

DAVID B. MARTENS

CONFIDENCE IN UNWARRANTED KNOWLEDGE

ABSTRACT. Epistemic minimalism affirms that mere true belief is sufficient for propositional knowledge. I construct a taxonomy of some specific forms of minimalism and locate within that taxonomy the distinct positions of various advocates of minimalism, including Alvin Goldman, Jaakko Hintikka, Crispin Sartwell, Wolfgang Lenzen, Franz von Kutschera, and others. I weigh generic minimalism against William Lycan's objection that minimalism is incompatible with plausible principles about relations between knowledge, belief, and confidence. I argue that Lycan's objection fails for equivocation but that some specific forms of minimalism are better able than others to articulate that defense.

1. EPISTEMIC MINIMALISM

By 'epistemic minimalism' or simply 'minimalism,' I mean affirmation of the thesis that mere true belief is sufficient for propositional knowledge or, equivalently, that mere true belief strictly implies or entails knowledge of the believed truth. By 'warrant,' I mean "that, whatever precisely it is, which together with truth makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief."¹ So, knowledge is unwarranted if minimalism is correct.²

Minimalism is worth serious consideration. Granted, mainstream epistemologists traditionally reject the position out of hand.³ However, minimalism is surprisingly resistant to refutation. It has the further virtues of being combinable in attractive ways with specific positions on other, related theses, and of having a respectable tradition of advocates. So, however odd the position may appear when viewed from the mainstream, it is not one that can legitimately be ignored as being undeniably refuted, unmotivated, and unoccupied.

My principal purpose in this paper is to weigh minimalism against a "comparatively exotic, roundabout objection" brought by William Lycan.⁴ Much turns on the success or failure of Lycan's objection, and his objection therefore deserves careful and thorough assessment.⁵ For one thing, as Lycan allows, Crispin Sartwell has already

“addressed all the obvious objections” to minimalism and “offered an ingenious positive argument in its support.”⁶ Moreover, though Lycan himself engages only with Sartwell, Lycan’s objection actually bears upon a much wider range of epistemological positions than just Sartwell’s. Lycan’s powerful objection is roughly that minimalism is incompatible with plausible principles about relations between knowledge, belief, and confidence. I will argue that minimalism generally is defensible against Lycan’s objection, though the strongest defense is available only to forms of minimalism other than Sartwell’s, some of which do account well for relations between knowledge, belief, and confidence. (I will not further discuss or endorse Sartwell’s arguments, which have been discussed by others; I will offer no positive argument of my own for minimalism; and I will not discuss other objections against minimalism.⁷)

Though it might be unobvious how a position as uncomplicated as minimalism can have much richness in the variety of forms it takes, it is crucial to my argument that Sartwell’s form of minimalism is not the only form. To place that fact beyond question from the outset, I will construct a taxonomy of minimalism now, and mention and classify some actual minimalists.

Generic minimalism takes various specific forms as it is combined with specific positions on other, related theses. For example, it might be asked whether propositional knowledge is all of one kind, or whether there are various essentially distinct kinds of propositional knowledge. *Homogeneous minimalism* affirms the former, while *heterogeneous minimalism* affirms that mere true belief is sufficient only for one kind of knowledge. Other questions might be asked, too. Is true belief both sufficient and necessary for propositional knowledge, or is it sufficient but not necessary? *Biconditional minimalism* affirms the former, while *oneway conditional minimalism* affirms the latter. Is belief all-or-nothing, or is it a matter of degree? *Nondegreed minimalism* affirms the former, while *degreed minimalism* affirms the latter. These three independent distinctions together yield eight distinct specific forms of minimalism. Other distinctions can easily be made, but these will do for now.

Sartwell’s minimalism is homogeneous, biconditional, and nondegreed.⁸ Before Sartwell, homogeneous minimalism may be found, for example, in John McTaggart, who reported that he “should say that knowledge was a true belief.”⁹ Heterogeneous minimalism also has a long history outside the mainstream of epistemology. Currently, Alvin Goldman advocates a minimalism that is heterogeneous, biconditional, and degreed.¹⁰ He explicitly rests his social epistemology on a

distinction between “weak knowledge” (mere true belief) and “strong knowledge” (true belief plus some further factor).¹¹ The recent history of heterogeneous minimalism may be traced to Jaakko Hintikka’s recognition of a weak sense of “knows” (as a synonym for “rightly believes”) that is present “in ordinary speech” but that is distinct from “the strong sense of the word in which philosophers are wont to use it and in which it is contrasted to true opinion.”¹² Hintikka’s minimalist influence may be discerned elsewhere, too. For example, Lawrence Powers recognizes both a “weak true-belief” concept of knowledge and “the standard concept which [mainstream epistemologists] have all been trying to analyze,” Richard Routley recognizes both “piss-weak knowledge” (mere true belief) and stronger knowledge, and Franz von Kutschera recognizes both a “minimal concept of knowledge” (mere true belief) and “the concept of knowledge embodied in our everyday discourse” (the definition of which is “pursued by most other authors”).¹³

Later in the paper, I will extend this taxonomy and my classification of actual minimalists.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents my reconstruction of Lycan’s objection, and Section 3 defends the adequacy of my reconstruction. Section 4 surveys various genuine options for reply to Lycan’s objections. Section 5 argues that Lycan’s objection suffers from false premises on two interpretations of what it means to be ‘confident of’ a proposition. Section 6 argues that, while all the objection’s premises are plausible on a third interpretation of the phrase ‘is confident of,’ not all the objection’s inferences are valid on that interpretation. Section 7 summarizes the paper’s main conclusions.

2. RECONSTRUCTION OF LYCAN’S ARGUMENT

The core of Lycan’s objection to minimalism is an argument to the conclusion that mere true belief is not sufficient for propositional knowledge. Here is my reconstruction of Lycan’s argument.¹⁴

Premises

- (1) Sartwell believes the “antiSocratic and outrageous claim that knowledge is [entailed by mere] true belief.”¹⁵
- (2) “For any subject S, if S believes P and S is well aware that S believes P, then S believes that S believes P truly.”¹⁶

- (3) “For any subject S, if S believes P and S knows that [P entails Q], then S believes Q.”¹⁷
- (4) Sartwell cannot be “so arrogant” or “so opinionated” as not to have at least one “self-consciously modest belief..., i.e., [at least one] belief which he is aware of holding but of which he is not confident enough to make a knowledge claim.”¹⁸

Assumption for Indirect Proof

- (5) Knowledge is entailed by mere true belief.

Consequences

- (6) Sartwell knows that knowledge is entailed by mere true belief. (From 1 and 5.)
- (7) “For *any* P such that Sartwell both believes P and is well aware that he believes P, Sartwell believes he knows P.”¹⁹ (From 2, 3, and 6.)
- (8) There is at least one P such that (both) Sartwell believes that he knows P, and it is not the case that Sartwell believes that he knows P. (From 4 and 7.)

Conclusion

So, “we should deny [5].”²⁰ (From 5 through 8, by indirect proof.)

3. ADEQUACY OF THE RECONSTRUCTION

Before surveying genuine options for reply to Lycan’s argument, I will comment on three objections to the adequacy of my reconstruction of the argument.

Objection 1. “Your reconstruction misrepresents Lycan’s objection as bearing upon the wider range of positions encompassed in generic minimalism, when Lycan actually engages only with Sartwell.”

Comment. Lycan does not deny that propositional knowledge is essentially homogeneous,²¹ he does not deny that true belief is necessary for propositional knowledge,²² and he does not deny that belief is all-or-nothing.²³ In other words, Lycan does not contest any of the characteristics distinguishing Sartwell’s homogeneous, biconditional, and nondegreed minimalism from other specific forms of minimalism. What Lycan does deny is the claim

made by Sartwell's minimalism that mere true belief is sufficient for propositional knowledge. But that sufficiency claim is just the characteristic thesis of generic minimalism, the thesis affirmed in common by various specific forms of minimalism: not just Sartwell's, but, I think, also Hintikka's, Goldman's, von Kutschera's, and others'.²⁴

Objection 2. "Your reconstruction misrepresents Lycan's objection as being and literally and seriously an argument against minimalism, when actually it is only an ad hominem against Sartwell."

Comment. Lycan explicitly describes his objection as a "deduction," by "reductio" (indirect proof), of the falsehood of minimalism; that is, as literally an argument to the conclusion that minimalism is false.²⁵ Lycan's reference (in premises 1 and 4) to an actual person (Sartwell) clearly is inessential to his argument against minimalism, for clearly Lycan does not intend the argument to be directly empirical.²⁶ Premises 2 and 3 should each be understood to be tacitly prefixed by a necessity operator of some sort. And the superficially empirical premises 1 and 4 should be understood as joint proxies for a single premise asserting the possibility (of the appropriate sort and merely illustrated by Sartwell) that someone or other believes minimalism without being confident of everything she is well aware of believing. Subsequent inferences are underwritten by plausible rules of modal inference. Lycan's argument is fundamentally an ad hominem only in the circumstantial and inoffensive sense that Sartwell serves as an actual instance of a possibility figuring in premises of an argument to the falsehood of a position he holds.²⁷

Objection 3. "Your reconstruction misrepresents the structure and content of Lycan's actual objection. In particular, Lycan thinks that 7 is 'uncontroversially false.'²⁸ So, where you have premise 4, Lycan himself has only the flat denial of 7, call it premise 4*. Lycan thinks that 4* is intrinsically plausible and he only offers 4 as dispensable supplementary support for 4*."

(4*) "[T]here is at least one proposition... that [Sartwell] believes to be true [and he is well aware of believing] but... he does not claim to know to be true."²⁹

Comment. This objection gives a correct account of the roles of 4 and 4* in Lycan's objection. Premises 1 and 4* are joint proxies for a single premise asserting the possibility (of the appropriate sort and merely illustrated by Sartwell himself) that someone or other believes minimalism without believing she knows everything she is

well aware of believing. Lycan affirms this premise in the first instance solely on the basis of its intrinsic plausibility for him, saying that he “cannot imagine” it to be false.³⁰ But an unsatisfying dialectical stalemate threatens if Lycan rests his case there, for “Sartwell may wish to... accept [7 and deny 4* simply] because he really is convinced of [the correctness of minimalism].”³¹ If Sartwell’s commitment to minimalism (itself perhaps based partly on a brute intuition about 4* and 7 that differs from Lycan’s) can be opposed only with Lycan’s own brute intuition (itself perhaps infected by a prior theoretical commitment to mainstream antiminimalism), then it is at least unclear whether Lycan’s objection really does rest on premises that can all be accepted “from a position of official neutrality with respect to [minimalism].”³² Perhaps recognizing this, Lycan offers supplementary support for 4* in the form of 4, with its talk of confidence, arrogance, and opinionatedness. Lycan’s introduction of 4 shifts the focus of his objection away from his brute intuition about 4* and 7, and towards the principles by virtue of which 4 is able to support 4*. In my reconstruction of Lycan’s objection, I am following and emphasizing his shift of focus, because I think it is in those principles (about relations between knowledge, belief, and confidence) that neutral ground can be found for a satisfying, non-question-begging assessment of the soundness of Lycan’s objection.

4. OPTIONS FOR REPLY

I will now survey the four genuine options for reply to Lycan’s argument, which include rejecting one or more of the premises, and rejecting the inference of the contradiction (8) from the premises. I will argue that these options are not all equally promising.

Reply Option 1. “Let’s reject premise 1. No competent and modest speaker could sincerely affirm minimalism and no competent and modest thinker could genuinely believe it.”

Comment. It would be odd for an advocate of minimalism to make this reply, but not impossible. After all, a competent and modest speaker can sincerely put forward for consideration a proposition that (arguably) no competent speaker could sincerely affirm, such as ‘triangles are not three-sided.’ And a competent and modest thinker can entertain and perhaps even feel positively towards a proposition that (arguably) no competent thinker could genuinely believe, such as ‘truth-telling is always wrong.’ It would similarly be possible to

advocate minimalism, albeit anemically, without either affirming or believing it.³³ Even so, the history of minimalism (partly described above in Section 1) creates a weighty presumption that it is possible for competent and modest speakers and thinkers to advocate minimalism full-bloodedly, with sincere affirmation and genuine belief. Minimalists should not be in a hurry to exercise Reply Option 1.³⁴

Reply Option 2. “Let’s reject premise 2 or premise 3. These sorts of closure principles are notoriously problematic. For example, perhaps we can run the lottery, or the sorites, or the preface, or some other standard paradox or counterexample against 3.”

Comment. Premises 2 and 3 no doubt are contestable as to the details of their formulation, but I do not think that the most effective reply to Lycan’s argument can be built around rejection of either 2 or 3. Minimalists should grant that 2 and 3 are least somewhat plausible in themselves and plausible additionally by virtue of their coherence with a more general and not wildly controversial view of knowledge and belief. For its part, 3 follows from the closure of belief under believed entailment (B1), together with the necessity of belief for knowledge (K1).³⁵

(B1) If S believes P and S believes that P entails Q, then
S believes Q.

(K1) If S knows P, then S believes P.

And 2 follows from the inflatability of truth in belief contexts (B2), the closure of belief under conjunction (B3), and the sufficiency of being well aware that one believes for believing that one believes (B4).

(B2) If S believes Q, then S believes R, where R is just like Q except for having ‘P is true’ in one or more places where Q has ‘P.’

(B3) If S believes P and S believes Q, then S believes the conjunction of P and Q.

(B4) If S is well aware that S believes P, then S believes that S believes P.

Granted, though K1 is entailed by biconditional minimalism, some one-way conditional minimalists might want to reject K1.³⁶ However, 3 has at least some significant plausibility in itself as a rationality constraint on belief. Granted, the constraints imposed on belief by 2, 3, and B1–B4 no doubt require qualifications to be fully plausible as governing actual beliefs of fallible, imperfectly rational, and finite thinkers. However, satisfactory qualifications (to avoid the lottery, or the sorites, or the preface, or whichever other paradox or counterexample is run against those constraints) likely would only introduce complexities without weakening the objection's force.³⁷ So, I recommend that minimalists do not rest their reply to Lycan's argument on rejection of 2 or 3. But more than that, in replying to the argument, minimalists should feel free to draw on the more general view of knowledge and belief with which 2 and 3 cohere. For it is difficult to see how one might reasonably accept 2 and 3 in any form that might threaten minimalism, while yet rejecting even suitably qualified versions of B1–B4.

Reply Option 3. "Let's reject premises 4 and 4*."

Reply Option 4. "Let's reject the inference of the contradiction (8) from the premises."

Comment. To some minimalists, Reply Option 3 may seem obviously correct. However, it is not obvious how to exercise this option without immediately generating an unsatisfying dialectical stalemate in which Lycan's acceptance of 4 and 4*, on the basis of his intuitions and theoretical commitments, is directly opposed by the minimalist's rejection of 4 and 4*, on the basis of intuitions and commitments directly contrary to Lycan's. A heterogeneous minimalist, for example, might dismiss Lycan's intuitions in favor of 4 and 4* as actually concerning only strong knowledge and not weak knowledge (mere true belief). But this is already to beg the question of the soundness of Lycan's objection, since there is no such thing as weak knowledge if the objection is sound. I think that Reply Option 3 is correct, but it can be exercised in a satisfying way only if 4 and 4* can be rejected on neutral grounds and this is best achieved by exercising Reply Option 3 together with Reply Option 4. In what follows, Section 5 develops Reply Option 3 and Section 6 develops Reply Option 4.

5. BELIEF AND CONFIDENCE

I will now argue that, if belief is taken to be all-or-nothing (rather than a matter of degree) and 'is confident of' is taken in either of two somewhat

artificial senses (as ‘believes’ or as ‘believes that he knows’), then all the inferences in Lycan’s objection are valid but, notwithstanding their apparent plausibility, each of his premises 4 and 4* is a contradiction.

Premise 4 covertly conjoins two separable and individually plausible claims.

- (4a) There is at least one P such that Sartwell both believes P and is well aware that he believes P, but Sartwell is not confident of P.
- (4b) For all P, if Sartwell believes that he knows P, then he is confident of P.

It is important to keep in mind that premises 1 and 4 are only superficially empirical. The joint plausibility of 1 and 4a rests on a straightforward appeal to modal intuition. Surely it is possible that (premise 1) someone or other believes minimalism and (premise 4a) that person is not confident of everything she is well aware of believing.³⁸ For its part, 4b follows from the familiar and plausible general principle (K2) that confidence is necessary to make a knowledge claim.³⁹

- (K2) For any subject S, if S believes that he knows P, then S is confident of P.

K2 is at least as plausible as and coheres well with the other principles (B1–B4, K1) of the more general view of knowledge and belief with which 2 and 3 cohere.⁴⁰

Contradiction 8 does follow from the conjunction of 4a, 4b, and 7, but apparently not from any pair of these. It seems difficult in light of this to maintain both the joint plausibility of all the argument’s premises and the validity of all its inferences. A root difficulty is to say precisely what sort of confidence is involved. Two sorts are readily identified, but neither is adequate to maintain all the argument’s premises.

In one somewhat artificial sense, to be confident of a proposition is merely to believe it.

- (C1) S is confident of P iff S believes P.

Lycan’s argument from 4 fails immediately and decisively if it involves C1-confidence, for 4a is then obviously a contradiction.⁴¹

The necessary falsehood of 4a when it involves C1-confidence only shows that, of necessity, Sartwell is such that he believes a proposition iff he believes it.⁴²

In another somewhat artificial sense, besides that of C1, to be confident of a proposition is to believe one knows that proposition.

(C2) S is confident of P iff S believes that she knows P.

Lycan's argument from 4 fails almost as immediately and almost as decisively if it involves C2-confidence rather than C1-confidence. (Lycan doesn't give an explicit definition, but he appears to intend C2-confidence.⁴³) The problem is not with 4b, which is obviously a tautology given C2. Rather, the problem is that 4a is inconsistent with the conjunction of 1, 2, B1, and C2.⁴⁴ As I noted earlier, it is difficult to see how one might reasonably accept 3 while rejecting even a suitably qualified version of B1. So, notwithstanding the plausible appearance of 4a, the reasonable inference is that, when Lycan's argument involves C2-confidence, at least one of the four premises implicated in the inconsistency (1, 2, 3, and 4a) is false and the argument is unsound. It should be noted that 5 is not implicated, so the inconsistency is a problem for the soundness of Lycan's argument and cannot be made a problem for the truth of minimalism.

In fact, premise 4a is false.⁴⁵ This can be shown on neutral grounds, since it is a plausible general principle that one cannot believe one knows something unless one believes it and is well aware that one believes it (K3).

(K3) For any subject S, if S believes that he knows P, then
S both believes P and is well aware that he believes P.

K3 is at least as plausible as and coheres well with the other principles (B1–B4, K1, K2) of the more general view of knowledge and belief with which premises 2 and 3 of Lycan's argument cohere. Now, given 1, 2, B1, C2, and K3, it follows that 4a is not merely false but a contradiction.⁴⁶

Since 4a is false whether it involves C1-confidence or C2-confidence, 4* receives no support from 4a in either case. Moreover, 4* itself is false and this, too, can be shown on neutral grounds. Given 1, 2, B1, and K3, it follows that 4* is not merely false but a contradiction.⁴⁷

6. MINIMALISM AND DEGREE OF BELIEF

I will now argue that, if belief is taken to be a matter of degree (rather than all-or-nothing) and ‘is confident of’ is taken in its primary English sense (as ‘strongly believes’), then the joint plausibility of all the premises in Lycan’s argument can easily be maintained but not all the argument’s inferences are valid.

I will first extend the taxonomy I constructed above (in Section 1), in order to identify a form of minimalism whose defenders must grant all of Lycan’s premises. Degreed minimalism has two forms. *Unrestricted degreed minimalism* holds that belief of a truth to any degree at all is sufficient for knowledge of that truth. Goldman’s biconditional minimalism is of the unrestricted degreed form: mere belief (to any degree) of a truth is weak knowledge (to that degree) of that truth.⁴⁸ On the other hand, *restricted degreed minimalism* holds that, for some degree of belief greater than zero, belief of a truth to at least that degree is sufficient for knowledge of that truth. Wolfgang Lenzen and Franz von Kutschera each advocates a heterogeneous, biconditional, restricted degreed minimalism: mere belief (to the highest degree) of a truth is “minimal” knowledge of that truth.⁴⁹ Forms of restricted degreed minimalism other than Lenzen’s and von Kutschera’s are identifiable, too. *Strong-true-belief (STB) minimalism* holds that belief of a truth to any degree greater than the threshold for a belief to be unhesitating is sufficient for knowledge of that truth. For present purposes, it does not matter how the threshold for unhesitatingness is set. (Most plausibly the threshold is set contextually, so that a belief with less than the highest degree of strength will nevertheless count as unhesitating provided it has a high enough degree of strength relative to the context.)⁵⁰

The joint plausibility of Lycan’s premises is maximized if his objection is directed specifically at STB minimalism.⁵¹ Where the argument’s target is STB biconditional minimalism, premises 4a, 4b, and 4* are jointly plausible and maximally so just in case they are reformulated as follows.

- (4a’) There is at least one P such that S (the STB minimalist) both hesitatingly believes P and is well aware that she hesitatingly believes P, but S is not confident of P.
- (4b’) For all P, if S unhesitatingly believes that she knows P, then she is confident of P.

- (4*') There is at least one P such that S (the STB minimalist) both hesitatingly believes P and is well aware that she hesitatingly believes P, but S does not unhesitatingly believe that she knows P.

The sort of confidence involved in 4a' and 4b' when they are jointly plausible is neither C1- nor C2-confidence. Where belief is a matter of degree, so are C1- and C2-confidence.

- (C1') S is to some degree confident of P iff S believes P to that degree.
- (C2') S is to some degree confident of P iff S believes to that degree that she knows P.

4a' is implausible if it involves either C1'- or C2'- confidence, just as 4a is implausible if it involves either C1- or C2-confidence, and for essentially the same reasons. On the other hand, 4a' and 4b' are jointly plausible when they involve a third sort of confidence that is identifiable where belief is a matter of degree.

- (C3) S is confident of P iff S unhesitatingly believes P.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the primary English sense of “confident” [of a proposition] is “having strong belief” [of that proposition], that is, C3-confidence. If 4a' involves C3-confidence, then 4a' is strictly equivalent to the plausible proposition that S (the STB minimalist) has at least one hesitating belief that she is well aware of having.⁵² And, given the appropriate reformulation of K3, 4*' is also strictly equivalent to that plausible proposition. Finally, if 4b' involves C3-confidence, then 4b' follows from the appropriate reformulation of K2.⁵³

Though all of Lycan's premises are now plausible, his inferences are no longer all valid. Where the objection's target is STB biconditional minimalism, 7' follows from appropriate reformulations of premises 1, 2, and 3 and assumption 5.

- (7') For any P such that S both unhesitatingly believes P and is well aware that she unhesitatingly believes P, S to some degree believes that she knows P.

However, neither 8 nor any other contradiction follows from 7' and either 4a' and 4b', or 4*'. Lycan's objection clearly fails against STB biconditional minimalism.

Lycan's objection clearly fails in essentially the same way against degreed minimalism generally. For example, if the objection is directed specifically at unrestricted degreed minimalism, then 7'' follows in place of 7'.

- (7'') For any P such that S (the unrestricted degreed minimalist) both to some degree believes P and is well aware that she to some degree believes P, S to some degree believes that she knows P.

But no contradiction follows from the conjunction of 7'' with the other premises and the assumption of unrestricted degreed minimalism.

7. CONFIDENCE IN MINIMALISM

I have argued that Lycan's objection fails on account of equivocation about what it means to be 'confident of' a proposition. In one sense (somewhat artificial, C1- or C2-confidence), the objection's inferences are all valid but its premises include contradictions. In another sense (the primary English sense, C3-confidence), the objection's premises are all plausible but its inferences are not all valid. But the various forms of minimalism are not all equally well able to articulate that defense. Indecisive generic minimalists, and nondegreed minimalists (Sartwell), can point out that the argument is unsound if it involves C1- or C2-confidence. However, those forms of minimalism lack the resources to acknowledge C3-confidence and so cannot account for the possibility of a self-consciously modest minimalist (the conjunction of Lycan's premises 1 and either 4* or 4a). Degreed minimalists, on the other hand, can acknowledge all three sorts of confidence and so can fully articulate the defense of equivocation. Biconditional degreed minimalists (Goldman, Lenzen, von Kutschera), especially, can fully accept all the objection's premises and the more general view of knowledge and belief with which those premises cohere, while yet rejecting the objection's conclusion.⁵⁴

I have offered no positive argument for minimalism. However, I like the hypothesis that propositional knowledge is correctly described by some substantive form of heterogeneous, biconditional, contextualized strong-true-belief minimalism. The ability of this

hypothesis to account especially well for relations between knowledge, belief, and confidence weighs in its favor, though obviously not decisively or even preponderantly so.

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NOTES

¹ Plantinga (1993, p. 3). Plantinga's usage of 'warrant' diverges deliberately from prior general usage, which was as a synonym for 'epistemic justification.' For prior usage of 'warrant,' see, for example, Lewis (1946, p. 254) and Lycan (1988, p. 157). There is wide agreement now that 'epistemic justification' is not Gettier-proof. In contrast, 'warrant' is Gettier-proofed simply by its stipulated definition in Plantinga's usage.

² One attraction of minimalism is precisely that it relieves frustrations with the intractable post-Gettier mainstream disagreements about the nature of warrant so carefully described by Shope (1983) and Plantinga (1993). However, it would be a mistake to think that minimalism as such entails that epistemic justification is not necessary for knowledge. On the contrary, generic minimalism is quite consistent with views on which actual or counterfactual epistemic justification is necessary for belief, or truth, or both. For example, generic minimalism is consistent with epistemic conservatism (Foley 1983) and with epistemic theories of truth (Putnam 1981). Only some very specific forms of minimalism entail that epistemic justification is not necessary at all for knowledge, neither as a warranting factor over and above belief and truth, nor as a necessary condition for belief or truth.

³ Classic statements of the mainstream's rejection of minimalism are given by Russell (1997, p. 131), and Lewis (1946, p. 27).

⁴ Lycan (1994a, p. 1).

⁵ The only discussions of Lycan (1994a) in the literature that I am aware of are the brief and dismissive notices given by Le Morvan (2002, p. 165, n. 2) and Skidmore (1997, pp. 125–126). There are two likely explanations for the relatively little discussion of Lycan's paper. First, Lycan (1994a) (unlike Gettier 1963, for example) challenges a little-known non-mainstream tradition. Second, certain inessential and purely rhetorical aspects of Lycan's presentation of his objection apparently have led some

readers to misconstrue the argument at the core of the objection in a way that makes the objection seem much less philosophically interesting and powerful than it actually is.

⁶ Lycan (1994b, p. 153, 1994a, p. 1).

⁷ For Sartwell's arguments, see Sartwell (1991, 1992). For critical discussions in addition to Lycan's, see Beckermann (1997), Carrier (1994), Hetherington (2001), Latus (2000), Le Morvan (2002), Maitzen (1995), Rosenberg (2002), and Skidmore (1993, 1997). See also Goldman (1999, p. 24, n. 15). Other important objections to minimalism (besides the obvious ones and besides Lycan's) have not been addressed by Sartwell and will not be discussed by me here. See especially Williamson (2000).

⁸ Sartwell is explicit that his minimalism is biconditional (Sartwell, 1991, p. 157, 1992, p. 167). He precludes heterogeneous minimalism when he says that "justification is in *no* sense logically required for knowledge." (Sartwell, 1991, p. 163. Sartwell is here using 'justification' nonstandardly, to express the sense that I express with 'warrant.' See Sartwell, 1991, pp. 164–165, n. 2.) He distinguishes belief, on the one hand, from, on the other hand, three matters of degree: (a) commitment to the truth of a proposition, (b) disposition to assent to a proposition, and (c) disposition to act as though a proposition is true (Sartwell, 1991, pp. 157–159). He equates believing a proposition with having "sufficient degree of commitment" or "some degree of serious commitment" to the proposition, that is, with having a degree of commitment that exceeds a certain threshold (Sartwell, 1991, p. 158). Whether a subject's degree of commitment exceeds a certain threshold is an all-or-nothing matter, so Sartwell's minimalism is nondegreed.

⁹ McTaggart (1924, p. 251). See also Powers (1978, p. 346).

¹⁰ Goldman equates degrees of belief with subjective probabilities (Goldman 1999, p. 88). This equation is not essential to degreed minimalism as such.

¹¹ Goldman (1999, pp. 23–25). Hetherington (2001) also defends heterogeneous minimalism.

¹² Hintikka (1962, pp. 18–19). Actually, the historical roots of heterogeneous minimalism seem to run much farther back than Hintikka. Ivan Boh (1993) finds various distinctions between weak knowledge (mere true belief) and stronger forms of knowledge in the writings of some medieval philosophers.

¹³ Powers (1978, pp. 345–346), Routley (1981, p. 101), von Kutschera (1982) and Beckermann (1997) (cited by Rosenberg 2002, pp. 123–124, 202, whose translations I have quoted and relied upon). Le Morvan (2002, p. 165, n. 1) notes that "von Kutschera (1982) arrived at this thesis [that is, minimalism] before, and independently of, Sartwell." Lenzen (1978, p. 151, n. 81) finds minimalism already in von Kutschera (1976) and advocates it himself in Lenzen (1980). As the snippets I've quoted from Hintikka and Beckermann might suggest, advocates of heterogeneous minimalism are well able to acknowledge, without disapproval, the fickleness of ordinary usage of 'knows.' Homogeneous minimalism and mainstream positions, on the other hand, require more or less evasive, skeptical, or revisionary approaches to ordinary usage.

¹⁴ I have made the following changes to Lycan's own presentation of his objection. (See also the discussion in Section 3 below.) First, I have clarified the objection's conclusion, and made corresponding clarifications elsewhere in the objection (in propositions 1, 3, 5, and 6). Lycan characterizes his target as the biconditional that knowledge is "equivalent to" mere true belief, "as a matter of philosophical analysis." (Lycan 1994a, p. 1) But, for reasons I present in Section 3 below, it is clear that the precise target of his objection is the conditional that mere true belief entails

knowledge. Moreover, it is incidental to the objection that minimalism is put forward specifically as a philosophical analysis and not merely as a true proposition. Second, I have renumbered and reordered propositions to make all the premises and the crucial inferences explicit. Where (m, n) means that the proposition I have numbered m was numbered n by Lycan, the following correspondences hold: (1, 1), (2, 6), (3, 9), (4, *none*), (5, 2), (6, 5), (7, 11), (8, *none*). The premise I have numbered 4 is clearly affirmed by Lycan, though he does not number it. A contradiction (which I have numbered 8) is clearly required by Lycan's objection (which he explicitly says is a "reductio") but is neither numbered nor clearly stated by Lycan (1994a, p. 1). In Lycan's presentation of the objection, the contradiction terminating the reductio occurs when proposition 7 (Lycan's 11) "rules out" proposition 4 (not numbered by Lycan) (Lycan, 1994a, p. 2). Third, I have omitted some propositions, to emphasize crucial inferences. The omitted propositions are intermediate inferences of only secondary importance, numbered by Lycan as 3, 4, 7, 8, and 10.

¹⁵ Lycan (1994a, p. 1).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Lycan (1994a, p. 2).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Lycan elsewhere seems somewhat receptive to the view that knowledge is, in some legitimate sense, essentially heterogeneous. See Lycan (1988, p. 136). But there is no evidence that he sees this as an issue between himself and Sartwell.

²² Nor does Lycan explicitly affirm the necessity of true belief. As Sartwell (1992, p. 177) observes, "Lycan is reticent here."

²³ Lycan elsewhere does affirm that belief is a matter of degree. (See Lycan 1988, p. 7, and compare note 50, below.) But he does not raise this as an issue between himself and Sartwell.

²⁴ Some forms of heterogeneous minimalism clearly are threatened by Lycan's argument, while other forms perhaps are not. *Substantive* forms affirm while *nominal* forms deny that there is some genuine and interesting sense in which 'knows' in the weak sense and 'knows' in the strong sense express or denote species of a common genus. Substantive forms affirm that (a) S knows P iff either S weakly knows P or S strongly knows P, (b) S weakly knows P iff S merely has a true belief of P, (c) that S strongly knows P is not entailed by S's merely having a true belief of P, and (d) that S merely has a true belief of P is not entailed by S's strongly knowing P. Substantive forms thus clearly are threatened by Lycan's argument, since it follows from (a) and (b) that, contrary to Lycan's conclusion, that S knows P is entailed by S's merely having a true belief of P. Nominal forms, on the other hand, perhaps are not threatened by Lycan's argument. By their lights, 'knows' on the left side of the biconditional in (a) must either mean 'weakly knows' or mean 'strongly knows' (and in either case the biconditional fails right-to-left) and 'knows' in the antecedent of the conditional denied by Lycan's conclusion must similarly either mean 'weakly knows' (in which case Lycan's conclusion denies a tautology) or mean 'strongly knows' (in which case Lycan's conclusion is quite compatible with acceptance of (b), (c), and (d), and rejection of (a)). I myself am attracted to a substantive form of heterogeneous minimalism. Explicit advocates of substantive forms include Hetherington (2001, ch. 5), in whose view weak knowledge and various degrees of strong knowledge are genuinely and interestingly unified in what Hetherington calls "the

spectrum of knowledge.” Hintikka and others in his tradition of heterogeneous minimalism (Goldman, Lenzen, von Kutschera, and others) are less explicit. Though they are well able to speak for themselves, I think they too must all be committed at least implicitly to substantive forms. To suppose they advocate only nominal forms is, it seems to me, to suppose they are only punning when in their books on epistemology and epistemic logic (books about genuine knowledge, which, when expressed or denoted by the word ‘knows,’ must, by nominal lights, be expressed or denoted by ‘knows’ in the strong sense, there being no genuine and interesting generic sense) they sometimes use ‘knows’ in the (not genuinely and interestingly related) weak sense – as, for example, an economist would only be punning when in a book on the banking system she sometimes used the word ‘banking’ in the ‘weak’ sense of ‘tilting an airplane sideways in flight.’

²⁵ Lycan (1994a, p. 1). (By ‘literally an argument,’ I mean something with premises and a conclusion.) Granted, Lycan has elsewhere described his objection as “an ad hominem against Sartwell.” (Lycan 1994b) These two descriptions can be reconciled smoothly by respecting the traditional distinction between abusive and circumstantial types of ad hominem argument. “What distinguishes the circumstantial from the abusive... type of ad hominem argument is that in the circumstantial type the primary focus of the attack in the argument is not on character but on the external circumstances of person, primarily on an inconsistency that is alleged.” (Walton 1998, p. 218) I presume that Lycan respects this distinction. Lycan’s objection is not fundamentally an abusive ad hominem, but rather a certain sort of circumstantial ad hominem argument. Skidmore summarily and (I believe) hastily dismisses Lycan’s objection on the ostensible grounds that the objection is merely an (abusive and fallacious) ad hominem, saying that “Lycan seems to treat [his] conclusion as a telling objection since it would make out that Sartwell is an *immodest* person.” (Skidmore 1997, p. 126, original emphasis)

²⁶ “I do not know [Sartwell] personally.” (Lycan 1994a, p. 2)

²⁷ Le Morvan (2002, p. 165, n. 1) correctly identifies Lycan’s ad hominem argument as circumstantial, but he too is summarily dismissive, saying only that “I do not find [it] persuasive.” Perhaps Le Morvan thinks, mistakenly (I believe), that Lycan’s objection is “merely” a circumstantial ad hominem of the “Pragmatic Inconsistency Subtype (You Say One Thing, Do Another).” (Walton 1998, pp. 261, 251) A Pragmatic Inconsistency ad hominem against Sartwell would, I think, not be of much more philosophical interest than an abusive ad hominem. In fact, however, Lycan’s argument is an instance of the type of ad hominem argument that Walton calls “the Logical Inconsistency Circumstantial Ad Hominem Argument.” (Walton 1998, p. 259) An argument of this type is simply an attempted *reductio* of a position held by the person to whom the argument is directed. Provided that the alleged inconsistency is genuine, the argument shows that the target position is false. So, this type of circumstantial ad hominem needs to be taken very seriously. (The inconsistency and the falsehood of the target position may, of course, provide grounds for subsequent criticism of the person to whom the argument is directed.)

²⁸ Lycan (1994a, p. 1).

²⁹ Lycan (1994a, p. 2).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Lycan (1994a, p. 3).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ “It is... surely possible to entertain or test hypotheses which we do not believe, or to treat them *as if* we believed them when in fact we do not.” (Sartwell 1991, pp. 158–159)

³⁴ Some of Lycan’s readers may urge that Lycan’s objection is precisely that no competent speaker could sincerely affirm minimalism and no competent thinker could genuinely believe it. They might urge, in brief, that Lycan’s argument is that minimalism is a false position because minimalists are bad people. This argument is an instance of the types of ad hominem argument that Walton calls a ‘fallacious Negative Ethotic Ad Hominem Argument from Cognitive Skills’ and ‘from Morals.’ (Walton 1998, pp. 249–251, 283) As such, it is unlikely to be what Lycan does intend, so I will call it the Pseudo-Lycan argument, to distinguish it from the actual Lycan’s argument, presented above in Section 2. Skidmore (1997, p. 126) seems to see something like the Pseudo-Lycan argument in Lycan (1994a). In comments on a previous version of this paper, Scott Aiken advocated a variant of the Pseudo-Lycan argument.

³⁵ The coherence of 3 with B1 and K1 is not, of course, an *argument* for 3, which may well have more plausibility intrinsically than either B1 or K1 has intrinsically. Nevertheless, the mutual coherence of the three propositions augments whatever plausibility each has intrinsically.

³⁶ Shope (1983, ch. 6.1) surveys some strategies for rejecting K1. See also Williamson (2000).

³⁷ Cherniak (1986) discusses rationality constraints on belief.

³⁸ Surely it is possible that such a minimalist believes some “highly controversial philosophical claim to be true,” but is not confident of that claim. “Surely there is at least one proposition—say, that Belgrade is the capital of Yugoslavia—that he believes to be true but (what with the turbulence of current eastern European affairs) he does not claim to know to be true.” (Lycan 1994a, p. 2)

³⁹ K2 follows Lycan in eliding the distinction between the speech act of claiming to know, and the mental state of believing that one knows. The elision is harmless for the purposes of this paper.

⁴⁰ K2 may not seem plausible if it is misread as saying that confidence is a necessary condition for knowledge. It is important to distinguish knowing from claiming to know. (See, for example, Woozley 1952.) Moore misses the distinction when he says that “from the conjunction of the two facts that a man thinks that a given proposition *p* is true, and that *p* is in fact true, it does not follow that the man in question knows that *p* is true: in order that I may be justified in saying that I know that I am standing up, something more is required than the mere conjunction of the two facts that I both think I am and actually am—as Russell has expressed it, true belief is not identical with knowledge.” (Moore 1959, p. 241)

⁴¹ On the other hand, it should be noted that an alternate account of the plausibility of 4b is available if the objection is interpreted as involving C1-confidence, provided that the objection is directed specifically at biconditional minimalism. If the objection’s target is biconditional minimalism, then 1 is replaced with 1a.

- (1a) Sartwell believes that knowledge is entailed by mere true belief, and he believes that knowledge entails true belief.

Given the deflatability of truth in belief contexts (B5) and the distributivity of belief over conjunction (B6), 4b follows from 1a, B1, and C1 (without need of K2).

- (B5) If S believes Q, then S believes R, provided that R is just like Q except for having ‘P’ in one or more places where Q has ‘P is true.’
- (B6) If S believes the conjunction of P and Q, then S believes P and S believes Q.

B5 and B6 are at least as plausible as and cohere well with the other principles (B1–B4, K1) of the more general view of knowledge and belief with which 2 and 3 cohere. So, this alternate account of the plausibility of 4b might serve if K2 were to be called into question.

⁴² Even competent and humble people can’t believe that Belgrade is the capital of Yugoslavia without believing it.

⁴³ This is the most straightforward reading of his claim that proposition 7 (his 11) “rules out” proposition 4 (Lycan 1994a, p. 2).

⁴⁴ Proofs of most of the formal results reported in this paper are left as elementary exercises for the reader.

⁴⁵ If one is not C2-confident that Belgrade is the capital of Yugoslavia, then perhaps one either believes it but is not well aware of believing it, or does not genuinely believe it despite some inclination to do so (an inclination that one might even quite properly express using the word ‘believe’).

⁴⁶ A proposition is a contradiction iff it is strictly equivalent to an *explicit* contradiction. I will first prove a lemma and then the main result.

Proof (lemma C2*):

<i>i</i>	$BP \wedge ABP$	assumption for conditional proof
<i>ii</i>	$B(BP \wedge TP)$	<i>i</i> , 2
<i>iii</i>	BKP	<i>ii</i> , 1, B1
<i>iv</i>	CP	<i>iii</i> , C2
<i>v</i>	$(BP \wedge ABP) \rightarrow CP$	<i>i–iv</i> , conditional proof
<i>vi</i>	CP	assumption for conditional proof
<i>vii</i>	BKP	<i>vi</i> , C2
<i>viii</i>	$BP \wedge ABP$	<i>vii</i> , K3
<i>ix</i>	$CP \rightarrow (BP \wedge ABP)$	<i>vi–viii</i> , conditional proof
C2*	$(BP \wedge ABP) \leftrightarrow CP$	<i>v</i> , <i>ix</i> ■

Proof (main result):

<i>i</i>	$(\exists P)(BP \wedge ABP \wedge \sim CP) \leftrightarrow (\exists P)(BP \wedge ABP \wedge \sim CP)$	logical truth
<i>ii</i>	$(\exists P)(BP \wedge ABP \wedge \sim CP) \leftrightarrow (\exists P)(CP \wedge \sim CP)$	<i>i</i> , C2*
<i>iii</i>	4a \leftrightarrow explicit contradiction	<i>ii</i> ■

⁴⁷ Again, I will first prove a lemma and then the main result.

Proof (lemma K4):

<i>i</i>	$BP \wedge ABP$	assumption for conditional proof
<i>ii</i>	$B(BP \wedge TP)$	<i>i</i> , 2
<i>iii</i>	BKP	<i>ii</i> , 1, B1
<i>iv</i>	$(BP \wedge ABP) \rightarrow BKP$	<i>i-iii</i> , conditional proof
<i>v</i>	BKP	assumption for conditional proof
<i>vi</i>	$BP \wedge ABP$	<i>v</i> , K3
<i>vii</i>	$BKP \rightarrow (BP \wedge ABP)$	<i>v-vi</i> , conditional proof
K4	$(BP \wedge ABP) \leftrightarrow BKP$	<i>iv</i> , <i>vii</i> ■

Proof (main result):

<i>i</i>	$(\exists P)(BP \wedge ABP \wedge \sim BKP) \leftrightarrow$ $(\exists P)(BP \wedge ABP \wedge \sim BKP)$	logical truth
<i>ii</i>	$(\exists P)(BP \wedge ABP \wedge \sim BKP) \leftrightarrow$ $(\exists P)(BKP \wedge \sim BKP)$	<i>i</i> , K4
<i>iii</i>	4* \leftrightarrow explicit contradiction	<i>ii</i> ■

⁴⁸ “[A]ny DB [i.e., degree of belief] in a truth has the same amount of V-value as the strength of the DB.” (Goldman 1999, p. 90) But “amount of V-value” is synonymous with “amount of truth possession,” which in turn is synonymous with “degree of knowledge.” (Goldman 1999, p. 116)

⁴⁹ See Rosenberg (2002, pp. 123–124), and Lenzen (1980, pp. 56, 58, 97). Like Goldman, Lenzen and von Kutschera equate degrees of belief with subjective probabilities. Again, this equation is not essential to degreed minimalism as such.

⁵⁰ My usage of ‘unhesitating’ (as indicating a relatively high degree of belief) follows that of, for example, Russell, Moore, Armstrong, and Lycan. Russell contrasts “what we believe hesitatingly” with “what we firmly believe.” (Russell 1997, p. 139) Moore says that “*feeling sure*... is merely a name for a high degree of belief.” (Moore 1953, p. 297) Armstrong contrasts “believing unhesitatingly” with “merely having some degree of belief.” (Armstrong 1973, p. 108) Lycan allows that Sartwell may “firmly believe” minimalism (Lycan 1994a, p. 2).

⁵¹ STB biconditional minimalism seems actually to have been defended. William Heytesbury, for example, held that “speaking broadly... to know is nothing other than unhesitatingly to apprehend the truth—i.e., to believe unhesitatingly that it is so when... it is so in reality.” (Heytesbury 1988, p. 447) On its face, this is a clear statement of STB biconditional minimalism. See the discussion of Heytesbury in Boh (1993).

⁵² Say, that Belgrade is the capital of Yugoslavia.

⁵³ Or from the appropriate reformulations of 1a, B1, B5, and B6.

⁵⁴ Many other specific responses to Lycan’s objection might well also be made by defenders of various more specific forms of minimalism. In particular, Lycan’s premises 2, 3, and 4b, and the other principles (B1–B6, K1–K3) of the more general view of knowledge and belief with which they cohere, are ripe for reformulation in various ways in response to standard paradoxes and counterexamples. In this paper I have aimed only at the most general possible defense of minimalism from Lycan’s objection.

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Department of Philosophy
 University of the Witwatersrand,
 Private Bag 3, WITS 2050
 Johannesburg, South Africa
 E-mail: martensd@social.wits.ac.za

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