within the context of a decision theory where the likelihood of any outcome is a matter of likelihood conditional on what one knows. This will also allow us to take care of ways in which KRIPKE and KRIPKE COMPANION need further refinement. For example, suppose one knows that act *T* will lead to what one wishes above all to avoid and that not doing *T* will almost certainly lead to that horrible outcome and moreover will certainly generate a second bad side effect. The decision theory will tell one to do *T* but the unrefined KRIPKE principle will not. None of this should matter much in the contexts we are discussing.)

As Kripke is aware, these kinds of considerations can form the basis of a quite compelling sceptical argument. For it seems that we should not take the dogmatism pill. But if we know that there is a God and the KRIPKE and COMPANION KRIPKE principles are along the right lines (and it seems that they, or some successors refined in the direction outlined above, are) then we should take the pill. So, by modus tollens, we don't know there is a God. (It is worth considering the same argument in connection with heretic-burning. If Giordano Bruno's inquisitors knew that he would go to hell were he not to recant and knew that he wouldn't recant without purging by fire, then, given the principles and/or a suitably low utility assignment to hell, purging by fire is the recommended action. No matter what our religious orientation, we should perhaps revisit the question whether the inquisitors knew.)

10. Conclusion

There are various other candidate structural features that might ramify in important ways in the religious case. Let us briefly mention two. First, many philosophers think that 'know' is a context-sensitive verb that expresses different relations in different contexts of use. As the idea is typically developed, there are certain contexts in which 'know' expresses a relation to a proposition that can only be achieved by someone who passes incredibly high epistemic standards, where in other context, 'know' expresses a relation that is far less demanding. Proponents of the idea then articulate mechanism by which the standards relevant to a context can vary. Proposals along these lines tend, as yet, to be pretty crude, but most make use of one or both of two mechanisms suggested by Lewis. One is that attending to sceptical possibilities tends to drive

the standards up. Another is that insofar as one is in a context where there is a lot at stake as to whether *p* is true, that also tends to drive the standards up. Even in this vague form it is easy to see how, in rough outlines, such ideas will apply to the religious case. For example, the theist might contend that in the context of problem of evil discussions, the atheist's attention has been drawn to the 'sceptical' possibility that horrendous evils have an undetected higher purpose and that this puts the atheist in a context where he cannot claim 'If there were a good guy who could have prevented this, he would'. Meanwhile, many religious questions (though certainly not all theological nuances) are paradigmatically 'high stakes' and so, assuming the second mechanism, one would expect the standards for 'know' to be high in contexts where those questions are explicitly under consideration. For better or worse, however, we feel these mechanisms need fuller development in order for their application to religious belief to be a very profitable venture. (The effect of stakes has also being prominent in discussion of 'subject sensitive invariantism'. For more one why the relevant discussion of stakes has been hopelessly underdeveloped see Anderson and Hawthorne MS.)

Many discussions of knowledge emphasise that knowledge has a further structural feature in its intimately connection to the absence of 'defeaters': when undefeated defeaters are present for belief in *p*, knowledge of *p* is unattainable. (According to this way of theorizing, one cannot know that a red ball is in fact red on the basis of perception if one learns that the ball has red lights shining on it and would as a result look red even if it were white. Knowledge of the lighting provides a 'defeater' that blocks the path to knowledge of the ball's colour via perception.) When it comes to religious belief, numerous alleged sources of

defeat for these beliefs have been proposed: for instance, the facts about religious pluralism discussed in earlier sections might together be said to constitute a defeater. Likewise, facts about the distribution of evil in the world, or the evolutionary origins of religious belief might be defeaters. This way of speaking is common in epistemology, and any discussion of scepticism should mention it.

We think, however, that the need for defeat as an additional constraint on knowledge is not obvious. Many alleged cases of defeat can be assimilated under headings that have already appeared in our discussion. Some paradigmatic cases can be accounted for by CLOSE WORLDS and SIMILARITY: in many cases where I learn that an object that appears red is under red lighting, and would appear red even if it wasn't, the belief that it is red has a bad companion: either it is either actually false, or false in nearby worlds where it is formed by a relevantly similar perceptual process. Hence we already have laid out the resources for explaining why one can't know in these cases. In other cases there is a pretty good case to be made that knowledge is present before and after the so-called defeater. The alleged defeater may merely make it harder to know that one knows or instead reveal one to be someone who would cling on to the belief in a setting where one didn't know and in that sense to reveal that one has dicey dispositions. Of course friends of defeat will want to say more than this, but in our view current accounts of defeat are so gerrymandered or impoverished that we cannot apply them usefully to the religious case.

We have articulated a certain degree of pessimism about the fruits of two candidate structural features of knowledge – context dependence and defeat. At any rate, we are not in a position make helpful contributions to the epistemology

of theology by drawing on structural insights of that sort. That said we await new and more nuanced theoretical models of those phenomena and also those that we have discussed earlier. Discussions of scepticism come to life when conducted within the contexts of such models and will likely languish if they content themselves with a methodology dominated by reliance on intuitions about cases.

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