

Memories of the Fourth Condition and Lessons to be Learned from Suspicious Externalism

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Abstract: A significant and interesting part of the post-Gettier literature regarding the analysis of propositional knowledge is the attempt to supplement the traditional tripartite analysis by employing a fourth condition regarding the defeasibility of evidence and thus to preclude the counterexamples displayed in Gettier's original article. My aim in this paper is to critically examine the sort of externalism that accompanies the most promising of the proposed fourth conditions, due to Pollock, in order to offer some fresh insights on this old epistemological issue. I argue that Pollock's paradigmatic treatment of the matter gives rise to a critical problem with regard to the exact role of the fourth condition and its relation with the onto-semantic or alethic condition of propositional knowledge, to wit, truth. In the light of this discussion, I draw certain conclusions about epistemic externalism and point out some of its theoretical shortcomings.

Keywords: externalism, fourth condition, Gettier, knowledge, Pollock, truth, undefeasibility.

1. Propositional knowledge, truth and epistemic externalism

Although what is derisively called "Gettierology" – that is, the sum total of indefatigable philosophical attempts to provide the necessary and sufficient conditions of propositional knowledge following Edmund Gettier's seminal article published in *Analysis* a long time ago – is clearly regarded as *passé* in our times, we can perhaps still

learn and benefit from some of the crucial epistemological mistakes of the Gettierologists. In this paper, I turn to a Gettierological matter with the hope of being able to offer some useful insights about a certain intriguing issue surrounding the concept of propositional knowledge. The problem I am particularly interested in is the unsuspected *externalization* of human agents' epistemic states due to a condition on the right hand side of the S-knows-that-p biconditional. Although nonepistemic truth will not be my main concern in this paper, I am going to provide at the outset some preparatory reflections on that topic before I go on with the subject matter I intend to deal with. There is little doubt that the overwhelming majority of theoreticians of knowledge suppose that truth is an independent condition on propositional knowledge *and* they mostly take truth to be nonepistemic. The traditional tripartite definition of propositional knowledge hence comes with a distinct alethic component, viz., nonepistemic truth, which is alleged to secure in an objective manner the subject's veridical connection to what is to be known in the world. There are, as one should expect, a number of anti-realist philosophers who do not care too much for a concept of truth normatively distinct from epistemic justification: some pragmatist thinkers, for instance, are famous for their extreme anti-truth approaches. Those anti-realists would definitely not regard the relationship between knowledge and truth as interesting or worthwhile in the first place. In addition to these two predictable philosophical attitudes, there is yet another possible onto-epistemic stance, which is relatively rare and evidently less apt to be cheered by mainstream epistemologists, and that is basically contending (against anti-realistic tendencies about truth) that propositional truth must be taken seriously *but* insisting at the same time (against the traditional definition inherited from Plato) that the "secure role" truth plays in ordinary epistemic contexts cannot be taken for granted. According to this relatively less popular stance, to which I find myself sympathetic,¹ the truth condition of the tripartite definition is – unlike

¹ I argued against the "received view" in theory of knowledge elsewhere (2004) and claimed that epistemologists have generally failed to seriously question the philosophical consequences of counting nonepistemic truth among the necessary conditions of knowledge.

the justificatory and doxastic conditions—not one whose satisfaction can be “checked” by finite, evidence-bound agents. Of course, people can and do operationally (say, inductively) “check” truth values of empirical propositions through evidential means and processes, but the truth condition *itself*, where truth is strictly nonepistemic and thus different from justification, cannot be checked for satisfaction by finite agents. If this reasoning is essentially correct, one can raise a serious question about the actual role of truth appearing in the traditional definition. But, one may ask, why should “checking” become an issue in this matter? Why can’t we allow that something that is not epistemic be among the conditions of human knowledge? And isn’t “checking” a rather unrealistic demand on ordinary empirical knowledge?

Proponents of the traditional definition must presume that each of the separate conditions of propositional knowledge serves some actual epistemic function whereas, I think, in fact the truth condition (or the *onto-semantic* component) of knowledge can only be checked via the justification condition (an *operational* one). Needless to say, the satisfaction of the onto-semantic condition is meant to be conceptually independent of epistemic justification or warrant or evidence; otherwise the tripartite definition would boil down to a bipartite definition. But if truth is conceptually independent of the best evidence cognizers can possibly gather, what might be the *functional telos* behind making it a *condition* of propositional knowledge? This line of reasoning is not meant to demonstrate that truth can or must be rendered an “epistemic property” as opposed to a robust semantic notion. It is just meant to problematize the actual role of the truth condition that appears in the classical tripartite definition and to show that such an onto-semantic condition in the definition gives rise to an epistemic externalization of plain human knowledge.² The externalization I mention in this context arises due to graciously exempting particular human agents from knowing in particular epistemic cases that the truth condition of the tripartite definition is actually satisfied *and* simultaneously allowing

² It is not the case that the perspective I advocate here has never been propounded in the history of philosophy. K. Popper (1975) and R. Almeder (1992) both defended some form of “realism” which takes truth seriously but denies that we are in epistemic touch with it in a straightforward or unproblematic fashion.

them to attain the cognitive state we call “knowledge”. While such externalization is a familiar and *prima facie* legitimate epistemological move, one must notice that it makes human knowledge conditional upon something whose occurrence in reality is meta-epistemically opaque to all non-omniscient agents.³ Since truth and evidence are conceptually distinct, we cannot expect the kind of “cognitive availability” generally associated with the notions of belief and evidence to attach to the concept of truth in a similar manner. Let me dwell on this point a bit further.

According to the standard definition, a subject who does know a given proposition is one who has, by definition, somehow “found” or “hit on” the pertinent truth. For example, *knowing* that there are n undergraduate students in a given university at a given time implies, if knowledge is really happening in that instance, the *truth* of the proposition that there are n undergraduate students in that university at that time. Notice that the evidence or justification one has for that particular empirical assertion may vary depending on the subject’s circumstances, but its truth must be fixed for that specific time-slice. The crucial point of this example is of course that propositional truth, unlike evidence, is a nonepistemic happening; it belongs to the world that exists outside of human minds and epistemic states. Now, while it would be simply wonderful for us to be in a position to *recognize* such an ontological situation, viz., truth’s really happening in the world, limited cognizers like ourselves are unfortunately never capable of telling which of the *a posteriori* judgments we entertain acquire that special status in actuality. A more general name for this problem is the “problem of criterion”, explicated by thinkers like R. Chisholm, and it is a reminder of the fact that when we really do know something veridically, the object of our knowledge does not (and cannot) stand out in the ontological ground and highlight itself with distinctly recognizable alethic marks. To put it metaphorically, truth happens in the world without a warning, that is, without loudly announcing that it is in fact truth, not falsity. Thus, it is always an im-

³ In this context, “externalism” is obviously related to the admission of the KK-thesis, viz., the claim that one’s knowing a given proposition p implies that she knows that she knows that p .

perfect and often precarious evidential task for us to distinguish the veridical appearances/propositions from seemingly true ones. In a similar vein, there is no guarantee that an empirical proposition which clearly seems to be true now will not turn out to be false in light of further evidence in the future. Consequently, the traditional externalistic account of the truth-knowledge connection may make some theoretical sense within the framework of an abstract epistemological account, but it turns out to be the least useful delineation from the perspective of any flesh and blood human knower who approaches truths solely by way of evidence. From the standpoint of any actual (non-omniscient) knower, truth's being a *condition* for knowledge is a useless and empty stipulation. This certainly does not exclude the possibility that truth serves, for instance, a *normative* function for actual human agents (and for the epistemologist's theoretical task), but such a claim is very different from what is stated in the classical definition of knowledge. Truth condition of the traditional definition or analysis of propositional knowledge gives rise to a notable externalization.⁴

In short, I am inclined to think that we can legitimately talk about an issue concerning the *epistemic externalization* due to the truth condition of knowledge although the majority of epistemologists have admittedly not had great worries over this matter. Now, I also do believe that the above mentioned externalization is not the only interesting sort we can talk about in relation to the classical analysis of knowledge. Hence, my aim in this article is essentially to focus on a certain development following the publication of Gettier's article and provide some reflections over an epistemic externalization due not directly to the truth condition of traditional knowledge but to an extraneous component appended to the original definition. As everyone who is familiar with theory of knowledge knows quite well, once Gettier clearly showed in 1963 that the unqualified "justified true belief" (*JTB*) fails to characterize propositional knowledge adequately, epistemologists made considerable efforts to amend the definition by adding further conditions regarding the justificatory status of the believer. Gettier famously taught us the following: It may be the case that a true proposition *p* believed by *S*

⁴ I will come back to some of the issues about this sort of externality in Section 3 below.

somehow acquires its *JTB* status from such “unintended” sources as another true proposition q which S does not evidentially associate with p in a particular instance of alleged justified true belief—hence invalidating S 's claim to knowledge of p .⁵ During the post-Gettier period, one common response to the problem has been the suggestion that while the three basic conditions of the *JTB* analysis must be retained, the definition has to be supplemented by a fourth condition which is to render the evidential or justificatory support conferred on the proposition to be known by S a non-accidental one. Thus, the fourth condition is employed to secure the epistemic link between the proposition to be justified, p and the evidence S actually holds for p .

Let us now examine a well-elaborated and well-circulated form of the fourth-condition analysis in order to display the relationship between that analysis and the nature of externalization it gives rise to. As I have already mentioned, some epistemologists supposed that the tripartite definition could be made tenable if we added an extra condition regulating the relation between the proposition S believes and S 's actual reasons for believing it. More specifically, the claim is that the epistemic justification for S 's belief that p is said to be undefeatable if there is no defeating evidence, or simply “defeater”, in connection with either p or the evidence that S has for p . J. Pollock calls the former kind a *rebutting defeater*, and the latter an *undercutting defeater* (Pollock 1986, 38 – 39). The literature on defeaters is fairly rich and convoluted, and I have no intention to survey here the existing views. So my treatment of the notion of defeaters here will be a rather focused one.⁶ I will use Pollock's formulation of the

⁵ To explain this, consider one of Gettier's classic examples (1963): Smith justifiably believes the false proposition p : “Jones owns a Ford” and infers from that proposition q : “Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona”. Since q is logically inferred from p , it seems also epistemically justified. As it turns out, Brown is really in Barcelona and, thus, q is true. But despite the fact that Smith believes in a justified true proposition, q , it is actually not an instance of knowledge. What makes *JTB* possible in this example is a fact beyond Smith's ken and, therefore, it is not an instance of knowledge.

⁶ One seminal work on this subject is Lehrer and Paxon's 1969 article “Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief”. R. Chisholm (1989) also made significant contributions to the discussion. See also Cohen (1987), Klein (1996a), Klein (1996b), Levy (1996), and Shope (1983).

supplemented definition of propositional knowledge, which puts together nicely certain important ideas from the defeasibility tradition, and will try to explain why I find the fourth condition analyses of this sort objectionable and ultimately incapable of solving the problem it intends to.

2. Pollock and ultimate undefeasibility

In the original Gettier examples, *S* fails to know *p* because, despite the fact that *p* is an instance of *JTB* for *S*, there happens to be a true proposition which makes *S*'s belief that *p* true—even though it plays no role in *S*'s reasoning in arriving at that belief. To remedy this situation, we can put forward an extra condition as follows:

There is no true proposition *q* such that if *q* were added to *S*'s beliefs then she would no longer be justified in believing *p*. (Pollock 1986, 181)

This suggestion will not quite do because although *q* may indeed be a defeater for *p*, there may be another proposition, *r*, which defeats *q*, thus acting as a *restoring defeater*. In that case, we say that *S* actually knows that *p* despite the presence of a defeater which would destroy *S*'s epistemic justification if she were aware of it. Suppose we amend the condition this time in the following way:

If there is a true proposition *q* such that if *q* were added to *S*'s beliefs then she would no longer be justified in believing *p*, then there is also a true proposition *r* such that if *q* and *r* were both added to *S*'s beliefs then she would be justified in believing *p*. (Pollock 1986, 182)

This is an obvious improvement upon the previous definition in that it allows the existence of “harmless defeaters”. In other words, the definition makes possible the neutralization of any defeater *q* (related to the original proposition *p*) by a proposition *r* which acts as a defeater defeater. But the problem with this new proposal, as Pollock notes, is that the introduction of *r* and *q* into *S*'s belief system may have the effect of adding new reasons for believing that *p* rather than restoring *S*'s old reasons. Since this effectively means having to deal with new defeater defeaters, one may begin to face the risk of getting bogged down in progressively finer, and arguably *ad hoc*, adjustments in the characterization of the fourth condition.

Pollock responds to this difficulty by defining the notion of an “ultimately undefeated argument” and placing it at the center of his account of epistemic justification. The idea is briefly as follows:

Every argument proceeding from basic [i.e., non-inferential] states that S is actually in will be *undefeated at level 0* for S In general, we define an argument to be *undefeated at level $n+1$* if and only if it is undefeated at level 0 and is not defeated by any arguments undefeated at level n . An argument is *ultimately undefeated* if and only if there is some point beyond which it remains permanently undefeated; that is for some N , the argument remains undefeated at level n for every $n > N$. (Pollock 1986, 189)

To put it differently, Pollock urges us to consider an ultimate situation where (given an agent S , a proposition p she justifiably believes, an argument A she has for p , and the set of all defeaters in relation to p , including the restoring ones) the defeaters for A balance and neutralize one another, leaving S 's initial reasons for believing in p intact. Next, Pollock defines *objective epistemic justification* which he places somewhere between the concept of subjective justification and knowledge:

S is objectively justified in believing p if and only if S instantiates some argument A supporting p which is ultimately undefeated relative to the set of all truths. (Pollock 1986, 185)

Propositional knowledge differs from objectively justified belief in that the former necessitates, in addition to the latter, that S be cognizant of, and be sensitive to, socially recognized facts and situations. I think what Pollock has in mind here can be explained with the following example. Suppose S is a successful journalist and it is professionally expected from an employee in her position to start the day by checking a particular Internet site which provides reliable information for journalists like S —call this “Method₁”. One morning S skips Method₁ and instead follows the unusual method of calling a fellow journalist to obtain some specific information (Method₂). With the information S receives, she forms an argument A and eventually a true belief q as the conclusion of A . Since the past experience of S strongly suggests that Method₂ is a sufficiently reliable one, S is (subjectively) justified in believing that q . Yet, unbeknownst to S , q comes with numerous undercutting defeaters. It fortunately turns out that all of those defeaters somehow get neutralized by restoring ones, thus making S 's argument for q

ultimately undefeated. The important fact in this scenario is that *S* would have been aware of most of those undercutting defeaters if she used the well-established Method₁. Consequently, even if the defeaters in this situation have no ultimate epistemic effect on *S*'s belief in the true proposition *p*, we intuitively feel, Pollock thinks, that *S* does not know that *p* despite the fact that she is objectively justified.

I tend to think that Pollock's social requirement on propositional knowledge raises the question of how independent it is from the requirement concerning regular (or non-social) undefeasibility, but I will not discuss this issue here. Pollock finalizes his discussion by offering the following definition of propositional knowledge:

S knows *p* if and only if *S* instantiates some argument *A* supporting *p* which is (1) ultimately undefeated relative to the set of all truths, and (2) ultimately undefeated relative to the set of all truths socially sensitive for *S*.
(Pollock 1986, 193)

Pollock's definition seems to avoid the problems posed by the Gettier-like counter-examples one can find in the literature. This sounds like a significant result given the fact that continued failure of the defeasibility analyses especially in the 70's had caused some philosophers to give up all the hope.⁷ The apparent advantage of Pollock's account is that it capitalizes on the notion of *ultimate* undefeasibility, thus avoiding some important difficulties encountered by those accounts due to the existence of defeated defeaters. The problem I perceive here, however, is not just that the art of examples and counter-examples related to the undefeasibility condition has progressively moved epistemologists away from an adequate understanding of the actual practice or state of epistemic justification, but that it now seems very difficult to provide such a fourth condition at the appropriate dosage: either that condition is weak and uninteresting (and thus can be ultimately incorporated into the justification condition) or it is too strong and ideal

⁷ In his 1983 book *The Analysis of Knowing: A Decade of Research*, R. K. Shope, after providing a comprehensive and critical examination of the post-Gettier efforts to produce a tenable analysis of defeasibility, solemnly concluded his discussion by saying: "Perhaps the failure of so many analyses provides good reason to suppose that the defeasibility approach to the analysis of knowledge is itself destined to be defeated beyond restoration" (p. 74).

(in that it repeats the role of the realist truth condition). I further believe that this seemingly technical epistemic issue relates to a more general problem of excessive externalization.

3. The undefeasibility condition: how different is it from the truth condition?

Let us take a closer look at the condition about ultimate undefeasibility of a believer's argument for a given proposition. This condition (call it 'UC') is intended to guarantee that the evidence an epistemic agent (*S*) possesses for a true proposition (*p*) that she believes is ultimately undefeated by other facts. In Pollock's formulation, *S* knows *p* only if *S* instantiates some argument *A* supporting *p* which is ultimately undefeated relative to *the set of all truths*. This rather strong demand raises, I think, an important question about the exact nature of UC. Can we imagine an instance of *S*'s alleged knowledge that *p* where UC is satisfied but the truth condition ('TC' hereafter) is not? This seems rather unlikely. To see this consider the following: Suppose we are told that *S* justifiably believes in a proposition *q* and that *S*'s argument for *q* is ultimately undefeated relative to the set of *all truths*. We also assume, in this hypothetical example, that we are not imparted any information about *q*'s truth value. Under these circumstances, it is inconceivable, I think, that *q* turns out to be a false proposition. Notice that UC requires not just that *q* remain ultimately undefeated relative to those truths epistemically accessible for *S* or any other agent but also that it remains so with respect to all truths regardless of their accessibility to normal cognizers. One obvious implication of this externalist requirement is that the reliability of the evidence *S* has for *q* is preserved *sub specie aeternitatis* (or *sub specie veritas*), viz., from the standpoint of the set of all truths, rather than from the perspective of a finite epistemic agent. But, if this is so, how can this situation be made compatible with the possibility of *q*'s being false?

This last point can also be made by way of a *reductio* as follows. Let us suppose that *q* is a false proposition *and* that UC is satisfied for *q* which is a belief held by *S* at time *t*. Take *q* as the proposition "There are eight planets in the Solar system", *S* an epistemic agent who justifiably believes in *q*, and *t* the year 1920—that is, ten years before the

discovery of Pluto by Clyde Tombaugh. In this case, contrary to our initial assumption, UC cannot be satisfied for S because there must, intuitively speaking, be a piece of evidence, i.e., some hidden truth, *out there* undermining S 's argument leading to the false belief q .⁸ This strongly suggests that if q is a false proposition, UC cannot possibly be satisfied in reality. Now consider another hypothetical case where r is true but UC is not satisfied for r . Take r as "There are nine planets in the Solar system". Can S 's argument for r , assuming that r is really true, be somehow ultimately defeated relative to the set of all truths? I do not think that this question can intelligibly be answered in the affirmative. Of course, the present argument can be countered by saying that there may be isolated events in reality which are not related, in evidential terms, to any other occurrence at all – hence falsifying the thesis that ultimate undefeasibility of p by all truths is equivalent to truth of p . This would indeed constitute a genuine counter-example to my claim that satisfaction of UC cannot be conceived independently of that of TC, but I seriously doubt that there are any such natural events within our current epistemic and/or scientific reach. In short, as far as the world which we live in (and understand) is concerned, it seems like a general rule that if there is no fact to defeat a proposition p , then p is true, and *vice versa*.

The above discussion suggests that UC has actually an ambiguous role in the definition of propositional knowledge. Although it is originally intended to rectify S 's defective justification, it appears to do far more than that epistemologically. It is not just that both UC and TC are externalist or non-operational conditions; more crucially, their satisfactions are seemingly concomitant circumstances. If UC holds, there is apparently no way that the proposition under consideration can be false. And conversely, if a given empirical proposition is true, then it is impossible to envisage a situation where, remembering Pollock's

⁸ In the case of Pluto, the discovery was due to astronomers' comparing the observed positions of Uranus and Neptune with those predicted from their orbits. The fact that there were certain departures from the predicted positions was taken to indicate that the paths of Uranus and Neptune were affected by the gravitational attraction of another astronomic object. For the purposes of my example here, these departures constitute one "missing truth" (or defeater) in relation with the false belief "There are eight planets in the Solar system".

definition, that proposition *ultimately* turns out to be defeated. I will come back to this matter in the last section of this paper.

4. Externalism and the problem of truth's partial dependence on discursivity

I believe that the problem with such definitions as the one proposed by Pollock goes deeper than the epistemological issue I have displayed above. The phrase "the set of all truths" in Pollock's definition of knowledge deprives that definition of its epistemic usefulness from a broader conceptual and ontological perspective as well. To see this, consider the following example. Suppose a human agent, call him Socrates, is watching a particular rock somewhere at the outskirts of Athens in the year 450 B.C. During his perception of the rock, the proximal stimulus given to Socrates's cognitive system causes him to get the sensation of color violet. Consequently, Socrates forms the belief p : "The rock looks violet to me now", and derives from it another one, q : "The rock is violet". Let us call this argument A . Suppose further that there is a natural anomaly involved in this instance of belief formation: an unusual electromagnetic phenomenon affects the area around the rock, causing the light waves reflected from the objects in the area to alter their wavelength. Thus, although the physical fact is that the rock emits light waves of length 630 nanometers (red), they get transformed to waves whose length is 430 nanometers (violet) before they reach Socrates's eyes. I will assume, for the sake of this example, that we can accept physicalism about the nature of color and its perception. Then, it is the case that Socrates perceives a red rock as violet. Moreover, his argument A which proceeds from p to q is ultimately defeated by the true statement d : "In this particular area which is being affected by a natural electromagnetic phenomenon, all objects looking violet to normal human eye are actually red". Hence, Socrates's argument A (which supports q) is said to be defeated by d .

This scenario is not meant, properly speaking, to be a counterexample to Pollock's definition. After all, the belief being considered here, q , is a false one. Rather, my point is that if an absolutely externalist condition like UC is incorporated into the definition of ordinary knowledge, we get the implausible consequence that *any* true proposi-

tion, irrespective of the linguistic, cultural, or scientific framework within which it has been produced, is *ipso facto* licensed, almost ontologically, to act as a potential defeater vis-à-vis an agent's justified belief. It now seems that we have reached the crux of the issue: The unacceptable result of Pollock's definition given above is that although Socrates seems to *know* the "false" proposition that q , his argument for q is defeated by a member of "the set of all truths" which is imagined to exist, from a metaphysical viewpoint, independently of the epistemic and cognitive limits of human agents like Socrates and his contemporaries. But it is extremely implausible to hold that Socrates's argument A for his "false" belief that q is defective merely because it is not informed and corrected by a piece of truth that could have been spelled out and brought to bear by means of the epistemic-scientific tools of those agents who would live centuries after Socrates and his fellow citizens.

It seems unlikely that Pollock can adequately respond to a challenge of the sort I have presented above. Even though Pollock talks about "ultimate undefeasibility relative to the set of all truths socially sensitive for S " in the final form of his definition of knowledge, that particular clause is meant only to be a supplement to the main clause of the definition which is solely about "ultimate undefeasibility relative to the set of all truths" (Pollock 1986, 193). Hence the problem is a genuine one, for Pollock is seen to adopt a rather odd ontological picture where truths affect one's justification in an unconstrained fashion, i.e., independently of their actual "epistemic mobilization", so to speak, by actual human agents. Let us note that if we lived in a world where human beings never produced a theory of electromagnetic phenomena, what the externalist takes as a "truth" or "fact" defeating Socrates's argument A would actually *not* be making any epistemic contribution vis-à-vis the justification of propositions/beliefs in that world. Thus, it is obvious that the grand set Pollock envisages can only be the set of all truths that can be formed, shaped, and discovered within some conceptual framework made by actual human beings.

One may be tempted to think that the proposition d in the Socrates example actually qualifies as a legitimate defeater because it after all expresses a *truth* (assuming that it really does) in the spatio-temporal reality open to human cognition. That the electromagnetic theory (EMT) was unknown to Ancient Greeks does not entail that electro-

magnetic fields were nonexistent in cosmos two millennia ago. Therefore, Socrates's belief that q : "The rock is violet" can be considered false regardless of the fact that Socrates and his fellows understandably could not help believing that q . The problem here is that this may lead, by way of "pessimistic induction", to a very implausible and undesirable philosophical consequence about our present and future attempts at empirical knowledge as well. It must be borne in mind that *EMT* is merely one possible and contingent way to describe the mind-independent reality. In the Socrates example, *EMT* is claimed to have an unexpected impact on epistemic states of the members of a temporally distant culture. By projection, we can state that any human community in history would then probably have to suffer from a similar, unavoidable and dismal epistemological fate. This evidently leaves us with an unacceptable philosophical position. Actually, we can go one step further in this argument and make an even stronger point. Consider an imaginary situation where a certain set of physical phenomena is successfully explained by a hypothetical theory *XYT* which has never been, or will be, invented by human scientists. Without a doubt, the actual invention and utilization of theories like *EMT* and *XYT* are *contingent* occurrences and there must be, intuitively speaking, countless theories which have great explanatory power and yet to remain, as far as living human agents are concerned, forever "unearthed" in history. So suppose that in the Socrates example *XYT*, rather than *EMT*, uncovers and explains a certain defeater for Socrates's belief that q . Then we would definitely be very hesitant to maintain that a theory like *XYT* can play any role in our epistemic actions and states such as defeating our knowledge attempts. Just as we concede that theories like *XYT* cannot plausibly play any epistemic role in our attempts at knowledge (such as undermining our beliefs), we also have to admit that "actual" theories like *EMT* are not capable to nullify, by means of some mysterious onto-epistemic mechanism operating across different ages and conceptual schemes, knowledge attempts of situated cognizers belonging to different ages and cultures. So my conclusion is that a given non-omniscient cognizer must be admitted to *know* a given empirical proposition if certain reasonable conditions on knowledge are satisfied *even if* the cognizer's justification for that given proposition is somehow "undermined" by a set of exceedingly esoteric true propositions.

5. Concluding remarks on UC and externalism

In Sections 3 and 4 I have spelled out two different but related arguments. So let me present in compact form my reasons for thinking that Pollock's epistemological account is fundamentally flawed. First, it makes little sense to talk about the set of *all* truths defeating particular knowledge claims because truths and propositions are formed and constituted, *pace* the author of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, in relation to some conceptual network or life-form, not solely in the noumenal warp and weft of the mind-independent reality.⁹ Naturally, this is a highly controversial matter involving a vast literature, and a full treatment or defense of such an onto-semantic view is clearly beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁰ The gist of the position I am holding against Pollock can perhaps be found in the thought that without language there would definitely be some reality but not empirical truths.¹¹ An externalist/realist would argue against this tenet, insisting that truths are plainly embedded in reality, *and* they can "reach out" and defeat justifications at any point of the space-time continuum. Let me call this the *inter-theoretical* aspect of externalism regarding defeasibility of empirical beliefs held by cognitive agents.

I want to distinguish this aspect or perspective from the *intra-theoretical aspect of externalism*. According to the latter kind, *within* a given life-form or paradigm UC dictates that the evidence *S* possesses for *p* is ultimately undefeated by other truths. Pollock argues that *S* knows *p* only if *S* instantiates some argument *A* supporting *p* which is ultimately undefeated relative to the set of all truths. Intra-theoretically, this can be read as saying that empirical knowledge *rules out*, by definition, the existence of those truths that would function as de-

⁹ See Lynch (1998) for a detailed and comparative exposition of various conceptions of conceptual frameworks together with a lucid defense of their philosophical legitimacy *contra* D. Davidson.

¹⁰ See especially Putnam (1986; 1994), Searle (1995), Alston (1996), Lynch (1998; 2005), Goldman (1999). I also tried to make contributions to the literature on the ontology of truth from a "metaphysical anti-realist" perspective in my (2006).

¹¹ Despite their differences, both Putnam (1994) and Davidson (1990) believe that truths are nonepistemic and also dependent of the epistemic and linguistic tools of finite knowers.

featers for the empirical proposition to be known—with the proviso that both the proposition to be known and its potential defeaters are situated within the same conceptual scheme or framework. Obviously, the intra-theoretical version is epistemologically the more common and interesting one since philosophers typically (and understandably) put aside the semantic or ontological matters aside when they deal with the technicalities of justificatory and epistemic issues. So my epistemological objection against Pollock's position, presented in Section 3, is that the way UC employs the idea of "the set of all truths" brings in an intolerable externalism to the whole enterprise because UC then seems to serve no epistemic purpose as distinct from that of TC. I will put it bluntly and state that one gets the impression that the UC-externalist is somehow rigging the epistemological game: He attempts to save the reliability of knowledge from such challenges as Gettier's by "ontologizing" what is essentially a justificatory problem. More openly, the fourth condition in the traditional definition of knowledge actually ends up functioning as an excessively powerful externalistic (even "alethic") device under the guise of being just a regulatory clause concerning the justificatory status of the subject. I have supported this view above by arguing that if UC ever fulfills the epistemic function attributed to it, we get the surprising result that the proposition in question cannot possibly be a false one anyway. This is a highly problematic epistemological picture because while propositional truth admittedly owes its existence more directly to the mind-independent reality, epistemic justification cannot reasonably be handled by transferring the justificatory responsibility to the realm of existence—rather than to non-omniscient cognitive agents.

There is a different but related issue about "ontologizing" ordinary epistemic states. Pollock's notion of ultimate undefeasibility relative to the set of all truths is an instance of externalists' attempt to secure *by fiat* the connection between propositional knowledge and truth. Philosophers have always felt that the relation between truth and knowledge is an indispensable and essential one—in the sense of knowledge's depending on truth. And the dependence is one-way only. Truth is a necessary condition of knowledge, but there have always been and will always be certain truths that are never to disclose themselves to human cognizers. Interestingly, however, there will always

be certain *false* (and practically working) propositions which will, unknowingly, be taken as truths. To make this point precise, suppose that there is a set of false empirical propositions $\{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$ about the world such that they are highly justified for the members of an epistemic community who sincerely believe those propositions. Suppose also that members of that community (or even "outsiders", for that matter) in their complete history never get a chance to find out that propositions $\{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$ are in fact false. Furthermore, from a purely pragmatic point of view, propositions $\{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$ work just smoothly in everyday and scientific contexts for those who believe them. Would we then be inclined to say that people of that community know nothing at all when they believe $\{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$ despite the fact that they seem to be perfectly inculpable in their false beliefs? Probably not. This seems to suggest that there must be some room for a non-traditional conception of knowledge if our aim is to tell a convincing epistemic story of ordinary human beings as opposed to some abstract *S*.

Let me close my anti-externalist discussion by saying a little more about "knowing to the best of our abilities" as opposed to "knowing *sub specie veritas*". Robert Almeder once defended a view he called "Blind Realism" according to which "[w]e cannot justifiably say, justifiably pick out, or otherwise establish by appeal to any reliable decision procedure, *which* of our presently completely authorized beliefs do correctly describe the external world" (1992, 144). While this grim picture may turn out to be the epistemological "human predicament" (remembering Quine's memorable phrase), pondering over scenarios like the one I have produced above – involving Socrates and the red rock – one is somehow led to thinking that when human cognizers go collectively and unavoidably wrong on a certain matter, they must still get some epistemological credit for their false-but-perfectly-working empirical beliefs. On this matter, epistemic externalism appears to be particularly inadequate.

In the beginning of the paper I indicated that the traditional tripartite definition of propositional knowledge seems to involve a substantially externalistic component. If my arguments here are on the right track, we can safely maintain that the fourth condition analyses have basically generated even further externalized definitions of ordinary human knowledge which is supposed to accurately characterize ordi-

nary epistemic achievement of ordinary cognitive agents. To remove possible doubts, I must reiterate that arguing against *epistemic* externalizations does not make us anti-realists regarding the nature of truth. Nonepistemic truth is a substantial onto-semantic concept we ought to retain, a thesis successfully defended by numerous epistemologists such as W. Alston (1996) and A. Goldman (1986; 1999). On the other hand, we have to tread carefully when we portray human knowledge by reference to a robust concept like nonepistemic truth and extra conditions such as ultimate undefeasibility of evidence. Epistemic externalism is a hard position that comes at a heavy price, but pointing out the notable weaknesses of externalism must not be, I maintain, taken as some sort of philosophical license to sacrifice solid grounds like mind-independent reality or evidence-transcendent truth. Propositional truth provides a norm by which we are able to describe epistemic justification or evidence in the first place.¹² But it is one thing to talk about the onto-semantic and normative nature of truth, and yet another to utilize it in epistemological contexts in an externalistic fashion without paying due attention to the broader implications of such a maneuver.¹³

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¹² See, e.g., Kitcher (1993).

¹³ I have made significant revisions on the initial version of this paper in light of the comments and criticisms of an anonymous referee of *ORGANON F*. I am grateful for her/his feedback and constructive suggestions.

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