

ON ACCOMPLISHMENT

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This paper concerns a philosophical *genus* I call normative accomplishment, or simply *accomplishment*. It is a genus many philosophers seem to recognize, at last implicitly, but that in my view has been afforded insufficient explicit attention. Paying it more explicit attention, I contend, not only teaches us about the genus itself, but perhaps more importantly facilitates dialectical progress in various species-specific debates. I focus here on (what I argue are) two of the most philosophically important species of accomplishment: *propositional knowledge* and *morally worthy action*. As such, this research program is a close relative of another in contemporary epistemology and metaethics, according to which we can make progress in our thinking about epistemic and moral reasons by focusing on the genus *reasons*.

Here's what's coming. I start by clarifying the notion of accomplishment, including a schematic definition and an intuitive/historical argument for including knowledge and morally worthy action as species (§1). I then draw out three lessons in epistemology and metaethics. I argue that seeing knowledge as a species of accomplishment: offers a helpful framing of the debate between internalists and externalists in epistemology (§2) and motivates rejection of both the knowledge-first program in epistemology (§3) and a recent trend in metaethical work on morally worthy action (§4).

1. Introducing Accomplishment

It is true that in inquiry we aim for truth, we aim to attain knowledge of the truth. But why should we think that what we aim for in aiming both for truth and for knowledge is the ultimate end of our inquiry? Within the sport of archery we aim to hit the target as close to the bullseye as possible, an end intrinsic to that sort of activity. When engaged in the activity, don't we also prefer to hit the bullseye by means of skill and not just by luck? A gust of wind might come along and guide our arrow to the bullseye, but this will be less sweet than a hit unaided by the lucky gust. Of course a hit that through skill compensates for the wind might be sweeter yet. So I see nothing

unacceptable in a notion of a good, skillful shot that goes beyond that of a mere winning or accurate shot. A winning, accurate shot may have been just lucky and not at all skillful, and not in that sense a good shot. (Bonjour and Sosa 2003, 104–5)

Here, Ernest Sosa draws an analogy between (propositional) *knowledge* and a certain kind of shot in *sportive archery*. My view is that this is not merely an analogy; these are species of the same genus: accomplishment.

Following Sosa's suggestion, the activity *sportive archery* has what I'll call a *success condition*: hitting the bullseye. There are norms governing this activity, including things like how to hold your bow, how to aim, etc. I refer to *following* these norms as the *correctness conditions* for sportive archery.¹

At least some of the norms in question are *success-facilitating*: acting as those norms dictate *tends to* or *reliably* leads to success or makes success *more likely*. I leave it an open question precisely how best to understand such facilitation. Like Sosa, I do not presume that following success-facilitating norms has merely instrumental value (and allow that whether this is the case may vary from activity to activity). Nor do I presume that all norms relevant to correctness are success-facilitating norms; perhaps only an instance of sportive archery in which the archer exhibits certain virtues (e.g., sportsmanship) is correct, even if this has no impact on whether the archer hits the bullseye. Finally, I leave it open whether correctness requires following *all* the norms for an activity, or merely (say)

¹ I borrow the terms 'correctness' and 'success' conditions from McPherson (m.s.). As in all my examples, one might argue that I have misidentified the relevant correctness or success condition. Perhaps the success condition for sportive archery is *getting closer to the bullseye than any opponent* or *having fun*. That's okay; these are merely illustrative examples. In addition, my view is that we should be permissive pluralists here. Any coherent combination of coherent success and correctness conditions counts as an activity instance of which may be accomplished. It consider it a normative question whether we should be disposed to engage in one or the other, as well as which deserve(s) to be called 'sportive archery'.

Also: I won't be further discussing Sosa's claim that "a hit that through skill compensates for the wind might be sweeter yet," but I'll just briefly offer two suggestions about how this might fit in with the rest of what I say. First, one might think that there are some norms for an activity that it is more impressive for one to follow, perhaps because doing some is more challenging—e.g., here, the norms regarding not only how to shoot in general but how to compensate for the wind. Or one might think there are actually two different activities—sportive archery and windy sportive archery—and accomplishment at the latter is more impressive.

some sufficient portion. These are all substantive issues, but ones that can innocently be set aside for future consideration.

The success and correctness conditions for sportive archery are independent. An archer might follow the norms of sportive archery, yet a freak gust of wind might blow her shaft aside. Her shot might therefore be correct without being successful. A second archer might fail to follow the norms (or, at least, fail to follow them well enough), say holding the bow wrong, yet an unexpected gust of wind might blow his shaft to the bullseye. His shot might therefore be successful without being correct.

It is tempting to suggest that the pinnacle of achievement in sportive archery is a shot that is *both* correct *and* successful.² But a bit of further thought shows that this is insufficient. For this conjunction can be *accidental* (or, in Sosa's term, *lucky*). A third archer follows the norms perfectly, but the wind takes up his shaft, causing it to fly all over the place. Eventually, the wind happens to blow it into the bullseye. The archer's shot is both successful and correct, but this conjunction is accidental. A natural thought here is that what *makes* it accidental is that the archer's shot isn't successful *because* he shot correctly; his skillfulness does not account for the bullseye. I'll return to this thought in §3; for the moment I stick with the metaphor of accident.

The above suggests that we (and the sportive archer) might be most interested in:

ACCOMPLISHED SPORTIVE ARCHERY An *accomplished* instance of sportive archery =_{def} an instance of sportive archery where the archer follows the norms of sportive archery and hits the bullseye, and this conjunction is *non-accidental*.³

One more mundane example before we get to the philosophically fraught ones. Imagine a lawyer engaged in an activity: *defending an innocent client*. The success condition for this activity is: *the*

² Of course, one might think the pinnacle of achievement is something like 'making a shot under the most difficult possible conditions' or something like that (see note 1). The existence of this other sense of the phrase makes no difference here.

³ Or, at least, where the conjunction between the archer's following the *success-facilitating* norms and success is non-accidental.

*client is acquitted.*⁴ The correctness condition is: *following the relevant legal norms*. Again these conditions are independent. The lawyer can give her client the best possible defense, yet her client may be convicted. Her defense can be correct without being successful. Or she can give her client a substandard defense, and yet her client may be acquitted. Her defense can be successful without being correct. Or she can give her client the best possible defense, and her client can be acquitted, but only because the jury is biased.⁵ Her defense can be both correct and successful, but not *accomplished*, because this conjunction is accidental (again, intuitively, because the correctness of the lawyer's defense doesn't account for her success). Thus we (and the lawyer) might be most interested in:

ACCOMPLISHED DEFENSE OF AN INNOCENT CLIENT An accomplished instance of defending an innocent client =_{def} an instance of defending an innocent client where the lawyer follows the relevant legal norms and her client is acquitted, and this conjunction is non-accidental.

It's not hard to see where this is going. In epistemology, we are often interested not just in whether you form beliefs by following the norms of belief-formation (perhaps: by apportioning your beliefs to your evidence), or whether you form true beliefs, but whether this conjunction is non-accidental. Likewise, we are often interested not just in whether you act in accordance with the norms for moral action (perhaps: act in accordance with what you justifiably take to be your moral reasons), or that you do the right thing, but whether this conjunction is non-accidental. Thus, I take the following to be philosophically interesting categories:

ACCOMPLISHED BELIEF-FORMATION An accomplished instance of belief-formation =_{def} an instance of belief-formation where the believer follows the norms of belief-formation and forms a true belief, and this conjunction is non-accidental.

⁴ I specify that the client is innocent to avoid complications regarding what we take the success conditions for a legal defense to be. One might take the view that success always means acquittal, but one might also take the view that success means the client gets what she deserves. If the client is innocent, the distinction presumably collapses.

⁵ One might like to think this impossible, but surely there can be cases where the misleading evidence against an innocent defendant is sufficiently strong that a non-biased jury would convict.

ACCOMPLISHED MORAL ACTION⁶ An accomplished instance of moral action =_{def} an instance of moral action where the actor follows the norms of moral action and performs a right action, and this conjunction is non-accidental.

My view is that accomplished belief-formation is *knowledge*, and accomplished moral action is *morally worthy action*. My primary evidence for the former claim is how closely our imagined, but quite natural, dialectic regarding sportive archery mirrors an introductory gloss on the historical debate over the analysis of knowledge (at least up until a few decades ago). We care about following the norms of belief-formation—i.e., doxastic justification. And we care about successful belief—i.e., truth. But we also (perhaps primarily) care about *knowledge*. Perhaps that's just justified, true belief. But no! There are Gettier cases, where our justified beliefs are only *accidentally* true. The hard part, of course, is saying what this means in non-metaphorical terms.

My evidence for the claim that morally worthy action is accomplished moral action is that, echoing relevant claims about knowledge, it is commonly said that that morally worthy action is action that is *non-accidentally* right (more on this in §4).

While I'll do what I can in what follows to further defend these identities, I also hope that the independent philosophical interest of these species of accomplishment is apparent, even to those who wish to reserve 'knowledge' or 'morally worthy action' for other phenomena.

This brings us finally to our schematic definition of the genus *accomplishment*, generalizing from the examples above:

ACCOMPLISHMENT For an activity A, where A has determine success and correctness conditions, an accomplished instance of A =_{def} an instance of A that is both correct and successful, where this conjunction is non-accidental.

⁶ It would perhaps be more accurate to call this 'morally accomplished action', but I put things this way for consistency. An accomplished *action* simpliciter is, I take it, one that is *normatively* accomplished. If morality is overriding, as some believe, all accomplished moral actions are accomplished actions simpliciter, but that wouldn't mean the categories were the same, since an action might still be accomplished even if morality is silent about it.

Obviously, to develop ACCOMPLISHMENT into a full theory of accomplishment, we would need to say exactly what counts as an *activity*, as a *success* condition, as a *correctness* condition and as *non-accidentality*. This is beyond the scope of this paper; my goal here is to show how taking knowledge and morally worthy action to be species of accomplishment can facilitate progress in some relevant debates in epistemology and metaethics. Before moving on, however, I address two further issues.

First, in some cases the correctness and success conditions for an activity are not independent. Consider the activity *playing chess*. Suppose the success condition for this activity is: *there is a legal endgame according to the rules of chess*. The correctness condition is: *following the rules of chess*. The players have not managed to complete a game of chess unless they have properly followed the rules of chess. If I ‘win’ by jumping my queen from behind my pawns to your back row and yelling “checkmate!” we have not successfully played chess. So, *successful* chess-playing entails *correct* chess-playing. This may or may not suggest, in turn, that there is no distinction between *successful* chess-playing and *accomplished* chess-playing. It might not, for instance, if one can play correctly, but only accidentally finish the game.

The dependence can go the other way, too. Consider the activity *completed addition*. This has a correctness condition: *following the norms of addition and arriving at a sum*.⁷ It also has a success condition: *arriving at the correct sum*. Here, correctness entails success. One cannot start with 2 and 3, properly follow the norms of addition, and end up with anything other than 5. Here, I am more inclined to think there is no distinction between *correctness* and *accomplishment*, though nothing to come rests on this.⁸

Note that on some views, *moral action* is in the latter category. That is, on some views, one cannot properly follow the moral norms yet fail to act rightly. I take no position on this here. I note

⁷ I distinguish *completed* addition from mere addition because one might think that one can begin and then abandon a complicated addition task, but still add correctly while engaged.

⁸ An obvious question is whether there are any activities where one is successful if and only if one is correct. I have yet to think of any.

only that this position in no way undermines the claim that morally worthy action is accomplished moral action. It merely suggests that *accomplished* moral action may be the same as *correct* moral action.

The second issue to be addressed is what it means to *follow* the norms for an activity. Suppose Jerry knows how to play chess. Tom does not, though Jerry is not aware of this. Tom and Jerry sit down at a chess board. Tom moves pieces about the board at random, removing Jerry's pieces from the board when Tom's pieces enter their spaces. By sheer happenstance, all of Tom's moves are legal chess moves. At some point, Jerry finds that he is in checkmate.

As I'm using the terms, while both Tom and Jerry have acted as the rules of chess dictate, only Jerry has *followed* the rules of chess, and thus only Jerry has *correctly* played chess.⁹ This difference is an *internal* one: the only relevant difference between Tom and Jerry is that Jerry is *aware* that he is playing by the rules of chess while Tom is not.¹⁰

This seems to be a general feature of following and thus of correctness, rather than a peculiar feature of correct *chess-playing*. Someone who chooses a stance, bow-grip, etc. at random, and happens upon the right way to shoot an arrow has not *correctly* shot an arrow.¹¹ A lawyer who mounts a legally

⁹ I'm not sure whether we should therefore say that only Jerry successfully played chess, or that neither did because successful chess-playing requires correct chess-playing on the part of both players.

¹⁰ The terminology here is stipulative, but the distinction is not. You might find it more natural to say that both followed the rules, but only Jerry was *aware* that he did so. I mark the distinction as I do for rhetorical reasons, for one because I think 'follow' has a relevantly internal flavor. One could argue that there is a further *modal* difference between them: at nearby worlds, Jerry plays the same way; Tom makes other (perhaps illegal) moves. But we can fiddle with the case to ensure that Tom always makes legal moves without being aware that they are legal moves, and yet it still seems he is not following the rules the way Jerry is.

¹¹ Of course, in real life we might be tempted to think that such a person simply had an intuitive grasp of the relevant correctness conditions, but I'm stipulating that this is not the case here. And, of course, if he realizes that this way of shooting is reliably accurate by doing it a couple of times, we may *then* judge him to be shooting correctly.

sound defense, but who does not actually understand the legal standing of what she is doing, does not *correctly* mount a legal defense.¹²

There is an additional question here, which concerns exactly what it is Tom needs to be aware of. Does Tom merely need to be aware that he is following *some* norms, or does he need to be aware of those norms' role (especially, perhaps, their success-facilitating role) in the relevant activity?¹³

It will be easiest to see the distinction if we return to a case where the success and correctness conditions are independent. Suppose Marian finds herself on an archery range, but she doesn't really know what sportive archery is. She finds a list of instructions next to a bow and arrow (though she doesn't know what these objects are), explaining how to hold the objects lying here, etc., but for some reason she comes to believe that these are instructions for cleaning the objects. She follows the instructions and hits a bullseye.

Is this an instance of accomplished sportive archery? I am inclined to think not. It's hard to see why we would care that Marian understand that she's acting as some set of norms dictates, but *not* care that she has no idea how those norms relate to the activity she's engaged in, especially if our focus is on a kind of personal achievement. But maybe this will be controversial, so for now I'll leave things ambiguous: correctness either requires only *weak* norm-following (what Marian does) or *strong* norm-following (what some other archers mentioned did). I return to this issue briefly in §3.¹⁴

¹² I admit *addition* is trickier. Suppose I start at 2, count three more, and get to 5. Does anything else need to be said to guarantee that I've correctly added 2 and 3? I'm genuinely uncertain. But even if the answer is yes, I don't think this threatens the general point. This is because I'm inclined to think that what is doubtful here is only that I can count without being to some extent aware that that's what I'm doing. So the thought isn't that correct addition is purely external, but that it's impossible to act as the norms of addition dictate without being aware that one is doing so.

¹³ There is a middle ground option, where he needs to be aware that he is playing as the chess norms dictate, but doesn't need to understand how those norms relate to the game of chess. I set this aside for simplicity's sake, and because I have trouble imagining what would motivate remaining at such a middle ground.

¹⁴ Note that this distinction is not typically addressed in epistemology. This is not surprising. The relevant question there is whether an agent needs to understand that her belief-forming process is a way of getting at the truth. Since many believe

2. Internalism vs. Externalism in Epistemology

Correctness in belief-formation is doxastic justification. The fact that this has an internal aspect, as just discussed, should come as no surprise; nearly everyone accepts that justification is at least partially an internal condition.¹⁵

This suggests that the view that knowledge is accomplished belief-formation is also, and more controversially, a form of internalism about knowledge. ACCOMPLISHED BELIEF-FORMATION is not *strictly* inconsistent with externalism, because one could argue, contra what I've just said, that correctness is a wholly external condition. But this would leave externalists with the daunting task of explaining why (perhaps uniquely!) in the case of belief, merely acting as the relevant norms dictate (or bearing some other external relation to them) constitutes *following* them in the sense relevant for correctness. Such *exclusive* externalism about doxastic justification is an unpopular position for good reason. Rather, common forms of epistemic externalism, such as reliabilism, take knowledge to be independent of justification. This suggests that externalism is best understood as denying that knowledge is a species of accomplishment.

In light of this, my intuitive evidence for the claim that knowledge is a species of accomplishment is also my evidence for internalism as a *hermeneutic* thesis about the historical focus of epistemology and at least some commonsense usage of the term 'knowledge'. I do not deny that phenomena like 'reliably formed true belief' are philosophically important, and I acknowledge that some quotidian talk of 'knowledge' has an externalist flavor.¹⁶ I have no quarrel with hermeneutic

that it is only *possible* to form beliefs by following apparent evidence of truth, we wouldn't tend to think about cases where an agent follows a set of belief-forming norms without understanding them to be such.

¹⁵ This is not to say that correctness is *entirely* internal; I take no position here on the debate between internalists and externalists about justification. *Success* in belief-formation—truth—is of course an *external* condition. This does not mean, however, that there are no activities with internal success conditions.

¹⁶ A common example is attributions of knowledge to animals, hence Sosa's (e.g., 2001) distinction between *animal* and *reflective* knowledge.

pluralists of this kind. My quarrel is only with *exclusive* externalists. I have said what I can against hermeneutic versions of this view (though perhaps some of what I have yet to say will further bolster my case). This brings to me to exclusive externalism about knowledge as a *revisionary* theory.

Let's distinguish two broad kinds of revisionism. The first is what I'll call *negative revisionism* or *coherence magnetism*. On such views, the intuitive understanding of some philosophically significant phenomenon is taken to be insufficiently coherent, or unrealizable, or unknowable, or in some other way deficient. The revisionist then treats some coherent (etc.) alternative that is taken to be sufficiently close to the defective one as the 'real thing'. Perhaps the clearest historical example is behaviorism about mental states.¹⁷

One criticism of the behaviorist program is that it failed to find a replacement sufficiently close to both theoretical and commonsense usage to do the necessary work. This is a deep kind of criticism I won't pursue against analogous epistemological positions. But we could independently criticize the behaviorist program to the extent that it failed to acknowledge its revisionary character. Behaviorism is quite clearly a poor hermeneutic thesis, and yet it was apparently treated as one by many theorists who might otherwise have found themselves espousing a skeptical view they could not abide.¹⁸

There are at least two potential problems with this, both of which are relevant to the topic of this paper. The first is that at least so long as some philosophers continue to pursue the 'real thing'—presumably because they reject the revisionist's claim that it is incoherent (etc.)—failing to acknowledge the revisionary nature of a thesis threatens to cause dialectical confusion.

¹⁷ A good deal of conversation suggests to me that many non-nihilistic anti-realists (constructivists, relativists, etc.) in metaethics are in this camp as well.

¹⁸ This gloss on the behaviorist program is informed more by rumor and rough impression than deep historical investigation. I trust this rough impression is common enough that this will serve as an exemplar here, even if many actual behaviorists did not make the mistakes I attribute to them.

Second, and relatedly, treating revisionist views as hermeneutic may have unexpected and unfortunate implications in other areas. Consider, for instance, the fact that long after the behaviorism that birthed it has gone by the wayside, many continue to treat the Turing Test as probative with respect to artificial intelligence. Had everyone acknowledged behaviorism as a revisionist view from the get-go, perhaps this would not have happened. This is especially relevant here, given that my position is that knowledge is merely one among many species of accomplishment. Better that we explicitly treat externalism as a revisionist view (if that is indeed what it is) than risk unnecessarily moving towards externalism about other kinds of accomplishment.

Of course, if accomplishment itself is an incoherent notion, such general revisionism may be warranted. But as I discuss in the next section, I doubt that this is the case. My target will be Timothy Williamson's knowledge-first program in epistemology. That view can, I think, both fruitfully and charitably be read as a form of coherence magnetism. However, my criticisms of it do not depend on this reading.

This brings me to the second form of revisionism, which I'll call *positive revisionism*. Unlike coherence magnetists, these revisionists accept that the original target is coherent (etc.) but think that something else in the region is either more or even exclusively of philosophical significance, and hold that we ought to shift our focus accordingly (and thus, insofar as our focus tends to follow certain terms or concepts, that we should revise those as well).¹⁹

I suspect that at least some externalists about knowledge are positive revisionists, but I won't do any such interpretive work here. To see how such a view might go, let's consider a similar revisionism about legal defense. Suppose Dalton thinks that we are far too concerned with the personal achievements of lawyers; that we should care more or even exclusively about whether the

¹⁹ This is not to say that someone couldn't be both a coherence magnetist and a positive revisionist.

innocent go free (and the guilty do not). So while Dalton thinks the idea of an *accomplished* legal defense is perfectly sensible, he thinks we should focus on it less, or perhaps not at all. However, he also doesn't think we should just care about *successful* legal defenses, because those might be merely accidentally successful. This sense of 'accident success' is a purely external one: a defense is non-accidentally successful if it proceeds in a way that reliably gets innocent defendants acquitted; it doesn't matter what the lawyer is aware of.

Now suppose there is a term 'lawyerrific' that people have tended to use to refer to accomplished legal defenses. Dalton could just suggest we stop talking about lawyerrificity. But he finds that rhetorically unappealing. After all, lawyerrific defenses are accomplishments and accomplishments are good things! So Dalton instead suggests that lawyerrific defenses *just are* reliably successful ones.

Obviously, my recommendation is that tempting as this might be, Dalton should instead acknowledge that his view is revisionist. On his view, we should stop talking about lawyerificity, or stop using 'lawyerrific' as a term for a kind of accomplishment. Reliably success defense is not what we've been talking about the whole time.

Before moving on, I want to note one intuitive point in *favor* of this sort of positive revisionism in epistemology. As mentioned, following Sosa I make room for the possibility that success-facilitating norms have more than instrumental value and are not exhaustive of correctness norms. But I don't assume this possibility is actual, either. For we might think there is an important difference between activities where the success condition does vs. does not have activity-independent value. Truth is arguably important in a way that hitting a bullseye is not, and this may suggest that success should be our primary concern. This is similar to Dalton's position: like defending the innocent, figuring out the

truth isn't a game. Perhaps we treat it too much as one when we focus more on personal accomplishment than whether or not we've figured out what is and what isn't the case.²⁰

Nevertheless, I do not support revisionism about knowledge, for the simple reason that I think accomplished belief-formation is a coherent, philosophically important category, *especially* from the first-personal perspective of potential knowers. I think reliably formed true belief is important, too. But I'm inclined to think that in the absence of a good argument that we should *not* care about accomplished belief-formation, and in the presence of the (admittedly empirically falsifiable) claim that historical philosophical usage and a good deal of commonsense sense usage concerns accomplished belief-formation, we should either reserve the term 'knowledge' for this phenomenon or draw distinctions between different senses of 'knowledge'. This is an instance of a plausible, general methodological claim: when commonsense usage for a term best tracks a coherent, philosophically important phenomenon, we should shy away from views on which the term is instead taken to refer to some less commonly tracked phenomenon, unless the latter is exclusively, or far more, philosophically significant.

3. Knowledge-First Epistemology

According to knowledge-first epistemology, knowledge cannot be understood in terms of a relation between justification and truth (or between any internal and external conditions). Rather, it is its own primitive sort of mental state.

If we accept that knowledge is a (fairly typical) species of accomplishment, the implausibility of this view comes into sharp focus, for this suggests that we should (in contrast to my definition in

²⁰ There is a further potentially interesting distinction between activities where not only the value, but also the *existence* of the success condition for an activity is activity-dependent vs. -independent. For example, there is no aim 'finishing a game of chess' independent of the rules of chess.

§1) accept an *accomplishment*-first view. We should accept that the pinnacle of achievement in moral action is a primitive action-type, one that cannot be understood in terms of any relation between following one's apparent moral reasons and the rightness of one's action. We should accept that the pinnacle of achievement in sportive archery is a primitive kind of shot, one that cannot be understood in terms of any relation between following the norms of sportive archery and hitting the bullseye. We should accept that the pinnacle of achievement in defending an innocent client is a primitive kind of defense, one that cannot be understood in terms of any relation between following the law to create the best defense possible and one's client's being acquitted. And so on. These claims are not merely implausible; some of them are difficult to even make sense of.

This means that knowledge-firsters are probably best understood as denying that knowledge is a species of accomplishment. Williamson (2002) offers two arguments for the knowledge-first view: inductive pessimism about offering a traditional analysis of knowledge and an argument that knowledge is *prime*—i.e., not analyzable as a conjunction of internal and external conditions. The former in particular inclines me to read the view as a form of coherence magnetism: the thing we *thought* we were after, accomplishment in belief-formation, can't be analyzed in the way we hoped. But, again, the arguments to follow don't depend on this reading.

My response to the inductive pessimism argument has two parts. The first is the argument already given, which like Williamson's is historical. Thousands of years of talk of 'knowledge' both in and outside of philosophy arguably suggest that knowledge, much like the archer's accomplished shot, the lawyer's accomplished defense, etc. is a belief that amounts to a kind of achievement. Without a further argument that there is something special about the epistemic case, we have every reason to think that analyzing other forms of accomplishment, not to mention the genus itself, will be no more nor less difficult than analyzing knowledge. It is hard to believe that less than a century of failed

attempts to offer such an analysis (since recognizing the need to address non-accidentality²¹), with a narrow focus on the activity of belief-formation, should lead us to conclude that there is no such thing as accomplishment, no relation that (e.g.) an archer's careful shooting can bear to her ultimate bullseye in virtue of which she counts as having made an accomplished shot.

The second part of my response goes on the offensive. I claim that thinking of knowledge as a species of accomplishment suggests that contemporary theories of knowledge are making progress, because they increasingly fit the model of ACCOMPLISHMENT as well as intuitive thoughts about the kind of accidentality appealed to therein.

First, nearly everyone agrees that knowledge is something more than mere true belief, and that an important missing element is a kind of *non-accidentality*. ACCOMPLISHMENT suggests that this non-accidentality is something that obtains between following the norms for an activity and success. This suggests that the non-accidentality in knowledge is a relation between the process of belief-formation and truth, rather than between a belief *itself* and the truth. This is precisely what we see in contemporary epistemology: a marked shift towards non-accidentality conditions that focus on belief-forming methods or bases for belief. My proposal indicates that this is a move in the right direction.

The second kind of progress regards the non-accidentality condition itself. In §1, I noted that it is natural to think that for a conjunction of correctness and success to be non-accidental, the success has to obtain *because* of the correctness—e.g., the archer hits the bullseye *because* she shoots correctly; the defendant is acquitted *because* his lawyer defends him correctly. This suggests that accomplishment requires an *explanatory* relation of some kind between correctness and success.

I draw three lessons from this. First, I am inclined to think that this helps explain the failure of a long line of *modal* accounts of non-accidentality. This is for the simple reason that explanatory

²¹ As with behaviorism, this potted history may be something of a caricature, but not, I think, in ways that undercut my point.

relations are widely regarded as being hyperintensional, and modal relations cannot fully capture hyperintensional relations. This point is bolstered by the special difficulty modal accounts have dealing with knowledge of *necessary* truths.²²

Second, I think this speaks in favor of some novel approaches to theorizing knowledge, such as Mark Schroeder's (2015) view that knowledge is belief for subjectively and objectively sufficient reason. Suppose my reason for believing it is 3:00 is that my historically accurate clock reads '3:00'. This appears subjectively sufficient—i.e., in my terms, I have followed the norms for belief-formation, and thus am doxastically justified. In a case of knowledge, this is also objectively sufficient—the clock's reading '3:00' is explained by the fact that it is 3:00, and (roughly) that relation is what makes the former objectively good evidence for the latter. By contrast, in the classic Gettier case, the clock reads '3:00' because it stopped 12 hours ago. Here, my belief is justified, and true, but the relevant kind of explanatory link is missing: the explanation for its justification is not the same as the explanation for its truth. Thus, Schroeder's view moves towards the intuitive gloss on non-accidentality just mentioned: it reads 'successful because correct' as roughly 'successful for the same reasons for which correct'.

I am not championing Schroeder's view here. For one, I have some lingering concerns about whether the relevant match can also be problematically accidental. My point is only that the claim that knowledge is a species of accomplishment predicts the move towards accounts like Schroeder's, and suggests that they constitute progress.

The third lesson is by far the most exploratory; salt to taste.

A natural thought here is that if non-accidentality is an at least partially explanatory relation, this speaks in favor of explanationism in epistemology—i.e., some version of the causal or, more

²² For further discussion see my [redacted].

broadly, explanatory theory of knowledge may be tenable after all. I find this thought attractive. I also think our discussion suggests that part of the reason for the historical failure of this program is that it fails to take into account that accidentality, like correctness, may be a partially internal relation. Before moving on, I'll offer two small pieces of *potential* evidence for this claim.

First, recall the distinction between *strong* and *weak* norm-following from §1. Suppose that, as suggested there, our interest is the former; agents need to be aware of the relationship between the norms they are following and the activity they are engaged in. There, I framed this as a feature of correctness. But one might accommodate the relevant intuition by instead holding that only *weak* norm-following is required for correctness—Marian shot correctly—but that her success is *accidental* if she isn't aware of the relation between what she was doing and hitting the bullseye. This is related to a recent suggestion from Matt Lutz (m.s.), who argues that one thing missing from explanationist accounts of knowledge has been recognition that knowers need to be aware of the explanatory relation between their beliefs and the truth. Again I am not championing this view. The point is only to note certain affinities between my proposal and what *some* would see as progress.

Second, recall Tom, who acted as the rules of chess dictate but did not *follow* those rules (weakly or strongly). Notice that it is natural to say of Tom that he made legal chess moves only *accidentally*. If this kind of accidentality—which is partly internal—is the same as the kind that can obtain between correctness and success, that might suggest that the latter is internal, as well.

Turn now to Williamson's other argument for knowledge-first epistemology, that knowledge is prime. My response is simple: the preceding discussion shows that *accomplishment* is prime, and yet again this shouldn't lead us to conclude it is primitive. Accomplishment is prime because it requires a *non-accidentality* relation between an internal condition (correctness) and an external one (success) that is not merely conjunctive. (And if, as I believe, that relation is a hyperintensional one, it isn't even conjunctive *across possible worlds*.)

We can illustrate by adapting Williamson's own *reductio* for the primeness of knowledge. Take two instances of accomplishment, A and B. Suppose A meets some condition that is *internally* sufficient for accomplishment. Suppose B meets some condition that is *externally* sufficient for accomplishment. Now take some action C that is internally identical to A and externally identical to B. It follows that C is accomplished, since C meets conditions that are both internally and externally sufficient for accomplishment. Yet for any two cases of accomplishment, we can always construct a C that is *not* accomplished.

Continuing to parrot: Suppose that, unbeknownst to archer A, someone has hung a picture of a target in front of her right eye. Her left eye, when open, sees the real target down the range. By pure chance, the picture is hung so that if A were to open only her right eye, her impression would match the location and distance of the real target. As it happens, however, A always aims with her left eye open and her right eye closed, so she aims at the real target and hits a bullseye. This is an accomplished shot. Now consider B, who is A's mirror image: the fake but coincidentally accurate picture hangs to his left; the real target is to his right; he always aims with his right eye open, left eye closed. B, too, makes an accomplished shot. Finally we consider C, who is internally identical to A: she aims—and aims well—with her right eye. And C is externally identical to D: she hits the bullseye. Yet an onlooker would surely note how lucky C was that she hit the bullseye dead on, when she had one eye closed and the other eye was staring at a picture. Accomplished sportive archery is prime.

Again, the general explanation is that accomplishment is not a conjunction of correctness and success, it is a *non-accidental* one. Certainly, it's hard to say what exactly non-accidentality is. It *may* even be impossible. But especially once we broaden our focus to accomplishment in general, surely it is more plausible that we have merely failed to define non-accidentality than that accomplishment is primitive.

4. Morally Worthy Action

Let's start with an important difference between historical discussions of knowledge and morally worthy action. It is common to claim that knowledge (morally worthy action) requires that one believe (do) what is true (right) *because* it is true (right). But from here, things have gone in predictably different directions. Here's why. In both belief and action, it is natural to interpret claims that an agent believes/acts *because* X as claims about that agent's *motivating reasons*. Thus, the relevant claim in epistemology would be that S knows that P only if S believes that P, and S's reason for belief is 'P'. This has, for obvious and good reason, never been regarded as a serious option. For one thing, on many accounts, if S's reason for doing A is 'P', S must believe that P. It would follow that for S to know that P, S must already believe that P. This is a clear dead end.

The relevant claim in metaethics suffers from no equivalent defect. This is the claim that S's doing A is morally worthy only when S does A, and S's reason for doing A is 'doing A is right'. The standard objection to *this* view (a view often attributed to Kant) is that having one's moral duty in mind *de dicto* is either unnecessary for morally worthy action or even incompatible with morally worthy action (perhaps because it is "one thought too many" (Williams 1981)).

There has been a recent resurgence of interest in morally worthy action in metaethics, much of it centering around the case of Huckleberry Finn. Huck helps his slave friend Jim to escape, despite believing whole-heartedly that what he is doing is wrong. Anecdotal and experimental evidence suggest that people are disposed to praise Huck for this action, indeed perhaps even more so than they would you or I for doing the same thing. A number of theorists have taken this to indicate that Huck's action is *morally worthy*.

To capture this, Julia Markovits (2010) and Nomy Arpaly (2002) have each defended similar theories of moral worth, a reasonable representative of which is:

MATCHING THEORY S's doing A is morally worthy just in case S's motivating reasons for doing A are also reasons why S's doing A is morally right.

Huck's reason for helping Jim to escape is that Jim is his friend.²³ And (we may suppose) his being Huck's friend is a reason why it is right for Huck to help him escape. Thus, Huck's action is morally worthy.

This view bears striking resemblance to Schroeder's theory of knowledge discussed in §3.²⁴ But there is an important difference. A reason's being *right-making* is analogous to its being *objectively sufficient* on Schroeder's view. This means that MATCHING THEORY lacks any requirement of *subjective* sufficiency; it is akin to the view that knowledge is belief for objectively sufficient reason, a decidedly bad theory of knowledge (as we'll see).

My position is that MATCHING THEORY is false, because morally worthy action is accomplished moral action, and MATCHING THEORY is a bad theory of accomplished moral action. Rather than adapt our earlier cases to show this, let's consider an example from Zoë Johnson King's recent attack on both MATCHING THEORY and the claim that Huck's action is morally worthy. As we'll see, Johnson King's argument is *remarkably* close to the argument one would anticipate given the premise that morally worthy action is accomplished moral action. I take this to bolster both our positions.

²³ I endorse the following note from Johnson King (m.s.): "Arpaly and Markovits suggest that what motivates Huck to help Jim is his concern for Jim's humanity, rather than for their friendship (Arpaly 2002, p.229; Markovits 2010, p.208). I agree with Sliwa (2015) and Manne (2013) that this is too highfalutin a description. But, even if Huck was motivated by concern for Jim's humanity, he was still motivated by something that makes it right to help Jim to escape only in light of important background conditions. If Jim had been a serial killer, then his humanity would not have made it morally right to help him to escape from the authorities." This last point anticipates an objection I raise at the close of this section.

²⁴ This is in a certain way ironic, since Schroeder's theory is explicitly meant as a nod to Kant's theory of knowledge, while MATCHING THEORY is meant as a response to Kant's theory of moral worth. It is an interesting exegetical question, though not one I am equipped to answer, whether Kant himself saw these as parallel.

Johnson King's argument begins with the point that most (including Arpaly and Markovits) hold that for my action to be morally worthy, it must be *non-accidentally right*. But, Johnson King argues, the relevant sort of match is insufficient for non-accidentality. For example, consider her case:

BURIED TREASURE Vincent decides to plant a rosebush in honor of his dead mother. What he doesn't know is that the one spot on the island where he lives that is suitable for growing roses is also the spot where buried treasure lurks just beneath the ground (the pirate who buried the treasure was fond of roses). So, when Vincent unearths the treasure, he can't believe his luck – how cool to accidentally discover buried treasure! (Johnson King m.s.)²⁵

Johnson King argues that cases like this motivate the view that for an action to *non-accidentally* have a certain feature (be morally worthy, be an instance of finding treasure), the agent cannot be wholly *unaware* that their action has this feature. This undermines MATCHING THEORY.

Notice how close this argument is to my arguments in §2 that non-accidentality has an internalist element. What's more, the argument implicitly makes use of the genus of accomplishment: she threatens MATCHING THEORY as a theory of non-accidentally right action by showing how poorly it fares as a theory of non-accidental success in other areas. In other words, Johnson King's discussion of BURIED TREASURE (and other cases) is really an argument against a certain theory of accomplishment:

EXTENDED MATCHING An instance of doing A is accomplished just in case its agent's motivating reasons for doing A are also reasons why doing A is successful.

Consider the activity *treasure-hunting*, for which the success condition is *finding treasure*. Vincent's reason for acting—that *here* is the best place for growing roses—is also the reason his action is a successful instance of *treasure-hunting*. Of course, that's not an activity he took himself to be engaged in. But that's immaterial here. Suppose that Vincent *were* explicitly engaged in the activity *treasure-hunting*, but rather than following the norms of treasure-hunting (say, finding out where pirates are

²⁵ Johnson King borrows this example from Lackey (2008).

likely to have buried treasure), he just digs in his favorite place, which is where it would be best to plant roses. Since Vincent didn't *correctly* treasure-hunt, his doing so clearly isn't accomplished. Yet EXTENDED MATCHING says that Vincent's *is* an accomplished instance of treasure-hunting. Vincent's reason for digging *here* is that it is the best place to plant roses, and that's also why the treasure is there, given the pirate's fondness for roses.

We can drive the point home further by considering what EXTENDED MATCHING says if we apply it as a theory of knowledge: roughly, that a belief counts as knowledge just in case my reasons for belief are reasons my belief is true. We don't need to look far to see that this fails; indeed, we can just adapt the above case:

ROSEBUD When Vincenza was growing up, her father told her that pirates love roses and always bury their treasure under a rosebush. Vincenza recently learned that a pirate buried treasure somewhere on her property. Vincenza thus believes that it is under the rosebush. As it happens, she's right. Her father just made up the story about pirates' loving roses, but a passing pirate heard him tell her the story, thought it was charming, and so buried his treasure under the rosebush on her property.

Clearly, Vincenza does not know that there is treasure under the rosebush on her property. But EXTENDED MATCHING says her belief-formation is accomplished. Her reason for believing that the treasure is under the rosebush is that her father told her pirates love roses. That fact also explains why her belief is true, because the pirate's hearing her father say that explains the pirate's burying the treasure where he does. So EXTENDED MATCHING generates a bad theory of knowledge.

The obvious question is whether MATCHING THEORY might be salvaged by plumping for a kind of reliabilism about moral worth. The idea again mirrors Dalton's view on legal defense: our focus should be on rightness, not on personal moral achievement.

The problem with this move is not that such reliabilism is false; it is that MATCHING THEORY is a poor representative. This is because it is not at all clear that Huck has acted as the norms for moral action dictate; he has merely acted on a reason that happens to be a right-making reason for his action. This distinction is important, because a reason's being right-making is context-dependent. Suppose,

for instance, that Huck was just generally disposed to treat ‘Jim is my friend’ as a reason to do things. Then Huck comes to believe that a true friend to Jim would hunt down and murder Jim’s old master. So Huck does it. Presumably, this is the wrong thing to do, even though it is done for a reason that was right-making in another context.

BURIED TREASURE nicely reflects this point. Vincent acts on a treasure-hunting reason: dig in the best place to plant roses (given that some pirate was inclined to bury his treasure in such a place²⁶). But this is obviously not the same as acting as the norms for treasure-hunting dictate in the sense that would make Vincent a reliable treasure-hunter.

What this shows is that MATCHING THEORY fails because it lies at an unstable position between internalism and externalism. It is hard to see how helping Jim can be a kind of moral achievement for Huck when he does it explicitly believing it to be immoral. The moral worth externalist doesn’t care; he cares only about right action, or reliably right action. But then MATCHING THEORY is either overkill or ‘underkill’. If what matters is just right action, then Huck’s reasons are irrelevant. If what matters is reliably tracking rightness, it’s not enough that his reason be right-making *in this context*.

Of course, the champion of MATCHING THEORY could claim that there is some *other* thing here—neither personal achievement, mere rightness nor reliable rightness—that she is concerned with. But my hunch is that this is not the case. My hunch is rather that champions of MATCHING THEORY have misunderstood what it is for an action to be *non-accidentally successful* in the way we are concerned with when we think about accomplishment.

²⁶ This is, of course, not a *pure* norm of treasure-hunting; it requires certain background conditions be met. But as Johnson King points out, the same is true of Huck’s reason.

5. Conclusion

I have argued that both knowledge and morally worthy action are species of a single genus—accomplishment—and that this (i) provides a useful framing of the debate between internalists and externalists about knowledge and (ii) speaks against the knowledge-first program in epistemology and (iii) the theory that morally worthy action is action taken for right-making reasons. But terminology should not be a sticking point here. If you leave convinced that both accomplished belief-formation and accomplished moral action are philosophically interesting categories, ones that much of our commonsense and historical philosophical discussions in epistemology and metaethics have concerned, I will count this paper a success, even if you ultimately conclude that we should reserve ‘knowledge’ and ‘morally worthy action’ for something else. If you leave here convinced of this because I’ve argued well, I’ll count the paper an accomplishment, too.

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