

“Is Knowledge a Social Kind?”

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Overview

“What is knowledge?” is one of the central questions in epistemology. Answers to this question usually provide a *criterion* for distinguishing between instances of knowledge and instances of other cognitive states (justified belief, true belief, ignorance). This criterion often takes the form of a set of conditions that are supposed to be necessary and sufficient for a cognitive state to be a state of knowledge. There are, of course, well-known difficulties with this project. But there are other types of answer one might give to this question. One might take it to be asking about the *metaphysical status* of knowledge. There are, broadly speaking, three kinds of accounts of the metaphysical status of knowledge:

1. Knowledge is a natural phenomenon. (The ‘natural picture’).
2. Knowledge is a social phenomenon. (The ‘social picture’).
3. Knowledge is normative. (The ‘normative picture’).

The natural picture is most closely associated with Hilary Kornblith (see Kornblith (1999, 2002, 2007)).¹ Kornblith’s view combines two claims. First, knowledge is a natural kind. Second, that epistemology should focus on knowledge (the phenomenon) rather than the concept of knowledge. I am primarily interested in the first claim. Kornblith thinks that knowledge is a cluster of properties that explains evolutionary success and predicts future behaviour. Further, he thinks that natural science has identified these properties, and so tells us what knowledge is.

The social picture is defended by the likes of Robert Brandom (1998, 2000), Martin Kusch (2002) and Michael Williams (2004). At a broad level of generality, these authors defend a similar picture: knowledge arises out of social practices. But there are deep differences between them. Brandom argues that only creatures who can engage in the social practice of giving and asking for reasons can have knowledge. Kusch thinks that knowledge is a social kind and thus something we can study

¹ For other defenders see (Devitt, 1994; Millikan, 1984; Stich, 1993).

using social theory. Williams is interesting in that he defends a social picture of knowledge *ascriptions*, but a kind of deflationism about knowledge itself (see Williams (1991)).

Many epistemologists think that knowledge is normative.² But some versions of the normative picture reduce to the natural or the social picture. Kornblith defends a naturalistic account of epistemic normativity (see Kornblith ((1993), and Kusch defends a social account (see Kusch (2002)). More broadly, many epistemologists reduce epistemic normativity to prudential normativity (e.g. Foley (1987); Laudan (1990a, 1990b); Steglich-Petersen (2011)) or social normativity (e.g. Graham (2015)). The normative picture is distinct from the natural and social pictures only if epistemic normativity is not reducible to these other species of normativity.

Of course, many epistemologists also think that epistemic normativity is a distinctive species of normativity. Take evidentialists, who generally hold that the requirement to proportion one's beliefs to one's evidence is distinctively epistemic.³ But the normative picture of knowledge requires that knowledge itself is distinctively epistemically valuable. Plato's *Meno* outlines the basic problem with holding that knowledge is distinctively epistemically valuable. If it is unclear why knowing how to get to Larissa is more valuable than truly believing how to get to Larissa, it is even harder to see how knowledge could be distinctively valuable, that is, valuable in a way that true belief is not.⁴

I will consider two views in contemporary epistemology that suggest that knowledge is distinctively valuable. The first is virtue epistemology, which (put roughly) holds that knowledge results from the proper exercise of the intellectual virtues (see Greco (2010); Sosa (2007); Zagzebski (1996)). Thus, knowledge is a kind of achievement, and is valuable in the way that achievements are valuable. The second is knowledge first epistemology. Timothy Williamson (2000, 2005) presents a hybrid picture on which knowledge has both natural (e.g. knowledge as a mental state, important in the prediction of behaviour) and normative (e.g. knowledge norm of assertion, belief and practical reasoning) aspects. One can focus on the normative aspect and extract the view that knowledge is a property that plays a range of distinctive normative roles. For instance, it is the norm of assertion, belief and

² But some don't. See, for instance, Kaplan (1985), Kvanvig (2003) and Sylvan (forthcoming).

³ Some defences of evidentialism have a moral flavour (e.g. Clifford (1876)). But most don't.

⁴ There are various ways of dealing with this problem. For a summary see Pritchard & Turri (2014)).

practical reasoning. You are permitted to assert p , believe p or use p in your practical reasoning (if and) only if you know that p . This is arguably a normative picture of knowledge.

This book will defend the social picture. Specifically, it will argue that knowledge is a social kind. It is important to distinguish the view that knowledge is a social kind from the social picture more generally. Some who defend a social picture of knowledge also hold that knowledge is a social kind (Kusch). Others deny that instances of knowledge form a kind at all (Williams).

The central argument is simple:

1. Instances of knowledge form a kind.
2. Knowledge is either a natural, social or normative kind.
3. Knowledge is not a natural kind.
4. Knowledge is not a normative kind.
5. Knowledge is a social kind.

Much of the book will be spent defending these premises. The defence will run as follows. The first section of chapter two will defend the first premise. I will argue that two standard assumptions in epistemology require that instances of knowledge form a kind. That is, they require that there is some sort of unity that instances of knowledge possess that, say, the set of events that happen on a Tuesday lack. The first assumption is that knowledge is a central notion in epistemology. The second assumption is that there is a principled distinction between knowledge and other cognitive states.⁵

The rest of chapter two will defend the second premise. The standard distinction in the literature is between natural and social kinds.⁶ Standard (albeit still controversial) examples of natural kinds include chemical elements and compounds, fundamental particles and biological species. Standard examples of social kinds include money, institutions and presidents. But this seems to ignore a particularly salient option in epistemology, which is that knowledge is distinctively normative. One view of natural kinds is that they are things that participate in laws of nature (see Bird and Tobin

⁵ We need this assumption to make sense of the ‘analysis of knowledge’ debate. For a summary see Ichikawa & Steup (2014).

⁶ Some authors talk about ‘human’ kinds too (e.g. Hacking (1991)). I focus on natural, social and normative kinds because human kinds are plausibly a subset of social kinds.

(2016)). Analogously, normative kinds might be things that participate in norms.⁷ According to a popular view in epistemology, knowledge participates in a number of norms, e.g. of assertion, belief and practical reasoning (see Hawthorne & Stanley (2008); Sutton (2007); Williamson (2000, 2005)). One can read this view as holding that knowledge is a normative kind. So there are three options: knowledge is either a natural, social or normative kind.

Chapter three will defend the third premise. Kornblith is the most prominent defender of the view that knowledge is a natural kind. While there are many objections to this view in the literature, I will focus on the most serious: it can't account for epistemic normativity. Kornblith is aware of this problem, and has tried to deal with it (e.g. Kornblith (1993)). I will argue that this attempt fails. First, it fails on its own terms. It only secures the value of not being *too wrong* about how to achieve one's ends, rather than the value of *knowing* how to achieve one's ends. Second, it is the wrong *kind* of view of epistemic normativity. It sees epistemic normativity as a species of instrumental normativity.

Chapter four will defend the fourth premise. I will focus on Ernest Sosa's (2007, 2009) virtue epistemology, John Hyman's (2015) view that to know is to be able to be guided by the facts and Williamson's knowledge first epistemology, in particular the knowledge norms. I will argue that virtue epistemology fails to secure the distinctive value of knowledge, whereas Hyman fails to show that knowledge (as opposed to some other epistemic state) is the ability to be guided by the facts. Finally, I will argue that defending the knowledge norms requires seeing them as social norms. Thus, the normative picture either fails, or reduces to the social picture.

This central argument has two virtues. First, it animates the question of the metaphysical status of knowledge. The consensus seems to be that Kornblith is wrong. But if the natural picture is wrong, what picture should we put in its place? The social picture is beset by difficulties. Prominent defenders use arguments that, if right, show that animals don't even have beliefs (e.g. Brandom (2000) and Williams (2004)). They also appeal to Wittgensteinian views of meaning that are, at best, controversial (e.g. Kusch (2002)). The normative picture is either no alternative to the natural or

⁷ Just as there are multiple accounts of what a natural kind is, there are multiple accounts of what a normative kind is. This is just one possible account.

social picture, or must posit irreducible epistemic normativity. Considering the alternatives makes the natural picture more attractive. So: why the consensus that Kornblith is wrong?

Second, the central argument makes the case for a social picture of knowledge without controversial assumptions about differences between human and animal cognition or the nature of meaning (that is, so long as my own social kind view eschews such assumptions). Social pictures of knowledge have been saddled with such unnecessary assumptions for too long. If there is a workable alternative to Kornblith's picture, the social picture is it. The aim of my book is to make the case for it.

However, the argument also has a vice. It avoids controversial assumptions only because it makes a negative case for the social picture. Chapter five will present a positive account of knowledge on which it is a social kind, and deal with two objections. The basic idea behind the account is that knowledge is a common or public good, like clean water or a safe environment. A safe environment is an environment that is safe *for us*. Similarly, on the account I defend, knowledge is a sort of cognitive state that we mark because it is important for us. Because we can study the *ways* in which we mark this state in a systematic way, knowledge is a social kind.

Chapter Summary

Here is a summary of the contents of each chapter. As this project is at an early stage, all of this is subject to change.

1. Chapter 1: Three Pictures of Knowledge

This chapter will introduce three broad pictures of the metaphysical status of knowledge. The primary aim is to provide an initial motivation for each picture and some necessary background for the later chapters.

1.1. Knowledge as a Natural Phenomenon

This section will introduce the natural picture. I will base my introduction on the idea of *animal knowledge*. When trying to explain or predict the behaviour of non-human animals we often ascribe beliefs and knowledge to them. For instance: the cat thinks you are unfriendly, the dog is sitting by the door because she knows that I am going to take her for a walk. The natural picture takes such ascriptions literally. Animals can actively investigate their external environments and integrate the

information they get from these investigations with the information they passively receive through their perceptual faculties. Animal knowledge results when these processes function as they should. This picture is then proposed as an account of knowledge more generally. Human knowledge is also a matter of the proper functioning of our perceptual and reasoning capacities.

1.2. Knowledge as a Social Phenomenon

This section will introduce the social picture. I will base my introduction on the idea that there is a crucial distinction between animal knowledge and *human knowledge*. Maybe animal knowledge is a matter of the proper functioning of perceptual and reasoning capacities. But human knowledge requires (human) social practices, for instance the practice of giving and asking for reasons.

I will discuss an ambiguity in the notion of ‘human knowledge’:

- First reading: To talk of ‘human knowledge’ is to talk about the kinds of things humans know and the ways in which they can come to know them.
- Second reading: To talk of ‘human knowledge’ is to talk about a kind of cognitive state that humans have and animals lack.

Clearly, humans know things that (non-human) animals can’t (e.g. advanced mathematics), and have ways of obtaining knowledge that animals lack (e.g. science). But this hardly shows that human knowledge is of a different type to animal knowledge. Defenders of the social picture intend the second reading, not the first. Indeed, they often base their distinction between animal and human knowledge on a more general account of cognition: humans have propositional attitudes; animals don’t (Brandom, Williams).

While I won’t argue the point in any detail, I think it is implausible that animals lack propositional attitudes. I will conclude that it is a requirement on any plausible social picture of knowledge that it not draw such implausible distinctions between animal and human cognition. The defender of the social picture needs to find a way to distinguish between animal and human knowledge without denying that animals can have propositional attitudes.

1.3. Knowledge as Normative

This section will introduce the normative picture. My main aim will be to explain how this picture could differ from the first two pictures. That is, my main aim will be to explain how epistemic normativity could be a distinctive species of normativity. I will take virtue epistemology and the view that knowledge is the norm of assertion, belief and practical reasoning as examples of the normative picture.

1.4. The Central Argument

This section will outline my central argument that knowledge is a social kind. While I will provide some initial motivation for the premises, motivating them properly will take up most of the book.

2. Chapter 2: Knowledge as a Kind

This chapter will do two things. First, it will argue that instances of knowledge form a kind. Second, it will introduce the notions of natural, social and normative kinds. Because the notions of natural and social kinds are contested, I will not try to define what it is for something to be a natural or a social kind. Rather, I will draw up lists of ‘characteristics’ of natural and social kinds.

2.1. Instances of Knowledge Form a Kind

This section will argue that instances of knowledge form a kind. The strategy will be to show that two common assumptions require that knowledge is some sort of kind. The first assumption is that knowledge is a central notion in epistemology. If the instances of knowledge formed some sort of gerrymandered set, it is unclear why knowledge would be of theoretical importance. The second assumption is that there is a principled distinction between knowledge and other cognitive states. If the instances of knowledge did not form a kind, any distinction one might draw between knowledge and other cognitive states would be arbitrary. One can distinguish between events that happen on a Tuesday and other events, but it is unclear what principled reason one could have to do so.

2.2. Natural Kinds

This section will clarify what a natural kind is. The key authors will be Richard Boyd (1988, 1991, 2010), Ian Hacking (1991), Saul Kripke (1980) and Hilary Putnam (1975). I will draw out these ‘characteristics’ of natural kinds:

- Natural kinds as homeostatic property clusters (collections of properties with a kind of stability).
- Natural kinds as permitting inductive inferences.
- Natural kinds as participating in laws of nature.
- Natural kinds as the things postulated in natural science.
- Natural kinds as figuring in *a posteriori* identity claims (e.g. water=H₂O).
- Natural kind terms as rigid designators.

I will argue that, because there is no consensus on what natural kinds are, it makes little sense to fixate on any particular account of natural kinds. I will adopt a ‘safe’ strategy. If I can show that there is no account of natural kinds on which knowledge is a natural kind, I will have shown that knowledge is not a natural kind.

2.3. Social Kinds

This section will clarify what a social kind is. The key authors will be Sally Haslanger (2012), Hacking (1999), Kusch (2002) and John Searle (1995). I will draw out these ‘characteristics’ of social kinds:

- Social kinds as the things postulated in social sciences.
- Social kinds as social statuses.
- Social kinds as public goods.
- Social kinds as joints in social reality.
- Social kind terms as non-rigid designators.

I will argue that, because there is also no consensus on what social kinds are, it makes little sense to fixate on any particular account of social kinds. But I will adopt an ‘ambitious’ strategy. To show that knowledge is a social kind I need to show that it has many of the ‘characteristics’ of social kinds.

2.4. Normative Kinds

This section will clarify what a normative kind is. The basic thought is hopefully intuitive. Natural kinds are meant to reflect structures in the natural world. Social kinds are meant to reflect structures in the social world. If one thinks that the normative realm isn't reducible to the natural or the social, then we can introduce kinds that reflect structures in the normative realm. These are normative kinds. Non-epistemic examples would include properties like moral rightness and goodness. Epistemic examples might include justification and reasonableness.

3. Chapter 3: Knowledge as a Natural Kind

This chapter will argue that knowledge is not a natural kind. Because he is the main proponent of the view, my discussion will focus on Kornblith. But I will provide some relevant background on the general project of naturalised epistemology. My general line is that Kornblith is right that his view stands or falls with the viability of an instrumental account of epistemic normativity, but wrong in thinking that an instrumental account is viable.

3.1. Naturalised Epistemology

This section will give a brief explanation of what naturalised epistemology is, and what the motivations behind it are. I will primarily focus on Quine (1969). The main focus will be on the general worry that naturalised epistemology is hostile to epistemic normativity (e.g. see Kim (1988)). But, using Quine's (1986) idea that epistemology is a kind of 'engineering aimed at truth production', I will explain why the general worry is misplaced.⁸ The question is whether the naturalist's account of epistemic normativity is viable, not whether the naturalist is interested in epistemic normativity.

I may include a discussion of feminist versions of naturalised epistemology. Feminist naturalised epistemologists follow Quine in taking science to be an integral part of epistemological theorising, but think the social sciences are as (if not more) relevant to epistemology as the natural sciences. Key authors here include Elizabeth Anderson (1995), Helen Longino (1990, 2002) and Lynn Hankinson Nelson (1990) The upshot is that naturalised epistemology need not be opposed to a

⁸ Kornblith (1993) emphasises these points. There are further reasons to think Quine is often misrepresented here (see e.g. Roth (1999)).

social picture of knowledge. I am undecided whether, and where, to include this, because I am unsure whether this issue can be dealt with as part of my discussion of naturalised epistemology.

3.2. Kornblith's Naturalised Epistemology

This section will summarise Kornblith's naturalised epistemology. I will focus on his claim that knowledge is a natural kind, which I think can be separated from his objections to traditional epistemological methodology in general, and conceptual analysis in particular. I will bring out a point Kornblith makes repeatedly but is often overlooked: if knowledge isn't a natural kind, what is it? His standard contrast is with the view that knowledge is a social construct (see e.g. Kornblith (1999, 2007)). The usual argument he gives against this view is that it requires drawing unprincipled distinctions between human and animal cognition. From this I will extract a requirement that I will argue in chapter 5 that my view can meet: any plausible social picture of knowledge must avoid drawing unprincipled distinctions between human and animal cognition.

3.3. Problems with Knowledge as a Natural Kind

This section will argue against Kornblith's naturalised epistemology. I will start by giving a summary of three important objections in the literature:

1. Kornblith's account of natural kinds is idiosyncratic (e.g. Horvath (2016), Kusch (2005)).
2. Kornblith's view is potentially more revisionary than he indicates. Why think that the natural kind Kornblith is interested in is factive (e.g. Brown (2012b))?
3. Kornblith's view might give us a plausible account of animal knowledge. But it says nothing about human knowledge, which is the kind of knowledge epistemologists are interested in (e.g. Williams (2004)).

While I find some of these objections persuasive (especially the first), I will argue that they need not be devastating for Kornblith. While Kornblith's account of natural kinds isn't universally accepted, this is only to be expected given how contested the notion of a natural kind is. While Kornblith makes the factivity of knowledge a matter for empirical investigation, this is better seen as a 'feature'

of his view than a ‘bug’.⁹ Finally, while I think there is something to the third objection, it awaits a positive account of human knowledge and how precisely it differs from animal knowledge.

I will then develop my main objection, which is that Kornblith can’t give us a satisfactory account of epistemic normativity. My focus here will be on Kornblith (1993), where Kornblith gives an account of epistemic normativity as a species of instrumental normativity. Very roughly, the thought is that valuing knowledge is a pre-condition for valuing anything at all. If I value some end E, I need to value knowing how to bring E about. Because everyone values something, everyone must value knowledge.¹⁰ I have two objections here:

1. The ‘internal’ objection: It is hard to see how Kornblith’s argument shows that valuing knowledge is a precondition for valuing anything at all. First, at most it shows that valuing *certain* pieces of knowledge (about how to achieve one’s ends) is a precondition for valuing anything at all. Second, I can reliably achieve my ends without knowing, or even having true beliefs about, how to bring them about. It is enough that my beliefs about how to bring about my ends are *not too false*.
2. The ‘external’ objection: Kornblith admits that his account might not give us ‘everything we want’ from an account of epistemic normativity, but he doubts that a better alternative is available. In chapter five I will develop a better alternative.

I will conclude that Kornblith’s naturalised epistemology fails.

4. Chapter 4: Knowledge as a Normative Kind

This chapter will argue that knowledge is not a normative kind. Because this is not a view that anyone has explicitly defended, this will require some work. I will focus on three authors: Sosa, Hyman and Williamson.

- Sosa ties knowledge to the exercise of intellectual virtue. Thus, Sosa equates knowledge with exercising virtue, in much the same way that virtue theorists in ethics equate rightness with exercising virtue.

⁹ I do think it would be a bug if it turned out that knowledge isn’t factive.

¹⁰ Kornblith talks more about truth than knowledge, but he seems to think what he says about truth will go for knowledge too.

- Hyman thinks that to know (that p) is to be able to be guided by the fact that p , which means (roughly) being able to act *because of* p . Thus, Hyman equates knowledge with a kind of ability. This ability is cashed out in normative terms (an ability ‘to be guided by the facts’) and having it puts one in a particular normative position (the position of being guided by the facts). So what unites the various instances of knowledge is something normative.
- Williamson holds that knowledge is the norm of assertion, belief and practical reasoning. Thus, Williamson holds that to know something is to be in a particular normative position, that is, a position in which one can permissibly believe, act and assert. So, again, what unites the various instances of knowledge is something normative.

In introducing the normative kind view I might draw on the standard epistemological picture of justification as involving a kind of epistemic responsibility. Those who think that justification is a theoretically interesting notion presumably think that there is some sort of unity to the various instances of justified belief. That is, they think that justification is a kind. But what sort of kind? Given the traditional connection between justification and epistemic responsibility, the natural answer is: a normative kind.

4.1. Sosa on Knowledge

This section will discuss Sosa’s virtue epistemology. I will offer two objections:

- It fails to show that knowledge is distinctively valuable (see (Kvanvig (2003); Pritchard (2010))).
- Sosa’s (2007) more general account of epistemic normativity is problematic because it seems to view epistemic norms as conventions. I will argue that, *contra* Hazlett (2014), this is deeply problematic.

I will conclude that Sosa fails to secure the distinctive value of knowledge.

4.2. Hyman on Knowledge

This section will discuss Hyman’s view. I will offer two objections:

- It explains the obscure (knowledge) in terms of the more obscure (an ability to be guided by the facts). What is involved in having an ability to be guided by the facts? Hyman gets things backwards. We should explain the ability to be guided by the facts in terms of knowledge, not vice versa.
- His argument that knowledge, as opposed to other cognitive states like justified true belief, is an ability to be guided by the facts is unconvincing. Some have objected to earlier versions of this

argument (see e.g. Hughes (2014), which responds to Hyman (1999)). I will argue that the new version doesn't deal with these objections.

I will conclude that Hyman fails to show that to know is to be able to be guided by the facts.

4.3. Knowledge First Epistemology

This section will discuss Williamson's knowledge first epistemology. However, my objections will focus on the knowledge norms. I will offer three objections:

- There is little reason to think that, necessarily, knowledge is the norm of assertion, belief or practical reasoning (for the assertion case see Cappelen (2011) and Pagin (2016)). But the account of knowledge as a normative kind requires that these norms be necessary.
- Defenders of the knowledge norms are committed to there being a common norm of assertion, belief and practical reasoning. But Jessica Brown (2012a) and Mikkel Gerken (2014) have argued that this 'commonality' is implausible. While this doesn't show that *all* the knowledge norms are false, it puts pressure on all of them, insofar as it is hard to see which one to 'privilege'.
- The literature on epistemic norms focuses on what these norms are (knowledge norms? justification norms? truth norms?) rather than on their ultimate source. The normative view requires that they are *epistemic* norms: they involve a distinctive species of normativity, in the same way that moral norms involve a distinctive species of normativity. But it is unclear what makes these norms epistemic norms. For instance, Williamson holds the knowledge norm of assertion is constitutive of assertion (see (2000, Chapter 11)). Doesn't this mean that it is a linguistic, or perhaps a constitutive, norm rather than an epistemic norm? What the defender of the normative view needs is an account of what epistemic normativity *is*. But this is entirely obscure.

I will conclude that, as it stands, a version of the normative view based on the knowledge norms fails. I am currently unsure how to incorporate other aspects of Williamson's broader epistemological picture. There are two issues worth mentioning:

- Aspects of Williamson's view are suggestive of the natural picture. For instance, he thinks knowledge is a mental state, and he emphasises the role of knowledge in predicting behaviour. If I deal with this issue, it will be as part of a larger section that discusses the possibility of 'hybrid' views (e.g. natural-normative, natural-social, etc.).

- Williamson’s primitivism about knowledge seems to preclude a positive account of the metaphysical status of knowledge. While I am concerned about this, I am not engaging in Williamson exegesis. My claim is that one can extract the normative kind picture of knowledge from Williamson’s views, not that Williamson himself defends it. If I deal with this issue, I will start by distinguishing different readings of the slogan ‘knowledge-first’. One reading is metaphysical: knowledge is metaphysically fundamental. Another is epistemological: knowledge is epistemologically fundamental. Yet another is conceptual: knowledge is conceptually fundamental. I will then argue that some of these readings are compatible with giving an account of the metaphysical status of knowledge, whereas others aren’t.

5. Chapter 5: Knowledge as a Social Kind

If the previous chapters are right, knowledge is not a natural or normative kind. Given that instances of knowledge seem to form a kind, this only leaves one option: knowledge is a social kind. But extant versions of the social picture of knowledge face serious objections. Why think the social picture is any better off than the natural or normative pictures? In this chapter I will present a view on which knowledge is a social kind, and in the process deal with two important objections.

5.1. Socialising Epistemic Normativity

In this section I will pick up where the argument of §4.3 left off. All three problems with the knowledge norms of assertion, belief and practical reasoning can be resolved if we think of them as norms that serve to promote the sharing and pooling of information in a community like ours. First, this picture explicitly denies that the norms are necessary. They are operative in communities like ours, but need not be operative in other communities. Second, I will argue that commonality can be defended on this picture. Third, on this picture epistemic norms are social norms, so their source is no longer obscure. This section will be based on parts of McKenna (2016).

5.2. Socialising Knowledge

In this section I will develop a view on which knowledge is a social kind. The basic idea is that knowledge is a common good, like clean water or a safe environment.¹¹ That is, the distinction between knowledge and its absence is a distinction that *we* find important to mark rather than a distinction that marks a joint in nature. By itself, this doesn’t show that knowledge is a social kind.

¹¹ This analogy is taken from Grimm (2009). I will develop the analogy in ways that go beyond Grimm’s use of it.

Indeed, some (e.g. Williams (2004); see also Williams (1991)) have inferred from this that instances of knowledge don't form a kind at all. But this just ignores the fact that we can (and do) study the *ways* in which we mark the distinction. I will draw on Edward Craig's functional approach to knowledge and knowledge ascriptions to present a taxonomy of features of cognitive states that we mark by counting them as states of knowledge.¹² The resulting picture is one on which the distinction between knowledge and its absence is one that we mark, but in a way that can be systematically explained. That is, the picture is one on which knowledge is a social kind.

5.3. Two Types of Knowledge

In this section I will discuss the objection that social pictures of knowledge need to draw an implausible distinction between animal and human knowledge. on Kornblith (1999), I will argue that we have three options:

1. Hold that animal knowledge is the thing epistemologists should be interested in.
2. Hold that human knowledge is the thing epistemologists should be interested in.
3. Hold that there are two distinct types of knowledge, both of which are of interest to epistemologists.

While I will plump for the second option, my discussion of these three options will be relatively concessive. My claim is that, in virtue of the problems with Kornblith's view discussed in Chapter 3, there seems to be a big difference between knowledge as he conceives of it and knowledge as it is standardly conceived of in epistemology. I take this to speak against the first option. But, while the third option is problematic, it has more going for it than many think. For instance, one can defend it without committing to any kind of lexical ambiguity thesis. What, other than a general suspicion of pluralism in epistemological and philosophical methodology more generally, speaks against it?¹³

5.4. Socially Isolated Knowers

In this section I will discuss the objection that social pictures of knowledge are unable to account for 'Robinson Crusoe' cases (that is, cases of socially isolated knowers). I will adopt a three-pronged strategy for dealing with the objection:

¹² See Craig (1990). Relevant literature here includes Fricker (2008); Gerken (2015); Hannon (2013); Kappel (2010); Kelp (2011); Kusch (2009); Rysiew (2012).

¹³ Of course, Sosa (2007, 2009) defends a view like this.

- I will argue that this objection is broadly analogous to Donald Davidson’s (1987) ‘swampman’ objection to teleological views of mental content. To the extent that the swampman objection doesn’t lead us to reject teleological views of mental content, it should not lead us to reject social pictures of knowledge.
- I will argue that the details of the case matter, in particular whether Robinson Crusoe has ever been in contact with another human being.
- I will argue that the defender of the social picture can lessen the force of the objection by clarifying what is at issue. What is at issue is whether a Robinson Crusoe can have *knowledge*. Maybe a Robinson Crusoe can have a cognitive state with the same *natural* properties as someone with knowledge. But, because knowledge is normative, that doesn’t mean that this cognitive state is a state of knowledge.

I may finish with a final section summarising the argument of the book.

Timeline/Plans

I have already written several papers and reviews that will form the basis of material for the book.

These pieces of work are particularly relevant:

- “Clifford and the Common Epistemic Norm” (in *American Philosophical Quarterly* [2016]).
- “‘Knowledge’ Ascriptions, Social Roles and Semantics” (in *Episteme* [2013]).
- “Is Knowledge Socially Constructed?” (under review).
- “Relativising Knowledge” (in draft).
- “On Assertion” (unpublished draft).
- Review of John Hyman’s *Action, Knowledge and Will* (forthcoming in *Analysis*).

I am currently doing the necessary research for chapters two and three, focusing on the literature on natural and social kinds and on naturalised epistemology. In the next year I plan on writing two papers on Kornblith’s naturalised epistemology:

- A paper discussing whether it has implausible epistemological consequences. One possible problematic consequence of his view is that knowledge isn’t factive. Another is that knowledge is ‘species relative’ (different species=different knowledge).
- A paper discussing views on which there are two ‘types’ of knowledge, animal and human. Kornblith’s case for his natural kind view is partly based on problems with the two types of

knowledge view. But are these problems that serious? My aim here is to both block one of Kornblith's arguments and contribute something to the more general issue.

These papers will be written in parallel with chapters two and three. I anticipate finishing drafts of both chapters within the next year, though chapter two may pose some difficulties, as the literature on natural and social kinds is large and a little unwieldy.

I am already familiar with the literatures on virtue epistemology and knowledge first epistemology. However, I want to spend some time re-reading Sosa, Hyman, Williamson and relevant secondary literature. I anticipate starting this early next year. I may write a paper about Sosa's view of epistemic normativity. I will write a paper on Hyman to go alongside the relevant sections of chapter four. The paper will, first, argue that Hyman defends an explicitly normative view of knowledge, and, second, criticise this view. I will base the material on knowledge norms on parts of my unpublished paper ("On Assertion"). I would anticipate having a draft of chapter four within the next 18 months.

Chapter five will be written after chapters two, three and four. I have already done a lot of the necessary research on social accounts of epistemic normativity and functional approaches to knowledge, and material from my published papers "Clifford and the Common Epistemic Norm" and "Knowledge' Ascriptions, Social Roles and Semantics" will be included in this chapter. But I want to look at the literature on social accounts of normativity more generally, and take into account new work on functions in epistemology that has been published since I last worked on this area. In any case, I would anticipate having a draft of chapter five within the next 2 years.

I will write chapter one after the other chapters are finished. I plan on submitting the book proposal to major university presses, like OUP. Setting aside time for re-writing and presenting material at conferences, I expect to be in a position to do this within the next three years.

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