

chapter one

Knowing Full well

Belief is a kind of performance, which attains one level of success if it is true (or accurate), a second level if it is competent (or adroit), and a third if its truth manifests the believer's competence (i.e., if it is apt). Knowledge on one level (the animal level) is apt belief. The epistemic normativity constitutive of such knowledge is thus a kind of performance normativity. a problem is posed for this account, however, by the fact that suspension of belief admits the same epistemic normativity as does belief itself, even though to suspend is of course precisely *not* to perform, at least not with the aim of truth. My solution distinguishes orders of performance normativity, including a first order where execution competence is in play, and a second order where the performer must assess the risks in first-order performance. This imports a level of reflective knowledge, above the animal level.

Two of Plato's best-known dialogues are inquiries about knowledge. The *Theaetetus* inquires into its nature, the *Meno* also into its value. each dialogue, i will suggest, involves the same more basic question: what sort of normativity is constitutive of our knowledge? a belief that falls short of knowledge is thereby inferior. it is better to know than to get it wrong, of course, and also better than to get it right just by luck. what is involved in such evaluation? an answer to this more basic question enables a solution for both Platonic problems. in this chapter

we consider mainly this question: what is the epistemic normativity that is constitutive of knowledge?

our question is, accordingly, this: what condition must a belief satisfy, in addition to being true, in order to constitute knowledge? This question as to the nature of knowledge has been central to epistemology in recent decades, as it was for Plato.

edmund gettier showed that more is required for a belief to constitute knowledge, beyond its being competently held: that is to say, competently acquired or sustained. For one thing, a belief can be false despite being competent. if the believer then competently deduces something true from his false belief, this true conclusion cannot *thereby* amount to knowledge. Yet, if we competently deduce a conclusion from a premise that we competently believe (even after drawing the conclusion), we thereby competently believe that conclusion as well. So a belief can be both true and competently held without amounting to knowledge.

Post-gettier, the Platonic problem takes this form: what further condition, added to, or in place of, being competently held, must a true belief satisfy in order to constitute knowledge?

on the contemporary scene, the second Platonic problem, that of the value of knowledge, has more recently moved to center stage. For Plato this was the problem of how knowledge can be quite generally more valuable than its corresponding true belief, if a merely true belief would be no less useful. a true belief as to the location of larissa, for example, will guide you there no less efficiently than would the corresponding knowledge. in line with this, we ask: How if at all does knowledge as such always improve on the corresponding merely true belief?

in connection with both problems, we will assume that there is some further condition (however simple or complex) that a belief must satisfy in order to constitute knowledge, beyond being a belief and being

true. This condition must add normatively positive content, moreover, sufficient to explain how it is that knowledge, which must satisfy this further condition, is as such always better than would be the corresponding merely true belief. when one ponders a question, for example, there is some respect in which it would always be better to answer knowledgeably than to answer correctly but just by luck.

we shall take up the value problem in chapter 3. in this chapter we take up the other Platonic problem: what is knowledge? How is it constituted?

Knowledge as a Special Case

all sorts of things can “perform” well or ill when put to the test. Rational agents can do so, but so can biological organs, designed instruments, and even structures with a function, such as a bridge. a bridge can perform well its function as part of a traffic artery. When a thermostat activates a furnace, it may perform well in keeping the ambient temperature comfortable. when a heart beats, it may perform well in helping the blood circulate. and so on.

a puppet performs well under the control of a puppeteer if its hinges are smooth, not rusty, and well oiled, so that its limbs are smoothly responsive. a bridge might perform well by withstanding a storm. we credit the puppet, as we do the bridge, if its good performance flows appropriately from its state and constitution. The bridge may have withstood the storm because it is a good bridge, strong and well made, and not just because the storm subsided at the last minute, having taken down many structures in its path.

The puppet “performs” (well or ill), as does the bridge, and thus produces performances. But it would be a stretch to consider it any more of an “agent” than is the bridge. Human beings are different, in any case, if only because we are rational agents. not only are there reasons why we

perform as we do. There are also reasons that we have for so performing, and for which, motivated by which, we perform as we do. This is not just a matter of having aims in so performing. After all, the thermostat and the heart do have their aims. But they are motivated by no such aim; no such aim gives them reasons motivated by which they perform as they do.¹

Human motivation is on another level, even when the performance is physical, as in athletic or artistic performance.

The archer's shot is a good example. The shot aims to hit the target, and its success can be judged by whether it does so or not, by its accuracy. However accurate it may be, there is a further dimension of evaluation: namely, how skillful a shot it is, how much skill it manifests, how adroit it is. a shot might hit the bull's-eye, however, and might even manifest great skill, while failing utterly, as a shot, on a further dimension. Consider a shot diverted by a gust of wind initially, so that it would miss the target altogether but for a second gust that puts it back on track to hit the bull's-eye. This shot is both accurate and adroit, yet it is not accurate because adroit, so as to manifest the archer's skill and competence. it thus fails on a third dimension of evaluation, besides those of accuracy and adroitness: it fails to be apt.

The account of epistemic normativity as a sort of performance normativity helps explain the nature of knowledge, which amounts to belief that is apt, belief that is an apt epistemic performance, one that manifests the relevant competence of the believer in attaining the truth. and, secondly, it explains also the extra value of knowledge beyond that of merely true belief.

¹True, we could perhaps, just barely, make sense of an extended sort of "motivation" even in those cases, as when a nearby torch fools the thermostat into activating the air conditioner even when the room is already cool. it still in some broad sense has a reason for performing as it does, a "motivating reason." despite the non-trivial resemblance, nonetheless, this is clearly a metaphorical extension, if only because a thermostat does not literally have a mind. So it cannot literally host any motives.

unfortunately, the account encounters a troubling objection, which we next consider.

THE PROBLEM OF WITHHOLDING

what's the problem?

The normative judgment that knowledge is as such better than merely true belief is of a piece with the normative judgment that withholding is better than believing when the evidence is insufficient. Since both judgments are epistemically normative, one would expect them to be closely akin. But that is not what one finds on first inspection.

If truth is the first-order aim of our cognitive endeavors, it is not obvious how to assess suspension of judgment with respect to that objective. accordingly, it is also unobvious how to apply our normative structure of performances to such withholdings. These are after all precisely *non*-performances. How then can they be brought within the sphere of our performance normativity? and if they are not thus as similar, doubt is cast on our claim to have uncovered the most relevant epistemic normativity involved in our intuition that knowledge is as such better than merely true belief.

let our archer now be a hunter rather than a competitor athlete. once it is his turn, the competitor must shoot, with no relevant choice. True, he might have avoided the competition altogether, but once in it, no relevant shot selection is allowed.² The hunter by contrast needs to pick his shots, with whatever skill and care he can muster. Selecting targets of appropriate value is integral to hunting, and he would also normally need to pick his shots so as to secure a reasonable chance of success.³

²i trust that, here and throughout, context will make it clear enough when my terms are gender-free.

³interesting questions arise here about the constitutive aims and practices of domains

The shot of a hunter can therefore be assessed in more respects than that of a competitor athlete. The hunter's shot can be assessed twice over for what is manifest in it: not only in respect of its execution competence, but also in respect of the competence manifest in the target's selection and in the pick of the shot.

Not taking a shot at a particular target may or may not involve a performance. You might fail to take that shot because at the time you are asleep, for example. Alternatively, you might intentionally and even deliberately forbear. If your deliberate forbearing has an aim, moreover, and if the aim is attained, then your forbearing succeeds, and may even be a performance, indeed one that is apt.

Suppose a domain in which an agent performs with an aim, whether athletic, artistic, academic, etc. This yields a derivative aim: to avoid failure. You can aim to avoid failure, moreover, without aiming to attain success, at least not ground-level success. When a hunter decides not to take a shot at a certain high-value target, for example, his performance, his forbearing, has its own aim of avoiding failure. To forbear is precisely not to aim at first-order success. Nevertheless, forbearing has an aim of its own: namely, avoiding failure.

Take then a hunter's performance of forbearing, which succeeds in avoiding ground-level failure. It does attain that aim. Is it thereby apt? Yes, so it is by our account; that is what we have to say. The forbearing is, after all, a performance with an aim of its own, and it does attain that aim, in doing which it does manifest a sort of competence.

What if it is a shot that the hunter very obviously should have taken? What if he makes a big mistake forbearing? How do we avoid the unwelcome result that the forbearing is apt despite being one that obvi-

such as hunting. Can one properly *hunt* without caring at all about the success of one's shots? Can one play chess if one cares not at all about winning? Is there such a thing as "merely going through the motions (without *really* engaging in the relevant game, sport, or activity)"? Perhaps we can properly deal with such questions by recognizing degrees in the seriousness of one's engagement.

ously should not even have occurred? Perhaps it has only a narrow aptness, while lacking an aptness of a broader sort. let us explore this option.

Consider diana's forced choice between taking a shot and forbearing doing so. if she opts to take the shot, then her archery skills come into play. if they produce a hit, then her performance, her shot, manifests her narrow competence, and is hence narrowly apt. Compatibly with this, nonetheless, her shot selection might have been incompetent: through thoughtless neglect, for example, or just through ignorance or error about her own abilities or situation.

That is one way for a narrowly apt shot to be broadly objectionable. The huntress who forbears taking a shot that she obviously should take fails in her performance of forbearing. Her forbearing avoids ground-level failure, but is deplorable nonetheless.⁴

VaRIeTieS oF aPTneSS

a performance is apt if its success manifests a competence seated in the agent (in relevantly appropriate conditions). it does not matter how fragile was the competence, or its appropriate conditions, when the agent issued the performance. a performance can thus easily fail to be "meta-apt," because the agent handles risk poorly, either by taking too much or by taking too little. The agent may fail to perceive the risk, when he should be more perceptive; or he may respond to the perceived risk with either foolhardiness or cowardice. He might perform on the ground level although the risk of failure is too high; or he might forbear although it is pusillanimous of him not to plunge ahead.

⁴Here i mean to stay within the domain of hunting, where we assess shots as good hunting shots. impressing a girlfriend, and bonding with a rich uncle, are objectives irrelevant to the assessment of a shot as a good hunting shot, though of course they remain relevant to the assessment of the shot in other ways.

The aptness of a performance is thus to be distinguished from its meta-aptness. either one can be present without the other.

a hunter archer's shot selection and risk taking may be excellent, for example, and in taking a certain shot he may manifest his competence at assessing risk, while the shot itself nevertheless fails, being unsuccessful (inaccurate) and hence inapt. The shot is hence meta-apt without being apt.

Conversely, the hunter may take excessive risk in shooting at a certain target, given his perceived level of competence (he has been drinking) and the assessed potential for wind (it is stormy). when he shoots, he may still fall just below the level of competence-precluding inebriation, however, and the wind may happen to fall calm, so that his shot is (through that stroke of luck) quite apt. Here the shot is apt without being meta-apt.

Our shift from the competitor archer to the hunter archer, with his much wider latitude for target or shot selection, imports therefore the following distinction.

A shot is apt iff the success it attains, its hitting the target, manifests the agent's first-order competence, his skillful marksmanship.

A shot is meta-apt iff it is well-selected: i.e., iff it takes appropriate risk, and its doing so manifests the agent's competence for target and shot selection.

Neither aptness nor meta-aptness is sufficient for the other. They vary independently.

if diana shoots, her shot might itself be both apt and meta-apt. if she forbears, her forbearing might be meta-apt, though of course it will not be apt on the ground level, since it does not even aim for success on that level. The forbearing might be meta-apt, nevertheless, in being a proper

response to the perceived level of risk, a response that manifests her meta-competence.

Sometimes an agent responds properly by performing on the ground level, in which case that positive performance is meta-apt; sometimes the proper response is to forbear, so that the forbearing is meta-apt.

arguably, a shot could be both apt and meta-apt while still falling short in that it is not in virtue of being meta-apt that it is apt. Thus, a shot might manifest a hunter's risk-assessment competence, and it might issue from his competence as an archer, in conditions appropriate for such shots, while yet its aptness does not so much manifest the archer's meta-competence as display a kind of luck. diana might assess risk aptly and then just toss a coin to decide whether to shoot.

Full aPTneSS and ReFleCTiVe Knowledge

a performance thus attains a special status when it is apt at the ground level while its aptness manifests competent risk assessment. Suppose this risk assessment issues in the performer's knowing that his situation (constitutional and circumstantial) is favorable (where the risk of failure is low enough) for issuing such a performance. if these conditions all obtain, then the performance's aptness might manifest its meta-aptness; thus, its aptness might be relevantly explicable as manifesting the performer's meta-knowledge that his first-order performance is likely enough to succeed and be apt.

This applies to performances such as a shot that hits its prey. That shot is superior, more admirable and creditable, if it is not only apt, but also meta-apt, and, further, fully apt: that is, apt because meta-apt. This happens, for example, when the aptness of diana's shot stems from her meta-competence in assessing risk properly, so that the shot's aptness

manifests her competence for taking apt shots, a competence that essentially includes her ability to assess risk well.

aptness comes in degrees. one shot is more apt than another, for example, if it manifests a more reliable competence. on one dimension, a shot by a tennis champion may be no better than a similarly paced and placed shot by a hacker. on another dimension, however, the champion's shot manifests her prowess on the court, while the hacker's nearly identical shot is just lucky, and skillful only minimally or not at all. The champion's shot manifests competence, moreover, on two levels. it manifests her sheer athletic ability to hit with good pace and placement, and with impressively good percentage. But it can and normally does manifest also her good shot selection, including her skill at attempting only shots with an appropriate percentage of success. The hacker's shot falls short on both dimensions.

The champion's shots are apt, meta-apt, and *fully* apt (i.e., apt in a way that manifests meta-aptness). For a shot to have the property of being apt is for its success to manifest a competence seated in the agent. This whole arrangement is itself something that the agent might be able to arrange (or not), and not simply by exercising the first-order competence seated in him. The agent might be able to choose when and where to exercise that competence, for one thing, and might manifest more or less competence in such a choice.

The same is true of the hunter archer's shot. It can be apt in that its success, its accuracy, manifests the agent's competence in relevantly appropriate conditions (no wind, enough light, distance within proper bounds, and so on). But it, and its aptness, can also manifest the agent's meta-competence for target and shot selection. if so, then it is no accident that the shot is made in specific conditions where the archer's competence is up to the task of producing success with a high enough percentage. in other words, the agent's risk perception is then compe -

tent enough, and this competence is manifest in his knowledge that the level of risk is appropriate. on one level, how apt the shot is depends on the degree of competence manifest by its success. But, on another level, the full aptness of the shot depends also on the meta-competence manifest by its aptness and by its success. a performance is *fully* apt only if its first-order aptness derives sufficiently from the agent's assessment, albeit implicit, of his chances of success (and, correlatively, of the risk of failure).

Here the agent is on a meta-level. He must take into account the likelihood that his competence is (and will remain) intact and that the relevant conditions are (and will remain) appropriate, and he must assess how likely it is that his action from such a competence in such conditions will succeed. Suppose he takes his chances of such success to be high enough (and the risk of failure low enough), and he is right, knowledgeably so, the chances being as he takes them to be, and his competence and conditions being relevantly as envisaged. Suppose further that he exercises his competence accordingly, so that his shot is, to a sufficient extent, apt because of his meta-competence, because he gets it right about his chances of success, and therein manifests his meta-competence. That shot is then more fully apt and more fully creditable in proportion to how fully all of that falls into place.

we have thus found a further level of performance-based normativity. epistemic normativity is, once again, a special case also in this more complex and subtle way. Animal knowledge is first-order apt belief. Reflective knowledge is animal belief aptly endorsed by the subject. We can now see that knowing something full well requires that one have animal and reflective knowledge of it, but also that one know it with full aptness. It requires, that is to say, that the correctness of one's first-order belief manifest not only the animal, first-order competences that reliably enough yield the correctness of the beliefs produced. One's first-

order belief falls short if it is not appropriately guided by one's relevant meta-competence. This meta-competence governs whether or not one should form a belief at all on the question at issue, or should rather withhold belief altogether. It is only if this meta-competence is operative in one's forming a belief at all on that subject matter that one's belief can reach the epistemic heights. One's first-order belief is apt in proportion to how reliable is the first-order competence manifest in its success. What is more, it is more fully apt in proportion to how reliable is the meta-competence that its success also manifests. This meta-competence is manifest at a remove, however, because the meta-knowledge that it is a belief likely enough to be apt on the ground level is constituted by the fact that the correctness of the corresponding meta-belief itself manifests the subject's relevant meta-competence.

Fully apt performances are in general better as performances than those that succeed without being apt at all, and also than those that are apt without being fully apt. Diana's apt shot that kills its prey is a better shot for being apt than it would be if successful only by luck and not through competence. Moreover, it is also a better, more admirable, more creditable shot, if its success flows also from her target-selecting, shot-picking competences.⁵ Her shot is more creditable in that case than it is when the right competence is manifest in conditions required for a successful first-order performance, but only by luck external to her selection meta-competence.

epistemic normativity is again just a special case of all that. apt belief, animal knowledge, is better than belief that succeeds in its aim, being true, without being apt. Apt belief aptly noted, reflective knowl-

⁵ it might be thought that one needs to know in some detail how the faculty works, if one is properly to be credited for its successful manifestations. But there is surely a kind of "credit" that is in place even for the unreflective subject, if only a sort *similar* to the credit attributable to a thermostat for keeping the room warm.

edge, is better than mere apt belief or animal knowledge, especially when the reflective knowledge helps to guide the first-order belief so that it is apt.⁶ in such a case the belief is fully apt, and the subject knows full well.

⁶ In fact proper reflective knowledge will always guide or help to guide its corresponding animal belief. Proper reflective knowledge will after all satisfy requirements of coherence, which means not just logical or probabilistic coherence of the respective belief contents, but also the mutual basing relations that can properly reflect such coherence among the contents. Cross-level coherence, from the object to the meta, and conversely, is a special case of such coherence, and it imports "guidance" of the animal belief by the relevant meta-beliefs (or, in other words, basing of the former on the latter). It bears emphasis that the meta-aptness of a belief, which we have found to be an important factor in its epistemic evaluation, requires ascent to a good enough perspective concerning the first-level potential attitudes among which the subject must opt (whether he opts with full conscious deliberation or through a less explicit procedure). Coherence among first-level attitudes is not enough. The subject must ascend to a level wherein he assesses relevant risk, whether in full consciousness or less explicitly, and opts on that basis. Included in that analysis is perforce some assessment of one's relevant competence(s) and situation, and this must itself be performed adequately, if it is to yield a fully creditable first-level performance. Its assessment as thus fully creditable is moreover epistemic. For it is an assessment based on epistemic standards as to whether belief, rather than suspension of belief, is the proper response to one's situation.