

## Epistemic means and ends: a reply to Hofmann

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**Abstract** How is epistemic justification related to knowledge? Is it, as widely thought, constitutive of knowledge? Is it merely a means to knowledge, or merely a means to something else, such as truth? In a recent article in this journal, Hofmann (2005, *Synthese*, 146(3), 357–369) addresses these questions in attempting to defend an important argument articulated by Sartwell (1992, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 89(4), 167–180) and reconstructed and criticized by Le Morvan (2002, *Erkenntnis: An International Journal of Analytic Philosophy*, 56(2), 151–168). This Sartwellian argument purported to show that, since epistemic justification is of merely instrumental value, it is not constitutive of knowledge. In this paper, I argue that Hofmann's defense of Sartwell fails, but that its failure brings to light some important lessons concerning the nature of justification and its relationship to truth and knowledge.

**Keywords** Knowledge · Epistemic justification · Truth · Sartwell · Le Morvan

*Meno*: I admit the cogency of your argument, and therefore, Socrates, I wonder that knowledge should be preferred to right opinion – or why they should ever differ.

*Socrates*: And shall I explain this wonder to you?

*Meno*: Do tell me.

*Socrates*: You would not wonder if you had ever observed the images of Daedalus; but perhaps you have not got them in your country?

*Meno*: What have they to do with the question?

*Socrates*: Because they require to be fastened in order to keep them, and if they are not fastened they will play truant and run away.

*Meno*: Well, what of that?

*Socrates*: I mean to say that they are not very valuable possessions if they are at liberty, for they will walk off like runaway slaves; but when fastened, they are of great value, for they are really beautiful works of art. Now this is an illustration of the nature of true

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opinions: while they abide with us they are beautiful and fruitful, but they run away out of the human soul, and do not remain long, and therefore they are not of much value until they are fastened by the tie of the cause; and this fastening of them, friend Meno, is recollection, as you and I have agreed to call it. But when they are bound, in the first place, they have the nature of knowledge; and, in the second place, they are abiding. And this is why knowledge is more honourable and excellent than true opinion, because fastened by a chain.

—Plato, *Meno* (96b-100d)

## 1 Introduction

How is epistemic justification related to knowledge? Is it, as widely thought, constitutive of knowledge? Is it merely a means to knowledge, or a means to something else, such as truth? In a recent article in this journal, [Hofmann \(2005\)](#) makes a valuable contribution to the discussion of these questions and to a debate that goes to the heart of epistemology. This debate concerns whether true belief suffices for propositional knowledge (hereafter “knowledge” for short).<sup>1</sup> Although there is little consensus in contemporary epistemology over what does suffice for knowledge, there is near-consensus concerning what I call the “Insufficiency Thesis”: that mere true belief does not suffice for knowledge.<sup>2</sup> A noteworthy minority of epistemologists, however, have argued for the opposite position, one that [Lycan \(1994\)](#) once labeled “antiSocratic and outrageous.”<sup>3</sup> This position we may call the “Sufficiency Thesis”: that knowledge amounts to nothing more than true belief.

The most influential member of this minority has been [Sartwell \(1991, 1992\)](#) who has argued quite ingeniously and provocatively for the Sufficiency Thesis. Coming to the defense of the Insufficiency Thesis in [Le Morvan \(2002\)](#) I offered a rebuttal of Sartwell’s case. Hofmann has now entered the fray, forcefully arguing that I failed to defeat a central argument of Sartwell’s. If Hofmann is correct, this argument of Sartwell’s stands, and by implication, the Insufficiency Thesis has been refuted, however widely held or presupposed it may be.

<sup>1</sup> Not all knowledge need be propositional (as in *S* knows that *p* where *p* is some proposition) as there can be objectual knowledge as well (as in *S* knows *o* where *o* is some object), and ability knowledge (as in *S* knows how to *A* where *A* is some activity). The relevant kind of knowledge for the purposes of this paper, however, is propositional knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> Though proponents of the Insufficiency Thesis agree that true belief does not suffice for knowledge, there are three main schools of thought concerning what does suffice for knowledge. Adherents of the so-called “traditional” conception of knowledge hold that knowledge is not merely true belief, but rather true justified belief (with a codicil for Gettier). Another school of thought holds that while justification is not necessary for knowledge, true belief is not sufficient either: knowledge is true belief which satisfies some additional requirement. Yet another school of thought holds that knowledge is not analyzable as true belief. Thus though the Sufficiency Thesis and the Insufficiency Theses are contradictory, the Sufficiency Thesis and the True Justified Belief=Knowledge version of the Insufficiency Thesis are merely contraries. Sartwell often seems to miss this distinction.

<sup>3</sup> [Sartwell \(1991, 1992\)](#) and [Skidmore \(1993, 1997\)](#) have clearly endorsed the Sufficiency Thesis. Others have argued for views related to it. [Goldman \(1999, 2002a,b\)](#) has argued that there is a sense of ‘knowledge’ according to which it amounts to true belief. He does not argue, however, that mere true belief is the only kind of knowledge. (For a critical discussion of Goldman’s views, see [Le Morvan \(2005\)](#)). [Beckermann \(2001, 1997\)](#) and [Von Kutschera \(1982\)](#) agree with Sartwell insofar as they regard truth (or true belief) to be the *telos* of inquiry and as incoherent the concept of knowledge as true justified belief. In fact, [Von Kutschera \(1982\)](#) arrived at these views before, and independently of, Sartwell. Beckermann and von Kutschera, however, do not identify the *telos* of inquiry with knowledge, and unlike Sartwell reject the concept of knowledge altogether.

Hofmann's case has the great merit of forcing defenders of the Insufficiency Thesis to clarify what exactly is wrong with a central argument of Sartwell's. The aim of this paper is to do precisely that, by focusing on Hofmann's valuable reconstruction and defense of it. What will emerge from this discussion are important lessons concerning the nature of justification and its relationship to truth and knowledge.

But first let us situate ourselves. In Sect. 2, I review the Sartwellian argument Hofmann aims to reconstruct and defend, and my criticism of it. In Sect. 3, I explain and critically examine Hofmann's attempt to reconstruct and defend the argument against my criticisms. In Sect. 4, I conclude with some conspective remarks.

## 2 A central Sartwellian argument and my criticism

Sartwell's original case for the Sufficiency Thesis and against the Insufficiency Thesis had four main elements. He endeavored to show that (i) various counter-examples do not refute the Sufficiency Thesis, (ii) there are counter-examples to the widely-held conception of knowledge as justified true belief (with a codicil for Gettier), (iii) the Sufficiency Thesis enjoys advantages over this conception of knowledge, and (iv) there are arguments (which he claims are based on considerations adduced by such prominent epistemologists as William Alston, Laurence Bonjour, Alvin Goldman, and Paul Moser) that should lead us to prefer the Sufficiency Thesis to this conception of knowledge.

In defending the Insufficiency Thesis in [Le Morvan \(2002\)](#) I offered a rebuttal of each of (i) to (iv). Hofmann, however, nowhere addresses my case against (i) to (iii). This is probably because Hofmann himself *rejects* some central claims of Sartwell's. He rejects, for instance, Sartwell's taking knowledge to be the *telos* (or end, goal or purpose) of inquiry, and claims instead that truth, and not knowledge, is the *telos*. In any case, Hofmann only claims to be defending some Sartwellian claims (or *insights* as he put it), not all of them. In particular, he aims to defend the Sartwellian notion that justification is of merely instrumental value.

Be that as it may, Hofmann focuses on (iv), namely, Sartwell's arguments that we should prefer the Sufficiency Thesis to the conception of knowledge as justified true belief. I reconstructed three such arguments. The third Hofmann does not refute, apart from claiming it is "softer" than the first two, and claiming that for reasons of brevity he will not address it (p. 359). The two reconstructed Sartwellian arguments that Hofmann does address, [Le Morvan \(2002\)](#), pp. 160–161) summarized as follows:

### The Instrumentality Argument

*First premise.* Knowledge is (identical to) the *telos* of inquiry.

*Second premise.* Epistemic justification is conducive (merely as a means) to knowledge.

*Third premise.* It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build into the definition of the *telos* of inquiry anything that is conducive (merely as a means) to it.

*Conclusion.* It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build epistemic justification into the definition of knowledge.

### The Criterion Argument

*First premise.* Knowledge is (identical to) the *telos* of inquiry.

*Second premise.* Having epistemic justification for beliefs is a criterion for whether they are knowledge.

*Third premise.* It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build into the definition of the *telos* of inquiry any criterion of it.

*Conclusion.* It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build epistemic justification into the definition of knowledge.

In the first premise of both these arguments, Sartwell uncontroversially took knowledge to be the end or purpose (the *telos*) of inquiry.<sup>4</sup> What was ingenious and provocative about these arguments was how he reasoned from this premise conjoined with the second and third to the conclusion that it is not necessary (or is even incoherent) to build epistemic justification into the definition of knowledge.

After mentioning that the Criterion Argument is structurally similar to the Instrumentality Argument, and that his response should apply to it as well, Hofmann proceeds to focus his critical discussion on the latter. In so doing, Hofmann endeavors to show that, by misconstruing Sartwell's position, my criticisms fail to refute Sartwell's argument properly-construed.

What were these criticisms? In criticizing the Instrumentality Argument, I argued that two kinds of conducivity need to be distinguished, which I called *extrinsic conducivity* and *intrinsic conducivity* respectively.  $X$  is extrinsically conducive to  $Y$  if and only if  $X$  is a means to  $Y$  but is not constitutive of  $Y$ .<sup>5</sup>  $X$  is intrinsically conducive to  $Y$  if and only if  $X$  is both a means to  $Y$  and is constitutive of  $Y$ .<sup>6</sup>

Wielding this distinction, I criticized the argument as follows:

If 'conductive' is read in the sense of extrinsic conducivity, Sartwell's second premise turns out to be question-begging, for he is presupposing what he purports to prove, namely, that epistemic justification is not constitutive of knowledge. But if 'conductive' is read in the sense of intrinsic conducivity, then the second premise conflicts with the third premise and the conclusion, for if epistemic justification is constitutive of knowledge, then it is necessary and coherent to build it into the definition of knowledge. Either way, the argument turns out to be unconvincing. (2002, p. 162)

I also pointed out that Sartwell and his defenders might protest that when he uses 'conductive' in his second and third premises, he is using it in the same sense as those epistemologists whom he quotes (Alston, BonJour, Goldman, and Moser) who claim that epistemic justification must be truth-conducive, and so he is not really begging any question (p. 162). Though doubting the exegetical accuracy of this claim, I granted it for the sake of argument. Even so, I countered that the argument would at best constitute a circumstantial *ad hominem* against those who hold the true justified belief conception of knowledge *and* also hold that epistemic justification is only extrinsically conducive to knowledge. It would not, however, constitute a compelling argument against the true justified belief conception of knowledge *per se* (p. 162).

Having now reviewed my criticism of the Instrumentality Argument I attributed to Sartwell, I will next consider Hofmann's attempt to rebut this criticism. My aim in doing so is not to engage in an exegetical quarrel with Hofmann concerning what Sartwell "really" had

<sup>4</sup> More specifically, he regarded this as the goal of inquiry with regard to particular propositions. He contrasted this with wider-ranging goals such as rationality.

<sup>5</sup> As an example of extrinsic conducivity, I deployed Skidmore's (1993, p. 72) example of the use of road maps on an automobile journey to accomplish our goal of arriving at our destination. The use of road maps here is extrinsically conducive to our goal of arriving at our destination because it is a means to that goal without being constitutive of that goal.

<sup>6</sup> To illustrate intrinsic conducivity, I gave among others the example of an Aristotelian theory of the good life according to which having close friendships is an integral constituent (among others) of the good life. According to such a theory, having close friendships is intrinsically conducive to the good life by not only being a means to it but by being (partly) constitutive of it.

in mind even though I harbor doubts that Hofmann's exegesis is correct.<sup>7</sup> I will assume for the sake of argument that Hofmann's reading of Sartwell's intentions is correct, but will also argue that, even on this basis, the argument Hofmann attributes to Sartwell does not defeat the Insufficiency Thesis (or establish the Sufficiency Thesis).

### 3 A critical examination of Hofmann's rebuttal

According to Hofmann, Sartwell is not committed to the Instrumentality Argument, for his argument properly-construed differs from it in subtle, but real and important ways. In particular, he thinks that the Instrumentality Argument's second and third premises do not properly represent Sartwell's argument. In what follows, I will critically examine Hofmann's rejection of the Instrumentality Argument in favor of what he calls Sartwell's *Conducivity Argument*, and his rejection of the notion of intrinsically conducive means.

#### 3.1 Hofmann on the instrumentality and conducivity arguments

Though he himself takes truth and not knowledge to be the *telos* of inquiry, Hofmann grants that the first premise of the Instrumentality Argument correctly represents Sartwell's intentions. He contends that this is not the case, however, with the second and third premises, and that a fourth premise is needed as well.

Recall that the second premise of the Instrumentality Argument that I attribute to Sartwell went as follows:

- (2) Epistemic justification is conducive (merely as a means) to knowledge.

On Hofmann's reading, by contrast, Sartwell's second premise properly construed is not concerned with knowledge but rather with the relationship between justification and truth. So it should read as follows:

- (2') Epistemic justification is extrinsically conducive to truth (and so is not constitutive of truth). (Hofmann, p. 361)

According to Hofmann, what Sartwell has in mind with regard to truth conducivity is clearly extrinsic conducivity on the supposition that justification is not constitutive of truth; if so, he thinks, the second premise is simply concerned with the instrumental relation between justification and truth, and is not question-begging.<sup>8</sup> (p. 361)

In this connection, let's consider the rest of Sartwell's central argument. Hofmann contends that I also misconstrue this argument by attributing to Sartwell the following premise:

- (3) It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build into the definition of the *telos* of inquiry anything that is conducive (merely as a means) to it.

<sup>7</sup> To give but one example, Hofmann reads Sartwell in passages such as this "It is incoherent to build a specification of something regarded merely as a means of achieving some goal into the description of the goal itself" (1992, p. 174) as distinguishing between two goals: some goal = the goal of justification, and the goal = *telos* of inquiry. But I think this reading is incorrect, for in this sentence construction the same goal is being referred to twice.

<sup>8</sup> This is marked, he thinks, by Sartwell's frequent use of the adjective 'merely' in connection with justification's role as a means to achieving truth.

Instead, Hofmann (p. 362) urges that we should read Sartwell as offering the following premise:

- (3') If something, X, is (at least) part of the *telos*, and something else, Y, is merely (extrinsically) a means for achieving X, then Y should not be built into the definition of the *telos*.

Why (3') and not (3)? Well, for Sartwell, knowledge is the *telos* of inquiry, and it is “incoherent to build a specification of something regarded merely as a means of achieving some goal into the description of the goal itself; in such circumstances, the goal can be described independently of the means. So, if justification is demanded because it is instrumental to true belief, it cannot also be maintained that knowledge is justified true belief.” (1992, p. 174) Hofmann claims that Sartwell here distinguishes: (a) the goal of truth to which justification is a means (an extrinsic, mere, means), and (b) the overall epistemic *telos* or goal of inquiry. What is the relationship between (a) and (b)? According to Hofmann,

[I]t is quite clear from the context what the relation must be like. For it is clearly assumed in Sartwell's discussion that truth is at least part of the overall *telos* of inquiry. And there is nothing objectionable or incoherent about that, since truth is accepted as (at least) being a part of knowledge, and knowledge is taken as being the *telos*. It is no issue of the debate whether truth is part of the *telos* or not; the only question of the debate is whether anything else besides truth belongs to the *telos*. If we conceive of the argumentative situation in this way, it becomes clear what exactly it is that the searched for principle prescribes: nothing which is merely a means for achieving something that is (at least) part of our *telos* should be built into the *telos*. The ‘something’ that is part of our *telos* is truth, and justification is merely a means for achieving it. Therefore, applying the principle to our case at hand yields the result that justification should not be built into the definition of the *telos*. The principle is, as it were, concerned with possible extensions of the *telos*. If we know already that X is (at least) part of the *telos*, what are we to say about a further candidate, Y? This is the situation to which the principle speaks. And the principle tells us to not take this candidate Y as a further part of the *telos* if Y is merely a means to X. (p. 362)

To complete the argument and to make an assumption explicit, we need to add, according to Hofmann (p. 362), a fourth premise:

- (4) Truth is (at least) part of the *telos* of inquiry.

And this gives us, on Hofmann's reading, the correct formulation of Sartwell's central argument which he dubs *Sartwell's Conducivity Argument*:

(SA) *Sartwell's Conducivity Argument*

- (1) Knowledge is (identical to) the *telos* of inquiry.  
 (2') Epistemic justification is extrinsically conducive to truth (and so is not constitutive of truth).  
 (3') If something, X, is (at least) part of the *telos*, and something else, Y, is merely (extrinsically) a means for achieving X, then it is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build Y into the definition of the *telos*.  
 (4) Truth is (at least) part of the *telos* of inquiry.  
 (C) It is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build epistemic justification into the definition of knowledge. (Hofmann, p. 363)

Thus, Hofmann concludes, Sartwell's argument escapes the dilemma that I had posed for the Instrumentality Argument, there is no ambiguity about the kind of conducivity at stake (justification is only extrinsically conducive to truth and not to knowledge), and the question that remains is whether (or the circumstances under which) premise (3') is correct. To this he turns next.

Before we consider his defense of (3'), let's pause to consider what we are to make of this argument. Notice that, even on the supposition that Hofmann has correctly represented Sartwell's intentions, the argument is either unsound or question-begging. To see why, consider the following.

Let's suppose for the sake of argument that (2') is indeed Sartwell's second premise. Let's also grant that justification is not constitutive of truth. Granting all this, (2') can be read or interpreted in two distinct ways in connection with the debate concerning the Sufficiency and Insufficiency Theses. I will call these two readings the *inclusive* and *exclusive* readings respectively.

On the inclusive reading, (2') amounts to:

(2')a Epistemic justification is extrinsically conducive to truth (and so not constitutive of truth) *where this is read or interpreted as leaving open whether justification is ALSO constitutive of knowledge.*

By contrast, on the exclusive reading, (2') amounts to:

(2')b Epistemic justification is extrinsically conducive to truth (and so not constitutive of truth) *where this is read or interpreted as implying that justification is NOT ALSO constitutive of knowledge.*

(2')a is not question-begging if it is agreed on all hands that justification is not constitutive of truth, but (2')b is question-begging with regard to the debate concerning the Sufficiency and Insufficiency Theses for it presupposes the Sufficiency Thesis in implying that justification is not constitutive of knowledge.

While the epistemologists Sartwell quotes (Alston, BonJour, Goldman, and Moser) do indeed seem to be committed to the truth-conducivity of justification and so to (2')a, none of them are committed, at least explicitly, in the works he quotes to (2')b. In fact, they all reject the Sufficiency Thesis.<sup>9</sup>

Even if they are not explicitly committed to (2')b, could they be implicitly committed to it? This would be the case if (i) justification's truth-conducivity entails or implies that (ii) justification cannot also be constitutive of knowledge. For if (i) entails or implies (ii), then those who accept (i) *ought* to accept (ii) as well on pain of incoherence. But that (i) entails or implies (ii) cannot simply be assumed, it's a substantive claim that needs to be argued for.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> BonJour (1985) writes that "in order for Person A to know that P, where P is some proposition, three conditions must be satisfied: (1) A must believe confidently that P, (2) P must be true, and (3) A's belief that P must be adequately justified." (p. 4) He adds, moreover, that the "distinguishing characteristic of epistemic justification is . . . its essential relation to the cognitive goal of truth. It follows that one's epistemic endeavors are epistemically justified only if and to the extent that they are all aimed at this goal, which means very roughly that one accepts all and only those beliefs which one has good reason to think are true" (p. 8). Moser (1985) writes: "Unlike true belief, propositional knowledge excludes what is merely coincidental truth from the knower's perspective, such as lucky guesswork and correct wishful thinking. . . . propositional knowledge requires some sort of evidential justification. On my view, evidential justification is epistemic justification" (p. 5). Goldman (1986) writes: "true belief is not sufficient for knowledge, at least not in the strict sense of 'know'. If it is just accidental that you are right that p, then you do not know that p, even if you are correct in believing it" (p. 42). Though Sartwell cited essays from Alston's *Epistemic Justification*, he nowhere cites the article "Justification and Knowledge" where Alston, though rejecting the idea that justification is necessary for knowledge, also rejects the idea that true belief suffices.

<sup>10</sup> This claim I shall argue later is false.

As we shall see, however, Hofmann (and Sartwell on Hofmann's reading) fail to distinguish (i) and (ii), or (2')a and (2')b, and accordingly the Conducivity Argument Hofmann attributes to Sartwell turns out to be either question-begging or unsound.

This can be seen by considering premise (3'). If premise (2') is read as (2')b, then the consequent of (3') logically follows from its antecedent. That is, given the tacit assumption made by Hofmann (and Sartwell) that what is not constitutive of knowledge should not be built into its definition, the unnecessary (or incoherence) of building justification into the definition of knowledge logically follows from justification's being merely extrinsically conducive to truth but not knowledge and truth's being constitutive of knowledge. But if (2') is read as (2')a, the argument is question-begging insofar as the argument presupposes what the argument is trying to show. For if we presuppose that epistemic justification is extrinsically conducive to truth *and is ALSO NOT constitutive of knowledge*, then of course it is not necessary (or it is incoherent) to build epistemic justification into the definition of knowledge (the *telos* of inquiry). For to presuppose that justification is not constitutive of knowledge is in effect to presuppose that it should not be built into the definition of knowledge on the tacit implicit assumption noted above.

By contrast, if (2') is read as (2')a, the argument is not question-begging, since it does not presuppose the conclusion of the argument. But in this case the argument is unsound, for the consequent of (3') does not follow from the antecedent. This is because, if it remains an open question whether justification is ALSO constitutive of knowledge, then the non-necessity (or incoherence) of building justification into the definition of knowledge does not logically follow from justification's being extrinsically conducive to truth and truth's being constitutive of knowledge. For if it remains an open question whether justification is ALSO constitutive of knowledge, *we cannot conclude that it should not be*.

In fact, premise (3') can be shown to instantiate a general principle that is demonstrably false. Recall that it claims that if something, X, is (at least) part of a *telos*, and something else, Y, is merely (extrinsically) a means for achieving X, then it is not necessary (stronger version: it is incoherent) to build Y into the definition of the *telos*. This premise is an instance of a general principle that may be put as follows: if X is a part of Z, and Y is conducive to, but not a part of, X, then Y is not a part of Z. (Premise (3') is just an application of this more general principle to the definition of a *telos*, with the presupposition that only what is part of a *telos* should be included in its definition.) To show that this general principle is false, all we need to do is to give counter-examples where all the following can be true at the same time:

X is part of Z.

Y is part of Z.

Y is conducive to, but not part of, X.

Many counter-examples come to mind. In the interests of space, I will restrict myself to two that I call the "Armed Forces Example" and the "Trilogy Example."

*The Armed Forces Example:* Suppose your goal is the defeat of the armed forces of an enemy country, where its armed forces are defined as its army, navy, and air force. Let Z = this goal, let X = the defeat of its army, and let Y = the defeat of its air force. Clearly, X and Y are both part of Z. Though Y is not part of X since they're distinct, Y is nonetheless conducive to X, since air superiority may facilitate the defeat of the enemy's army (and/or navy).

*The Trilogy Example:* Suppose your goal is to complete a trilogy. Let Z = this goal, let X = the completion of one of the books in the trilogy, and let Y = the completion of another book in the trilogy. Clearly once again, X and Y are both part of Z. Though Y is not part of X since they're distinct, Y is nonetheless conducive to X, since the completion of a book in a trilogy may facilitate the completion of another.



It is thus clear that the general principle instanced in premise (3') of the Conducivity Argument that Hofmann attributes to Sartwell (on the inclusive reading of the second premise) is false.

To sum up: the second premise of the Conducivity Argument that Hofmann attributes to Sartwell admits of both an inclusive and an exclusive reading. On the exclusive reading, the argument is question-begging. On the inclusive reading, the argument is unsound, as the third premise is false. Either way, it fails to provide us with compelling reasoning for the conclusion that it is unnecessary (or incoherent) to build justification into the definition of knowledge. Moreover, nothing in the reasoning provided by the Conducivity Argument establishes that (i) justification's truth-conducivity entails that (ii) justification cannot also be constitutive of knowledge. In fact, as we saw on one reading, this entailment is actually presupposed and not independently argued for; as we saw on another, the entailment does not obtain.

Does Hofmann's Sartwell provide us reasoning elsewhere to establish that (i) entails or implies (ii)? To this question we turn next, as we consider Hofmann's discussion of intrinsically conducive means, a discussion he thinks supports premise (3').<sup>11</sup>

### 3.2 Hofmann on intrinsically conducive means

Recall that in [Le Morvan \(2002\)](#) I distinguished between *extrinsic conducivity* and *intrinsic conducivity* respectively. *X* is extrinsically conducive to *Y* if and only if *X* is a means to *Y* but is not constitutive of *Y*. *X* is intrinsically conducive to *Y* if and only if *X* is both a means to *Y* and is constitutive of *Y*. In the Conducivity Argument we just considered, the only kind of conducivity mentioned was the extrinsic conducivity of justification to truth. But what about the possibility of the intrinsic conducivity of justification to knowledge?

According to Hofmann, Sartwell implicitly argued against the possibility of the intrinsic conducivity of justification to knowledge in his discussion of the possibility of there being multiple goals of inquiry; that is, justification could be valuable in three possible ways: "(i) justification could be merely a means for achieving the *telos* of inquiry; (ii) justification could be a means for achieving some other, nonepistemic goal (e.g., successful adaptation); and (iii) justification could itself be an intrinsic epistemic goal" (p. 363). Hofmann thinks that (ii) is irrelevant to the discussion of epistemic means and ends, and infers that only (i) and (iii) remain: justification is extrinsically valuable, or it is valuable in itself. Hofmann notes that (i) and (iii) are not mutually exclusive, because in principle "justification could be valuable twice over, as a means to truth and as a goal in itself" (p. 363).

Before proceeding further, notice that Hofmann (and Sartwell on his reading) fails to consider another possibility, namely, that justification's epistemic value could stem from two

<sup>11</sup> A reviewer for this journal raised the following challenge: "A crucial question is what status premise (3') has. The author assumes that Hofmann takes it to be a logical implication, and he/she criticizes Hofmann on the ground that 'the consequent of (3') does not follow from the antecedent' (p. 14). But it is not clear that (3') is supposed to be such a logical truth. It might simply be an interesting, non-trivial truth, a plausible 'methodological' principle; it need not be thought of as a logical truth. The question of whether (3') is true is not settled merely by pointing out that it is not a logical truth". My response is that I don't treat (3') as if Hofmann takes it to be a logical truth. Consider the following conditional that is clearly not a logical truth: If you eat this mushroom, then you will die. To show this conditional is false is to show that the consequent does not follow from the antecedent; in other words, that it is possible for the antecedent to be true and for the consequent to be false. Arguing that a conditional advanced by someone is false does not entail that one takes him or her to regard it as a logical truth. Moreover, premise (3') is put forward by Hofmann (or Sartwell on Hofmann's reading) as a conditional, and to validly derive the conclusion of the Conducivity Argument, it must be treated as such. What I show is that the premise is false, because, as a conditional, the consequent does not follow from the antecedent.

functional roles: in one role as being extrinsically conducive to truth, and in another role as being constitutive of knowledge. The notion of justification's being intrinsically conducive to knowledge *does not entail that justification is itself intrinsically valuable*; its epistemic value may be derivative from its roles mentioned above. When 'intrinsically' is used in the expression 'intrinsically valuable' it means "independently" or "not dependent on something else". But 'intrinsically' in 'intrinsically conducive' means "constitutively" or "inherently," and these are conceptually distinct notions from that of independence. This distinction will prove very important as we will later see Hofmann misconstrue justification's intrinsic conducivity to knowledge as nonsensically entailing its being intrinsically valuable. For now, though, I will proceed as if Hofmann (and Sartwell) were right that options (i) and (iii) were indeed the only available options, and will show that even so he fails to provide a sound argument.

Returning to Hofmann's reasoning, he claims that the Conducivity Argument has already ruled out the first option (i.e., that justification could be merely a means for achieving the *telos* of inquiry). We saw above, however, that this argument was unconvincing.

As for the third option, Hofmann contends that if justification is valuable in itself and is also constitutive of knowledge, "then knowledge becomes an incoherent notion" (p. 364). Why? Because of what Hofmann, building on Sartwell, calls the *coordination problem*: if both justification and truth are constitutive of knowledge and both are intrinsically valuable, "knowledge then gives us two goals for inquiry—justification and truth—of which it is by no means guaranteed that they can always be realized simultaneously. And there are reasons for believing that they cannot be always realized simultaneously" (p. 364).

Hofmann notes that justification and truth will be realized simultaneously on what he calls a "maximal conception" of justification where justification entails truth, say on a conclusive grounds conception of justification (pp. 364–365). Though Sartwell does not take this possibility into account, Hofmann doubts that it was this possibility that I had in mind in discussing intrinsic conducivity, since I did not argue against Sartwell's claim that knowledge is an incoherent notion if justification and truth are both intrinsically valuable and cannot always be realized simultaneously. So Hofmann does not take my notion of intrinsic conducivity to involve the notion of maximal justification.

Returning to the Conducivity Argument, Hofmann acknowledges that it does not take intrinsic conducivity into account, and that it presupposes that justification is not valuable in itself (p. 365). He notes that premise (3') is only correct on this presupposition (p. 365). Even if this presupposition turns out to be false, however, Hofmann thinks the coordination problem gives us another argument for thinking that the notion of knowledge is incoherent if justification and truth are both taken to be intrinsically valuable and constitutive of knowledge (p. 365).

What then is this argument? As Hofmann does not spell it out, I will reconstruct it here. Let's call this argument the *Coordination Argument*. Its reasoning appears to amount to this:

*The Coordination Argument*

- (1) Suppose that justification and truth are both constitutive of knowledge and so both are intrinsically valuable.
- (2) If so, then this notion of knowledge encompasses (at least) two goals: justification and truth.
- (3) In order for this notion of knowledge to be coherent, the goals of justification and truth must always be realized simultaneously.
- (4) But the goals of justification and truth are not always realized simultaneously.
- (5) Therefore, this notion of knowledge is incoherent.

Let's suppose for the sake of argument that premises (1), (2), and (4) are true. (I shall argue later, however, that the first premise mischaracterizes the position Hofmann aims to refute). Even supposing all this, the argument is not sound, for premise (3) is false. Let me explain.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that you regarded (a) being with your daughter and (b) being with your son as both being intrinsically valuable. It's quite possible that you could realize these goals independently. You could (say) play on the beach with your daughter or ride your bike in the park with your son. It might also be the case that you're sometimes torn between how to satisfy the two goals: for instance, should you play on the beach with your daughter or ride your bike in the park with your son? But suppose you also regarded *being with your children* as intrinsically valuable. Realizing this goal in effect involves realizing two goals simultaneously; put another way, realizing this goal *involves coordinating* two goals. Is this notion incoherent? Not at all. That these two goals can sometimes be realized independently or that they themselves might be regarded as intrinsically valuable does not show that a notion of them being realized simultaneously is incoherent. Or consider this analogy. Oxygen and hydrogen are essential constituents of water. Suppose I value water and want to produce some. If so, I must use oxygen and hydrogen. That I might also value oxygen and hydrogen independently or that oxygen and hydrogen can occur independently of water does not make the notion of water incoherent.

By parity of reasoning, that truth and justification are not always realized simultaneously or that they are both regarded as intrinsically valuable does not render incoherent the notion that justification and truth are both constitutive of knowledge. Premise (3) of the Coordination Argument is false. So the argument is unsound.<sup>12</sup> Once more, Hofmann, or rather Hofmann's Sartwell, has failed to provide us a good argument for rejecting the idea that justification is constitutive of knowledge. And this is the case even if we assume something implied by the first premise, namely that justification and truth are both intrinsically valuable. Moreover, nothing Hofmann (or Sartwell) has provided shows that premise (3') of the Conducivity Argument is correct.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Note that the water and son-daughter analogies suggest something applicable to the knowledge case. Even if I value both hydrogen and oxygen, I might value water for some property(ies) that its constituents do not have by themselves (say, drinkability). Similarly, even if I value spending time with my daughter and spending time with my son, I might value spending time with both of them for some property(ies) that its constituents do not have by themselves (say, interaction with both of them in play). Similarly, even if I value true belief and justification independently of each other, I might value knowledge for some property(ies) that its constituents do not have by themselves (e.g., being a true belief whose connection to truth is secure or stable).

<sup>13</sup> A reviewer of this journal points out the following: "One should keep in mind that we are looking for a notion (of knowledge) which is supposed to designate the *telos* of inquiry. If truth and justification are each intrinsically valuable and not 'coordinated', then, intuitively, it seems that the conjunctive notion of knowledge (as justified true belief) is not apt for playing the role of our notion of the *telos* of inquiry. Rather, the right way to describe the situation would be to say that there is no one *telos* of inquiry but only a plurality of (intrinsic) goals." In response, let me say this. As suggested by my daughter-son and water analogies which involve coordinating two goals, knowledge *is* a coordination of true belief and justification. That true belief and justification are not always coordinated, or that they can occur or be valuable independently of each other, does not show that the notion of knowledge as the *telos* of inquiry is incoherent. Analogously, just because oxygen and hydrogen can occur and be valuable independently of each other, it does not follow that the notion of water is incoherent. It should be remembered here that it was Sartwell who claimed that knowledge is the *telos* of inquiry, and who claimed on this basis that the *telos* of inquiry cannot be true justified belief. What I have sought to show in this paper is that he (even on Hofmann's reading) in no way establishes that knowledge is merely true belief or that the *telos* of inquiry is merely true belief even if we suppose that knowledge is the *telos* of inquiry. I myself am quite comfortable with the idea that having beliefs that are justified is better than having beliefs that are unjustified, and that having beliefs that are true is better than having beliefs that are false. But knowledge, it seems to me (see the conclusion of the paper), is better than true belief alone

But there is an even deeper mistake in the argument. It is contained in the first premise which assumes that if justification and truth are constitutive of knowledge, they are both intrinsically valuable. As we noted earlier, the notion of justification's being intrinsically conducive to knowledge *does not entail that justification is itself intrinsically valuable*; its epistemic value may be derivative from other functional roles, including that of being constitutive of knowledge. Consider, in this light, the following tweak on a previous analogy. Suppose I value water above all else, and want to create some. To this end, I have to use oxygen and hydrogen. Even if I value hydrogen only insofar as it is conducive to my end of creating water, it does not follow that hydrogen is not constitutive of water. (Hydrogen, moreover, might have other roles). Hydrogen's *being constitutive* of water in no way entails its being *intrinsically valuable*; conversely, hydrogen's *not being intrinsically valuable* does not entail its *not being constitutive* of water. Similarly, justification's *being constitutive* of knowledge (or truth for that matter) in no way entails its being *intrinsically valuable*; conversely, its *not being intrinsically valuable* does not entail its *not being constitutive* of knowledge. Thus, the first premise of the Coordination Argument fundamentally mischaracterizes the position it aims to refute.

To be sure, as a reviewer of this paper has pointed out, premise (1) can be recast as the following weaker premise:

- (1') Suppose that justification and truth are both constitutive of knowledge and are each intrinsically valuable.

So recast, this weaker premise sidesteps the issue of whether justification and truth's being constitutive of knowledge entails that each is intrinsically valuable. Whether this truly represents Sartwell's or Hofmann's intentions is an exegetical question I shan't pursue. Suffice it to say that, even so, it remains that premise (3) of the argument is false and the Coordination Argument is unsound, and the points I raised in criticism of the stronger premise (1) apply to Hofmann's final charge.

So let's now consider this final charge. He claims that the notion of intrinsically conducive means is "quite useless," for it is "either incoherent or superfluous" (p. 365). He goes on at length to argue for this charge, but we needn't explore the details of his reasoning here because it is all predicated on a fundamentally mistaken premise. To wit: Hofmann contends that intrinsically conducive means

will be of interest only if something is not just a means to some end, but is also intrinsically valuable. Applied to our epistemological case, this means that we have to consider the possibility that justification is valuable in itself (and not just a means to truth). So in the following discussion of the notion of 'intrinsically conducive means' we will always suppose that justification is valuable in itself. (p. 365)

But this supposition is false. Hofmann's reasoning for the "uselessness" or "incoherence" or "superfluity" of intrinsically conducive means is crucially predicated on his mistaken assumption that justification's not being intrinsically valuable entails its not being constitutive of knowledge. In this, he recapitulates his (and Sartwell's on his reading) fundamental mistake in arguing for the rejection of the intrinsic conducivity of justification to knowledge and by implication the Insufficiency Thesis. In the end, neither Hofmann nor Sartwell succeed in providing any good reasons for this rejection.

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Footnote 13 continued

(or justified belief alone for that matter), and knowledge is a more appropriate *telos* of inquiry than true belief alone (or justified belief alone). As I have sought to show in this paper, even if X and Y are each intrinsically valuable, they may still be constituents of an overarching intrinsically valuable Z.

#### 4 Some conspictive remarks

Despite Hofmann and Sartwell's failure to provide a sound case against the Insufficiency Thesis, their case does provide a valuable service to epistemology. How? By demonstrating that defenders of the Insufficiency Thesis need to be a lot clearer when it comes to specifying the relationship between two relationships: (i) justification's relationship to truth, and (ii) justification's relationship to knowledge. In particular, an important lesson we may garner from our discussion is that those who hold that justification is constitutive of knowledge need to more clearly and explicitly distinguish the question of whether justification is intrinsically valuable (or not) from the question of whether it is constitutive of knowledge (or not). Our discussion has also shown that even if truth and justification are both regarded as intrinsically valuable, it does not follow that they cannot both be constitutive of knowledge.

It's also worth bearing in mind that although the Insufficiency and Sufficiency Theses are contradictories, the conception of knowledge as true justified belief and the Sufficiency Thesis are merely contraries. Thus, even if Hofmann or Sartwell had succeeded in refuting the former by showing that justification is not necessary for knowledge, this would not show that the latter is true (or alternatively that the *telos* of inquiry is merely truth as Hofmann would have it). Why? Because one would still need to refute other versions of the Insufficiency Thesis unaddressed by Hofmann and Sartwell, namely versions of the Insufficiency Thesis that take knowledge to be unanalyzable or that take something other than justification to be constitutive of knowledge in addition to true belief.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, a key point that I raised in [Le Morvan \(2002\)](#) against Sartwell's identification of knowledge with true belief is that it has the highly implausible consequence that "any true belief, no matter how accidentally or irrationally or unreliably formed, counts as knowledge" (p. 153). It's too bad that Hofmann did not address this point, for although he does not think that knowledge is the *telos* of inquiry as does Sartwell, he does think that truth (presumably true belief) is the *telos* of inquiry. Hofmann thus fails to consider an important defeater of his own view. For to accept a thesis requires accepting its consequences, and Hofmann's view has as a consequence that any true belief whatsoever, no matter how accidentally or irrationally or unreliably formed it happens to be, satisfies the *telos* of inquiry. Is *that* really how we want to conceive of the *telos* of inquiry?

As Plato pointed out long ago in the *Meno* (96b–100d), knowledge enjoys a stability (or secure connection to truth) that mere true belief lacks. This stability of knowledge renders it more apt to be the *telos* of inquiry than mere true belief alone.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For a recent defense of the idea that knowledge is unanalyzable, see [Williamson \(2000\)](#). For versions of the Insufficiency Thesis that take something other than justification to be constitutive of knowledge in addition to true belief, see for instance [Alston \(1989\)](#) or [Plantinga \(1993\)](#).

<sup>15</sup> We can, of course, accept this valuable insight without also accepting other Platonic theses such as the account of knowledge as recollection, or knowledge only being possible of the Forms.

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