Degrees of Knowledge

Ву

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Abstract

Even though we ordinarily grade knowledge, including propositional knowledge, it is widely unaccepted in epistemology that propositional knowledge can come in degrees. This thesis argues that epistemic gradualism, the view that propositional knowledge comes in degrees, has numerous advantages and we should endorse epistemic gradualism to have a theory of knowledge that is more in line with our ordinary conceptions and uses of knowledge. Arguments from various sources, both theoretical and linguistic, also give us valid reasons to commit to epistemic gradualism. In the view I propose, degrees of knowledge are explained through direct relation with degrees of justification and verisimilitude. Moreover, this epistemic gradualist view can be extended to explain degrees of error.

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Introduction

In ordinary life, it is common to talk about knowledge as if it admits of degrees, in many contexts and many languages. 'Better, worse, a little, a lot, as well as' and many more that imply grades are routinely applied to 'knowing'. We grade knowledge for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, we simply feel that there is a difference in degree of knowledge, and we grade knowledge to express this intuitive difference we observe. Sometimes, our practical concerns change, and we grade knowledge in relation to our daily use and concerns. No matter the specific reason, it seems that we have no problem considering knowledge to be a gradable concept. Perhaps an example would better present this. When asked, someone may say that they know public transportation runs until 23.30 in Vienna. However, if someone needs to catch a bus at 23.15 and it is crucial that they do, then they ask whether the buses still run, the same person will probably refrain from showing the same confidence and say that they do not 'really' know. It seems we also do not only apply words that are directly gradable, but we also use 'really, actually, truly' to implicate different degrees of knowledge. However, this at least seemingly intuitive approach to knowledge is generally not accepted in epistemology. Especially propositional knowledge is considered to be a yes or no state.

This thesis argues that knowledge, propositional or otherwise, is gradable. It is of paramount importance to epistemology to examine the nature of knowledge. Whether knowledge is gradable is an important aspect of that nature. It is also important to account for the difference between our acceptance of ordinarily grading knowledge and resisting epistemic gradualism in epistemology. This account offers a more nuanced and intuitive understanding of knowledge that is more sensitive to the surrounding conditions, as we ordinarily accept knowledge to be. Furthermore, by applying this more fine-grained

understanding of knowledge, it may be possible to resolve certain important philosophical problems. While arguing for epistemic gradualism, I tried to refrain from defending a position in other epistemological or philosophical discussions that might be related to the questions at hand. I took this approach to demonstrate that the position I am advocating for is compatible with a range of perspectives, making it potentially appealing to people with diverse viewpoints. Nonetheless, our practical use and concerns about language and concepts play an important role in developing this view.

The thesis will consist of three chapters. In the first chapter of the thesis, I will first introduce epistemic absolutism as the orthodox view in epistemology, I will refer to mostly Gilbert Ryle's and Fred Dretske's views while doing so. In the next section, I will introduce the opposing view epistemic gradualism. I will mainly make use of Stephen Hetherington's works but will also consider some criticisms about his view by Changsheng Lai. Then, I will lay out the current debate, I will go over the main motivations and concerns of each side and try to address how the other side would provide answers. In the second chapter, I will focus on three points to give supporting arguments for epistemic gradualism. In the first section, I will investigate arguments about different kinds of knowledge and some kinds of knowledge being generally accepted to come in degrees. I will further argue that if we have reason to doubt they are fundamentally different from propositional knowledge, then different kinds of knowledge should have the same nature, namely being gradable. In the next section I will consider arguments from contextualism and claim that contextualism provides further motivations to endorse epistemic gradualism. I will briefly discuss how context not in the strictly contextualist sense, but in a general sense, is relevant to knowledge as well. In the last section of this chapter, I will consider the most popular kind of arguments against epistemic gradualism, linguistic evidence. I will argue that for various

reasons, these arguments do not provide enough reason to discard epistemic gradualism. In the last chapter, I will examine degrees of knowledge and error in relation to degrees of justification and verisimilitude. In the first section, I will explain how degrees of justification have an immediate effect on degrees of knowledge. In the second, I will explain the relation of verisimilitude to degrees of knowledge. Lastly, I will extend my view to apply to degrees of error as well. I will conclude by arguing that epistemic gradualism is a theory that is more in line with our daily use and understanding of knowledge.

Chapter 1: Epistemic Absolutism vs Gradualism

1.1 Epistemic Absolutism

Many kinds of knowledge such as the knowledge of people, objectual knowledge or know-how are generally considered to come in degrees. It seems natural to grade, in English and many other languages, such types of knowledge without any difficulty. We can give many examples to such instances:

- 1. 'You know this car better than I do.'
- 2. 'I know my sister as well as you know yours.'
- 3. 'I know Vienna very well, you do not know Vienna that well.'
- 4. 'You know how to play the piano better than John.'
- 5. 'No one knows Jane better than you know her.'

We can find many more examples that show we normally grade many types of knowledge. However, when it comes to propositional knowledge, many philosophers argue that it is not gradable (Ryle, 1949; Dretske, 1981; Stanley, 2005; Crane, 2012; Pavese, 2017). Stephen Hetherington argues that the orthodox view about propositional knowledge in epistemology is epistemic absolutism which is the thesis that: "Knowledge is absolute, in the sense that it is impossible for a person to have *better* or to have *worse*, knowledge of a fact" (2001, p. 3). Hetherington further claims that this is a dogma rather than an insight as most philosophers who argue that propositional knowledge does not admit of degrees, agree that other kinds of knowledge as in the mentioned examples can come in degrees without accounting for the difference between propositional knowledge and the types of knowledge they admit to be gradable. It seems reasonable to expect that the philosophers who claim some type of knowledge is gradable but propositional knowledge is not, should be the ones to account for the difference. However, such an attempt is usually not made and instead epistemic absolutism is simply assumed, supporting Hetherington's view that this is a widely accepted dogma in epistemology.

One of the most prominent philosophers who makes an attempt to explain why propositional knowledge does not admit of degrees is Gilbert Ryle. Ryle (1949) famously argues for anti-intellectualism, the view that know-how is not necessarily reducible to knowthat and that they are distinct kinds of knowledge. An important justification to distinguish between know-that and know-how comes from his argument that the former does not admit of degrees while the latter does. While discussing why know-that is not gradable, Ryle presents a contrast between partial knowledge and incomplete knowledge. He claims that the person may have partial knowledge but they cannot have incomplete knowledge of a fact. This interpretation of knowledge being graded does not seem to be very charitable as the examples he uses are very simple and they would fail to be knowledge if they were incomplete. For example, if knowledge of the fact 'Vienna is in Austria' is incomplete, then there is no knowledge. If there is no knowledge, there is of course no better or worse knowledge. This particular criticism of Ryle's does not really address what one means when they say there can be degrees of knowledge. Ryle also refers to the difference in the learning period of facts and abilities, while we learn an ability in a longer amount of time and get better at it during this time, learning facts are much faster:

Learning how or improving in ability is not like learning that or acquiring information. Truths can be imparted, procedures can only be inculcated, and while inculcation is a gradual process, imparting is relatively sudden. It makes sense to ask at what moment someone became appraised of a truth, but not to ask at what

moment someone acquired a skill. 'Part-trained' is a significant phrase, 'part-informed' is not. (1949, p. 59)

However, this is also not always the case. Some facts require much longer period to learn

compared to some other abilities. Someone may learn a fact about quantum mechanics in a

much longer time compared to someone who learns how to wink, for example.

Another prominent figure who argues against propositional knowledge admitting of degrees is Fred Dretske. Similar to Ryle, Dretske also admits different kinds of knowledge may come in degrees but propositional knowledge does not:

When talking about people, places and topics (things rather than facts), it makes sense to say that one person knows something better than another . . . But factual knowledge, the knowledge that something is so, does not admit of such comparisons. If we both know that today is Friday, it makes no sense to say that you know this better than I . . . In this respect factual knowledge is absolute. It is like being pregnant: an all or nothing affair. (1981, p. 363)

Despite being proponents of the same position, epistemic absolutism, it seems that Dretske considers the gradeability of knowledge differently from Ryle. While Ryle was more concerned about the more/less or incomplete/complete aspects when considering degrees of knowledge, Dretske is arguing about the possibility of better/worse knowledge. Still, similarly to Ryle, Dretske claims that once we attain knowledge about a fact, there are no degrees of that knowledge. If two people both know that 'Today is the 1st of April' one cannot know it better than the other. We have reason to doubt this claim, if I only learned the date from a reliable source very recently but another person is aware of the date every day and they had an important meeting on this day, they might know it better. Dretske would claim that it is the degree of our justification that is getting higher or better rather than the degree of our knowledge. Although, this conclusion may be too rushed. Dretske, though he accepts that knowledge of things can come in degrees, does not give an account of the relationship between the knowledge of things and knowledge of facts. We could

know the fact better if we know the main thing the fact is about better. Justification plays an important role in not just acquisition of knowledge but also the quality of knowledge. This issue will be further discussed in Chapter 3.1, when we are looking at the effects of degrees of justification on degrees of knowledge.

Regardless of the differences in their views, epistemic absolutists in general claim that after certain conditions are met for a certain belief to become knowledge, neither a higher or better degree of justification nor any other factor will improve it. Therefore, we either know something or not, propositional knowledge does not come in degrees.

1.2 Epistemic Gradualism

The opposing view is epistemic gradualism, the view that knowledge, propositional or otherwise, is gradable. Epistemic gradualists claim that we also ordinarily grade propositional knowledge and we have no reason to think we are wrong to use 'knowing' in such a way. Therefore, in this view, we could add examples such as to the mentioned ones:

- 1. I know that 'The Sun is a star' better than you do.
- 2. You know that there was a fire very well.
- 3. They know that he is a thief better than we do.

They seem as natural occurrences and as coherent as the previous examples. There are various ways to argue for epistemic gradualism as there are various motivations to support it. Stephen Hetherington, perhaps the most prominent defender of epistemic gradualism, argues for it on the grounds of practicalism. Practicalism is the view that claims know-that is reducible to know-how (Hetherington, 2011). He argues for the point by analyzing know-that statements as 'knowing how it is that' and emphasizing the view that knowing is an ability.

Following this line, Hetherington argues, if practical knowledge admits of degrees, and if propositional knowledge is reducible to practical knowledge, then propositional knowledge will admit of degrees too. In this view, practicalism and epistemic gradualism are very closely connected and epistemic gradualism is mainly supported by practicalism. This view may be appealing to some. Still, it may be problematic to link epistemic gradualism to practicalism, as while one may find epistemic gradualism appealing, they might find practicalism simply wrong. It is important to note here that they are fully distinct concepts and one need not commit to practicalism to argue for gradualism.

Hetherington also distinguishes two kinds of epistemic gradualism. In one of them, we can commit to external absolutism but internal gradualism, knowledge is clearly separated from what is not at a cut-off point and knowledge is graded once it passes that point. In the other view, we would commit to external gradualism as well, arguing that the cut-off point between what is knowledge and what is not is not as clear-cut or identifiable as it is usually believed to be. It seems important for Hetherington to avoid any type of relativism, so he commits to the first view. In a recent study, Lai (2021) commits to epistemic gradualism in a different manner than Hetherington's. Lai argues that, even though Hetherington's defense of epistemic gradualism is inspiring, he falls short of giving a truly gradualist account which Lai believes to be the external gradualist view. Lai claims that the discussion as it is focuses too much on internal gradualism alone and both absolutists and gradualists like Hetherington identify knowledge as a threshold concept, in the sense that there is a threshold for knowledge at a relevant scale and the threshold separates anything that is knowledge from what falls short (2021). We can think about being medically obese as a threshold concept, there is a certain threshold of weight ratio of the body that qualifies someone as obese. If you do not pass this threshold, no matter how close you are to it, you

are not obese. However, Lai believes we should be external gradualists as well and support that knowledge is a *spectrum* concept rather than a threshold concept. He uses spectrum concept in the sense of lacking a certain or singular point of reference that we can judge a concept, but we still identify instances of it. Just like something being red, more red, less red; there is no clear-cut point of being red on the color spectrum, only more or less paradigmatic instances of it. Similarly, Lai argues, knowledge is a spectrum concept. There is no certain point of threshold for knowledge but more or less paradigmatic cases of knowledge. Since it is natural for spectrum concepts to come in degrees, if knowledge is a spectrum concept it will admit of degrees.

However, even though Lai provides valuable observations about what kind of concept absolutist and gradualists take knowledge to be, perhaps referring to knowledge as a threshold concept in the orthodox view is also misleading. The existence of a threshold implies that there is a certain other concept that we judge knowledge in relation to, but it is not clear what that concept could be. It seems problematic that it would be justification or at least only justification. We should be able to explain the threshold without heavily relying on degrees of justification as there are different views concerning them both among absolutists and gradualists. Still, referring to knowledge as a threshold concept may be influenced by the fact that in the orthodox view, we need a certain level of justification for our belief to pass as knowledge and our justification may continue to rise even after we have knowledge. In order to avoid any problems that may rise from different conceptions of justification and to also avoid determining the details of such a scale where we judge knowledge, it would be more accurate to talk about knowledge being a switch concept rather than threshold concept. Switch concept can be any concept that is simply a yes or no state, as Dretske claims knowledge to be. Being a human or a member of any other species

could be an example of such a concept. If you satisfy conditions that are specific to that concept, the switch goes off so to say. Similar to the threshold concept, there are still conditions to be met. However, unlike the threshold concept, we do not need to identify the conditions in a gradualist sense. Regardless of how we name it, considering knowledge to be a threshold or switch type of concept does not coincide with our daily use and understanding of knowledge.

As it has been shown, there are more than one way to argue for epistemic gradualism, there can be a different gradualist approach that identifies the problem in a different manner and provide an even finer grained account. We can be internal or external gradualists. Nevertheless, all gradualists agree that at least external gradualism about knowledge, that knowledge once it satisfies the relevant conditions to be considered knowledge comes in degrees. In order to avoid going further into surrounding issues and with the aim of providing a more agreeable view that is compatible with various views, I will be generally referring to external gradualism when I refer to epistemic gradualism. This is not because I am convinced that internal gradualism is wrong but because I believe it requires further discussions about issues that are beyond the scope of this thesis. When I restrict my view to external gradualism. However, I also want to make clear that I do not fully subscribe to his view and it is not necessary to do so to commit to epistemic gradualism or to address the problems that arise from committing to epistemic absolutism.

1.3 State of the Debate

The debate between epistemic absolutism and epistemic gradualism perhaps does not follow the flow someone would expect from any philosophical debate. Both the absolutists and the gradualists seem to be concerned with other issues in epistemology or philosophy in general that I will mention in this section. Therefore, the discussion is not solely focused on the divide between epistemic absolutism and epistemic gradualism but a variety of topics where these two come into play too. This could also be because the nature of knowledge is often assumed but not discussed in detail by many philosophers, still, Ryle and Dretske make the most effort or provide the clearest works to give an answer to this problem on the side of absolutism (Hetherington, 2001). It seems Ryle's concern about the issue comes from his disdain about intellectualism. Dretske, on the other hand, seems to be more concerned about the nature of knowledge in relation to justification. His famous remark about knowledge being like pregnancy confirms the view that he sees knowledge as a switch concept, allowing the justification to get better but not knowledge, after our belief turns the switch and turns to knowledge. It may be interesting to point out here that the most prominent works about epistemic absolutism are considerably older than works about epistemic gradualism. Who knows, perhaps the orthodox view is slowly shifting towards gradualism.

Both sides of the debate have valid concerns about surrounding issues that may motivate them to support the views they do. One of the most driving motivations, interestingly for both sides, is linguistic arguments. Epistemic absolutists claim that we do not grade knowledge in our ordinary use, in the way we grade other truly gradable concepts (Stanley, 2005). For example, as we have mentioned, most philosophers agree that knowhow comes in degrees. Therefore, most abilities such as playing an instrument are accurately gradable in natural language. When we look at other concepts than knowledge, being tall is an example of a gradable concept but we cannot grade propositional knowledge in the way we grade these concepts. On the other hand, epistemic gradualist argues that we do grade knowledge, in English as well as other languages, and we do not only do this in our use of language but also in our considerations about knowledge. Epistemic absolutist gives too much importance to the examples that support absolutism and too little to the ones that support gradualism, weakening their arguments as a result. The linguistic arguments about degrees of knowledge will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.3.

One important motivation in committing to epistemic absolutism is thinking that epistemic gradualism leads or comes dangerously close to epistemic relativism. Relativistic accounts are usually treated almost like a disease that we should avoid at all costs, not just in epistemology but in other fields of philosophy as well. Even though I believe there is more value in relativist approaches than is usually considered and I agree that epistemic gradualism is at least closer to relativism than epistemic absolutism. Nevertheless, one does not need to be a relativist to argue for epistemic gradualism. Hetherington puts this very straightforwardly, at the very first sentence of his book *Good Knowledge, Bad Knowledge:* 'The last thing I want to do as an epistemologist is to accept an invidious relativism. In one respect, however, epistemology has become too absolutist.' (2011, p.1). In relation to the previous point, some might be drawn to absolutism because they think gradualism provides a too vague or too fine-grained approach that makes knowledge ascriptions meaningless. Epistemic gradualist, on the other hand, would argue that, on the contrary, absolutism provides a too coarse-grained framework that it does not reflect our pre-linguistic or pre-

theoretical considerations and intuitions. If our ordinary concept of knowledge does not align with our epistemological concept of knowledge, it seems pointless to even have an epistemological concept of knowledge. This is not to say that there should be no difference between the two nor to say that our use of language or other context-dependent criteria does not affect one or the other, but to say that our epistemological concepts of knowledge should always be checked considering our ordinary use and intuitions.

There seem to be other considerations such as commitment to other epistemological views or the belief that our position on this debate will help us solve other philosophical problems. One of them could be infallibilism, the claim that knowledge requires some infallibility condition to be satisfied (Dutant, 2007) or fallibilism, the claim that no belief is so well justified that it cannot be false (Peirce, 1960), depending on our position in the debate. It seems at least *prima facie* that infallibilism would favour an epistemic absolutist understanding. This would be even more so if the epistemic gradualism we were concerned about was external gradualism. One could support anti-justificationism which is the view that knowledge does not entail justification (Hetherington, 2011, p. 110) and be inclined to support epistemic gradualism on these grounds. Hetherington further argues in detail that endorsing epistemic gradualism might solve very important philosophical problems such as Gettier like cases, certain problems about knowing that we know something, and skepticism.

To elaborate on how epistemic gradualism can help solve these problems, epistemic gradualism makes it possible to distinguish between facts that we know better or worse, my knowledge of having hands can be better than my knowledge that I am not a brain in a vat. As a result, it allows us to accommodate the skeptic's intuitions about the difference

between my knowledge of the facts while avoiding committing to skepticism. With Gettier cases, Hetherington (2011) claims that knowledge in Gettier cases is *failable*, in the sense that it easily could have failed to be knowledge, therefore it is poor knowledge (p. 88). He further argues that one need not always know that they know something. There are again, degrees of our knowledge that makes it possible for us to talk about knowledge without always being fully aware that it is knowledge (p. 187). Absolutists might argue at this point that it is our understanding about something that improves, not knowledge as we also refer to better/worse understanding or awareness when we are discussing degrees of knowledge. But there is an undeniable relationship between the two and better understanding of parts of the proposition or the surrounding conditions could and would result in higher degree of knowledge, the gradualist could argue. The relationship between understanding and knowledge is beyond the scope of this thesis but I am confident it would provide further supporting arguments for epistemic gradualism.

Chapter 2: Supporting Arguments for Epistemic Gradualism

2.1 Arguments About Different Kinds of Knowledge

As I have discussed in the first chapter, many philosophers accept that practical knowledge, knowledge of persons, things or topics can come in degrees even though they resist the idea that propositional knowledge can come in degrees. If we can argue that these kinds of knowledge are not fundamentally different from propositional knowledge but distinct from it in some other way, perhaps through their way of acquisition or how we express them, it would be expected that these different kinds of knowledge still have essentially the same nature and are gradable in a similar manner. Numerous philosophers claimed that one kind of knowledge can be reduced to the other. Hetherington (2001) argues for practicalism to establish that knowledge admits of degrees. Ryle (1949) argues for anti-intellectualism to support epistemic absolutism. Stanley and Williamson (2001) argue that know-how is a subspecies of know-that. It is possible to extend the names of the philosophers who argue either know-how is reducible to know-that or know-that is reducible to know-how. The existence of many arguments like this makes it plausible to ask whether know-how and know-that are substantially distinct kinds of knowledge. I do not solely focus on arguments on the reducibility of different kinds of knowledge that are usually used to support epistemic gradualism, namely know-that being reducible to knowhow, but instead consider different arguments that are also given in favour of epistemic absolutism as my motivation in investigating these arguments is to show that we have good reason to doubt the idea that they are substantially different kinds, therefore have different natures such as being gradable.

Moreover, at least some of these instances of knowledge can be reconstructed as another kind. Let us consider knowing how to bake a cake, it is an ability and it has the appropriate know-how structure. However, when we closely investigate this act, we can divide it to its parts and express it in terms of propositional knowledge:

- 1. I know that the necessary ingredients for the cake are...
- 2. I know that I should mix these ingredients in the following order...
- 3. I know that I should whisk the mixed ingredients for this amount of time.
- 4. I know that I should preheat the oven at this degree.
- 5. I know that I should leave in the oven for this amount of time.

We can make the list as long and detailed as we like and cover all the steps. If I can know how to bake a cake better than someone else and if I can formulate my know-how in terms of know-that, then I should have better knowledge of these proposition in relation to someone else that bakes worse than I do. On the other hand, we can consider the reverse where know-that is analysed in terms of know-how. If I know that I am holding a glass:

- 1. I know how to believe accurately that I am holding a glass.
- 2. I know how to assess the data around me.
- 3. I know how to express this information.
- 4. I know how to answer questions about me holding a glass.

We can also make this list longer and more detailed, as it was possible with the other example. There are motivations to disregard one or both approaches. Still, if the argument against degrees of knowledge comes from the argument that they are fundamentally different kinds, that while know-how is gradable and know-that is not, we have good reason to doubt it. We can extend this view even further and argue that not only the aforementioned kinds, but all kinds of knowledge have essentially the same or significantly similar nature, therefore if any kind of knowledge is considered to come in degrees, propositional knowledge should be accepted as well.

2.2 Contextualism

Stanley (2005) identifies contextualism as "the semantic thesis that knowledge ascriptions, instances of 'x knows that p' are context-sensitive" (p. 16) and further argues that a gradualist understanding of knowledge is at the heart of many contextualist theories (p. 35). Sentences are context sensitive in the sense that what is expressed by them, as well as their truth value, will depend on the specific context that the sentence is used. Of course, many philosophers would agree that context is important while considering many sentences. However, the contextualist claims that either 'know' or the sentences that include 'know' are context-sensitive in a distinctly epistemological way (Stanley, 2005, p. 17). Let us consider this example:

- 1. I did not want to go there.
- 2. I know that the train has left.

The first example is context-sensitive because the meaning and the truth value of the sentence depends on the context on which the indexical 'I' and 'there' were used. The second one is context-sensitive in a distinctly epistemological manner due to the criteria according to which we analyse this use of 'know'. The person can be considered to know that the train has left if they do not really care but checked it online anyway and saw the notification that the train has left according to the schedule. But the person who needs to take the train to make a connecting flight would have to consider that the online information is not always accurate, once we go to the station we can see that the train has not left, there could have been some mix-up in the schedule or some other irregularity. So, whether we know that the train has left or not depends on the context and which criteria we use to assess whether it is knowledge. But it may be dependent on the context in a variety of ways. The person who asks and how we consider their practical concerns may play a role. The justification that we consider to be relevant in one context may be irrelevant in another. Justification may lose or gain strength depending on our practical concerns about the knowledge claim. Similarly, the strength of the justification may change over time due to external reasons.

The contextualist arguments about knowledge can give us a more fine-grained and intuitive understanding of knowledge that is very much in line with the epistemic gradualist view. Both views are sensitive to degrees of justification, the existence of better or more justification has an effect on our considerations about the proposition's meaning and truthvalue. They both acknowledge and endorse the idea that we have different epistemic standards depending on the context. Our criteria for knowledge will be much higher when we are concerned with a life threatening situation rather than answering a question asked out of mere curiosity. They are both concerned with the practical use and concerns of the epistemic agents while analysing knowledge ascriptions. They also allow for our knowledge to be updated over time due to newly acquired evidence or some other reason. It might be important to note here that even though these views are very compatible, I do not believe it is necessary that a contextualist should commit to epistemic gradualism. The contextualist may be motivated to claim that even though knowledge ascriptions are context-dependent, we do not have better or worse knowledge depending on different contexts, we rather have knowledge in some contexts and not in others. Keith DeRose similarly argues that what is considered knowledge in one context may fail to qualify as knowledge in another, even

though he also agrees that in contextualist theories knowledge is intuitively gradable (1998). Even if it is not necessary to commit to one when we commit to the other, these theories complement each other very well and provide supporting arguments for each other almost naturally.

Context, not only in the contextualist sense but also in its general sense is relevant when we are concerned with knowledge. Imagine two people in the same room but due to a difference in attention or location they know different aspects of the same thing or they know a proposition through different means, having better understanding of some of its parts than others. For example, they see something happening on the stage but one of them is at the very back behind a column where his vision is partial and the other is sitting right in front of the stage. They can both see the same thing and know the same proposition but one of them will be in an epistemically superior position to the conditions they were in and the context information they have. Or one's knowledge about context could influence the knowledge of the proposition not due to our perspective in the visual sense but due to our perspective in the intellectual sense. When we consider a proposition that concerns more than one discipline: "Ecosystem services provide benefits to the people such as the production of food, regulation of climate, and purification of water." a sociologist, an economist, and a biologist may all know this proposition, but they may all understand different things from the sentence and understand its truth through different sources. They may all have a different understanding about what benefit means. If one of them studied sociology and biology and conducted and interdisciplinary research about all the benefits it provides, they might know the proposition better as they understand the context better.

2.3 Linguistic Evidence

Linguistic arguments seem to be one of the most, if not the most, used arguments against epistemic gradualism. However, they are not the knockout arguments most people who use them believe it to be. First, we should make the important note that most of these arguments are restricted to English and therefore do not really give a comprehensive account of how natural languages deal with knowledge. When some of the examples are translated to another language, knowledge can be graded in the same way that is used in the example. Many languages allow for such a grading and the users of these languages grade knowledge without any problem. There are many examples to be given from other languages that demonstrate it is not only permissible but also expected to grade knowledge in certain cases. Not only grading but even saying "You know it wrong" is common in many languages including Turkish (Bac & Nurbay, 2011). This use does not necessarily mean that the person has no idea about what they are talking about. In Turkish, the more usual occurrence of this use would be when the person next to us believes they went through some procedure to acquire knowledge (maybe they heard it from someone or read it somewhere) so they believe they know a certain fact. When they utter it, with the implication that they know it, we would say 'You know it wrong". It is used to mean that the person is mistaken or sometimes even that the person knows quite a bit about what they are claiming but there is factual evidence against their claim that would render their claim false. It is also natural for speakers of Hungarian to use 'knowing wrongly' to refer to someone mistaken. Even if these uses are the result of a mistake, it reflects that we do not consider knowledge to be a strict yes or no state. Apart from this use, grading knowledge seems to be common to even English. Knowing better, worse, as well as are not unnatural

or isolated instances in which we grade knowledge. Let us look at this example from Chinese:

- 1. '?I know better than you that I suffered a bad toothache last night.
- 2. 我比你更知道我昨晚牙很疼'(Lai, 2021, p. 3957)

Or this example from Turkish:

- 3. You know better than I do that she is a nice person.
- 4. Onun iyi biri olduğunu sen benden daha iyi biliyorsun.

There are many more instances that can be given as examples to showcase that knowledge is graded in natural languages. First of all, the English versions also sound natural to my nonnative English speaker ears. Secondly, it does not make sense to claim while the sentences have the same meaning, even a similar structure in some languages, that the English version is forced and unnatural whereas the counterpart of the sentence in another language is natural. How are we to decide if the same sentence in two different languages sound natural in one and odd in the other?

Stanley (2005) argues against this gradable of knowledge and provides many examples to establish that the uses of knowledge where it is gradable sound odd. He puts forward some conditions such as if a term or verb is truly gradable, it should allow for modifiers:

5. 'That is really tall.

6. That is very tall.' (p. 36)

Furthermore, we should be able to construct the sentence in another way, maybe using a different modifier or negating it, but still keeping the natural comparison structure intact and natural feeling:

7. 'John is tall, but not really tall.' (p. 41)

Stanley gives more conditions and examples in different forms to show us that these examples sound natural but similar sentences with knowledge would not. For some reason, he is convinced that such ascriptions to knowledge sound very unusual and they would not naturally be used. Such as this:

8. 'John knows the bank is open, but doesn't really know that the bank is open.' (p. 41) Nonetheless, I do not believe he is being very charitable to epistemic gradualism when he reconstructs sentences. Many different examples can be given where the knowledge sentence also sounds normal. It is true that this sentence sounds more odd compared to sentence 7, but if it was used in daily life, most people would understand that John has some knowledge about the bank being open (could be because it is a week day, within working hours) but he does not know beyond any doubt that it is open (maybe there was an attack or any other unexpected occurrence that led to the bank being closed and it is absolutely crucial that he knows whether it is open or not). Even if this actually is an odd use, there are other uses, such as the examples 1 and 3 that do sound natural. Then, we have no substantial reason to believe, if we do not focus solely on the individual examples that sound odd, that knowledge ascriptions are strange in natural languages. Moreover, whether a sentence sounds natural or not is highly dependent on the person's linguistic intuitions which may or may not rely on other factors. Therefore, are not enough to make a conclusive claim.

There are also many instances in which the sentence contains a gradable term or verb but when we try to construct a similar sentence containing knowledge, it seems odd if not simply wrong. Yet it is not peculiar to gradeability of knowledge that when we change verbs in a sentence, even if they have similar meanings and uses, sometimes it does not make sense. This may not stem from knowledge being a switch concept but from the historical use of the words and other linguistic factors. This may be shown by examples in which better or more is used. Even though both represent something gradable, it will not be the case that we can apply them to every word in a similar way. Some will need to be graded by using a different wording or by changing the structure of the sentence or both:

9. I regret very much that I did this.

10. I know very much that you are ill.

In these examples, 10 clearly does not sound natural to grade. But if we use different wording to imply grades or compose the structure differently in other examples, then regret or any other that the absolutist accepts to be a gradable concept will sound odd:

11. I regret very well that I did this.

12. I know very well that you are sick.

Even if the examples were as successful as Stanley hoped them to be, natural languages are very complex and dependent on many elements. It is not plausible to argue against epistemic gradualism solely on the grounds of linguistic arguments. Even though natural languages can be a good indicator about certain philosophical points, it is not enough to discard epistemic gradualism based on them alone. Last but certainly not least, there are also many linguistic arguments in favour of epistemic gradualism, many cases in which we grade knowledge. The epistemic absolutist is usually too quick to overlook them but if these examples are not enough to establish epistemic gradualism, then the opposing examples cannot be enough to refute it.

Chapter 3: Degrees of Knowledge and Error

There are many factors that one considers when one grades knowledge. It can be based on the strength of justification, the knowledge of the subject about relevant propositions or verisimilitude. *Verisimilitude* can be explained as truthlikeness or approximation to the truth (Tichý, 1974), it will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.2. Degrees of justification and verisimilitude seem to have a close relationship to knowledge even under very different conceptions of knowledge. They also seem to be the determining features when we grade knowledge. I will look at their relationship to knowledge to understand how they affect degrees of knowledge. It may be useful to note here that there most probably are other factors that are related to degrees of knowledge. However, this thesis will focus on these two factors as they seem to be the elements that have the most impact on degrees of knowledge and error.

3.1 Degrees of Justification

The strength of our justification may change due to many reasons and justification comes in degrees in relation to these reasons. One of such reasons can be degrees of belief, as beliefs often serve as justification for other beliefs. Some of the others are the reliability of the source of justification, having more or less evidence, the relevance of the evidence, how reliably they formed the beliefs in question or how well they can infer the implications of their beliefs. There are certainly many other things to consider among these reasons but this much is enough for our present concerns. It furthermore seems that degrees of justification are sensitive to certain elements that degrees of knowledge are also sensitive to. Additionally, degrees of knowledge are sensitive to degrees of justification. If you ask someone if they really know something, and if they want to prove to you that they do, they will probably start giving reasons why they have strong justification and point out to not only the justification but also the strength of justification to show that they know something. If they have strong evidence, they may also say 'I know this very well because I know these further things' or 'I know this very well because I learned and used it in this way'. The more evidence they have about a certain proposition and the more related propositions they know contribute to their knowledge about the initial proposition as well. This can be verified by asking the person more questions about the initial proposition, the more they know and the stronger justification they have, they will be able to answer more questions about it. If they can successfully answer most questions but cannot answer some questions, we would not consider them to be ignorant about the proposition but as not knowing certain aspects of it, which is also in line with a gradualist understanding of knowledge.

The person who knows a proposition to a higher degree understands not only whether something is a certain way but also why and how or certain other features of the proposition. Let us consider an example. If I personally and carefully measured my room, more than once to be sure, and I calculated the square meter of my room, I can know that my room is 10 m². If I share this information with a friend and I explain to them how carefully I measured the room and made the calculation, also knowing that I am a reliable source and have no reason to lie about this, they can take my word. Now, when we go to a gathering with this friend and someone asks both of us how big is my room, we would both know it and we would both provide the right answer. However, if the person were to ask other questions about this fact, my friend would most likely say 'Ecem knows this better than I do, you should ask her'. I would be able to explain how I reached the number, what

that number means, the area is in which shape or other questions they might ask. Since I have a stronger foundation for this knowledge or more corroborating knowledge about it, the degree of my knowledge will be higher or better. This is not only because I can answer more questions about the fact but rather, I can answer more questions because I have better justification to believe that fact. The degree of justification in this case will depend on the fact that I went through the process of gathering justification myself, I know how reliable my process was, I maybe even had the chance to test this knowledge and I know other relevant facts about the initial fact. In the end, I end up with better knowledge about the fact due to having better justification about it.

I and a cardiologist can both know that the heart is approximately the size of a fist. But I have never seen a heart or studied anatomy. The cardiologist will know better what this proposition means and will have better justification for it since they went through a formal education where they learned much more specific information about the heart. Maybe they even know the usual range of sizes of hearts and fists, and make this claim based on this knowledge. Similarly, two people can both know that 'Centipede is an animal that has more than 10 pairs but less than 200 pairs of legs'. One of them may have learned this when they heard someone say that 'Did you know that no centipede actually has 100 pairs legs even though the number is close to 100'. When the other knows that centipedes have 15 to 191 pairs of legs which is how they know the original proposition. The second person knows that 'Centipede is an animal that has more than 10 pairs but less than 200 pairs of legs' in a higher degree not only because they can provide more information but also because they know more about the components of the proposition. In some cases, the imbalance between knowledge of the proposition and its components is more visible. I know that 'Telomere length shortens with age', I heard it from multiple sources, who were successful

people working in the field of biology. But if you asked me what telomere was, I would not be able to tell. It does not necessarily mean that I do not know the original proposition. It rather means that I do not know it well or as well as someone else, perhaps a biologist.

Hopefully, these examples showcase that degrees of justification have a significant effect on degrees of knowledge. The epistemic absolutist may be inclined to say that I actually do not have better knowledge of the proposition, only better knowledge about the things or the people that the proposition is concerned about. Even Dretske, being one of the most prominent defenders of epistemic absolutism, concedes that knowledge of objects or persons may come in degrees (1981). Then, it should be the burden of the epistemic absolutist to explain how the knowledge of the proposition does not come in degrees when the knowledge of its components does. It is not impossible that a switch concept can depend on a gradable concept as in the case of 'being of age' and 'age'. Being of legal age is a switch concept but age is clearly gradable. However, being of age is by definition a switch concept, it is to say, 'If the person is younger than this age, then they are considered not of legal age', it states implicitly that it is not concerned with the age once the set limit has been passed. Moreover, it seems 'age' is not a component of 'being of age' in the same sense that 'heart' is a component of 'I know that a heart is approximately the size of a fist'. Lastly, once the age limit is passed, it has no effect on being of age but in the case of knowledge, better knowledge about its components allows us to answer questions, have more trust in our knowledge and be able to rely on that knowledge for our practical concerns. Independent of our approach to the principle of compositionality, it seems that there is a strong link between knowing the components of a proposition and knowing that proposition. After all, how can we know whether A is B if we do not know what A is. If we know what A is better than someone else does, then we understand better how it relates to other things.

Therefore, how better we know the objects in the proposition contributes to the degree of knowledge we have about the proposition.

3.2 Verisimilitude

When we are not concerned with philosophical truths but concerned with practicality, even if truth does not come in degrees, our claims do not usually aim or accomplish to capture absolute truth but rather something true enough. We usually consider verisimilitude without even realizing whenever we are concerned with a proposition. If someone claims that the number pi is 3.14158 and someone else claims that it is 500, when it is actually 3.14159, most people would be inclined to consider one to be 'more wrong' depending on its approximation to the truth regardless of their view on truth being gradable or not. This consideration does not only present itself in the case of errors. If we are to consider a similar example, one person can say that the number pi is 3.14 when the other says it is 3.14159265359, in this case they are both true approximations but one is more approximate, so to say, than the other. It intuitively seems that one is closer to the exact truth. For a different example, we can consider how many permanent natural satellites Earth has, one claim can be 'it is either equal to or smaller than 10' and the other '1'. Even though they are both true in this case too, one seems to be closer to the truth than the other.

The view that one claim is closer to the truth than another can be challenged on the grounds of our conceptions of truth. One might claim that this is a matter of degree of specificity rather than approximation to truth. I think how specific and accurate the information is play an important role on its truth. Vague propositions, even if completely

meaningful in itself, will fail to be informative and meaningful when uttered. From the epistemological point of view, if the claim is not specific enough to properly identify the conditions of its truth, sentences can fail to be truth-value bearers or present inconsistent truth values to make talking about its truth obsolete. We can take 'the car is fast' as an example. It is not possible to make a claim about the truth of the claim as it is not specific which car it is or how fast. Truth is not applicable as it is not precise enough for us to check whether it accurately represents reality.

The problem does not disappear even when the object of the sentence refers to a real object, as in the original example about Earth's satellites. Consider a street race where people observe the race. One car wins the race and someone points to it and says 'this car is fast'. We can look at the conditions that the car that we refer to is in, and justifiably claim that the car is fast. It may be useful to note here that indexicals, pointing fingers or some other detail that we know about the context play an important role in specifying its truth conditions. When we return to the example, the same car races Formular 1 cars and comes last, someone else shows the car and says, 'this car is slow'. Later, the owner of the car parks it on a street and someone else passing by says, 'this car is fast'. How could we decide whether the proposition 'this car is fast' is true or not? It seems we would need further specifications on what they mean by fast, in which context or in which event. Even if these examples do not conclusively prove that we preciseness determines the conditions or even the possibility of truth assessments, they are enough to establish that there is an undeniable connection. Therefore, even if one is inclined to think that truthlikeness is not a very meaningful concept and essentially refers to vagueness or preciseness, these examples should establish that these considerations are still important for knowledge acquisition. Therefore, verisimilitude is still a useful and relevant concept for knowledge. In this light, we

can also claim that even though two propositions can be true in vague terms, one can have a higher degree of verisimilitude.

Similar approaches can also be observed in scientific practices. The scientist is often after what is verisimilitude enough to produce accurate and consistent results. We tend to think that it is scientists who are relentlessly working to discover truth but if scientists find a value that is reliable enough for their future practices, they would most probably be content with it. We see many concrete examples of such occurrences in sciences. One example could be Newtonian physics. We now know that Newtonian mechanics are not *true* in the sense that it is inconsistent with some of the scientific observations and other theories that better predict and explain the physical world (Assis & Zylberztajn, 2001). Yet, it is not *completely false*. When we are concerned with everyday objects and ordinary calculations about these objects, Newtonian mechanics is reliable and has predictive power. Even though scientists are aware that the system is not *true*, it is verisimilitude enough for certain purposes and unfit for some others. Depending on their concerns, they decide whether it is verisimilitude enough or not for their current purposes. There are many other examples in sciences where the scientists continue to use a certain tool when it fits their practical purposes, even when they know it is unproven or disproven. Since it produces results, the scientist would not care whether it was the absolute truth or not, it seems it is the desire of the philosopher to find the absolute truth (Elgin, 2010).

Knowledge of probabilistic contents also display another reason why verisimilitude is a useful notion in understanding degrees of knowledge. Probabilistic knowledge such as "I know that it might rain tomorrow" show even stronger bonds between verisimilitude and degrees of justification. It can always be true independent of the strength of our justification that "I know that it might rain tomorrow". One person might know that it might rain tomorrow because it might rain every day and the other might have consulted various forecast sources, identified the most reliable ones, and depended on the ones they chose. Therefore, the second person will have a much higher degree of justification and the knowledge they gather at the end of this process will most likely be more truthlike. It seems that degrees of justification and verisimilitude can reveal stronger relations when we are concerned with probabilistic knowledge because we often need more information to come up with the probabilistic content and require more justification. The person who claims, 'It might rain tomorrow' needs much less justification for this to be knowledge compared to someone who claims 'There is a %70 chance that it will rain tomorrow'. For the latter probabilistic knowledge to be considered knowledge the person probably acquired the justification in a different and more demanding manner than the former. The probabilistic sentence 'It might rain tomorrow' also seems to have a higher degree of verisimilitude when it is compared with "It will definitely rain tomorrow". As there are other conditions in the world that might always affect the weather, it is more truthlike to talk about such conditions in probabilistic terms.

Some of these are considerations we already have even when we are not aware of them, and these considerations play an important part when we are concerned with degrees of knowledge. When the proposition is more truthlike, the person knows the proposition better or more compared to some other person. Both degrees of justification and verisimilitude play an important role in degrees of knowledge but their role becomes even more apparent when we examine them together. Someone can know something more or better as their claim is more truthlike and has a higher degree of justification.

3.3 Degrees of Error

The factors I have mentioned above can be applied to degrees of error as well as degrees of knowledge. As one of the examples already presented, degrees of justification and verisimilitude seem to be very important even when we fail to have knowledge, for even when the subject makes a false claim, such as claiming the distance between Vienna and Budapest being 213 km when it is actually 214 km, we still give them epistemic credit as opposed to someone who claims it is 3 km. Similarly, we can consider cases in which two people learned the same fact but one of them did not remember it correctly, we would still give them more epistemic credit than someone who never even tried to learn the fact and does not have any idea about the fact. Even mistaken results of mathematical equations can be considered in this way. If the person knows which tools to use, which procedures to follow to get to a particular result, even if the result is false due to a calculation mistake, we would give them at least some epistemic credit. We would consider them to be *less mistaken* than someone who does not even know basic math but takes guesses.

It may be vague and counterintuitive when we claim that one proposition has a higher degree of verisimilitude or is closer to truth than another even if they both propositions in question are false. If one finds possible worlds to be a meaningful notion, it provides a rather straightforward way of conceptualizing verisimilitude of errors and in relation, degrees of error. Let us consider two possible worlds in which the errors we considered are not errors but facts and this is the only aspect in those worlds that we set as different from the actual world. So, in the first possible world the distance between Vienna and Budapest would be 213 km and in the second, it would be 3 km. Indubitably, even if we begin imagining these worlds to have only one aspect different from the actual world, more

changes would arise as facts are dependent on each other and they would need to be readjusted according to realistic expectations considering the change we make in the possible world. In the first world, since the distance between the cities are only slightly shorter, the city centre of either city may be just one kilometre to right or left. Even if this will inevitably create other changes in the possible world, the changes it creates may not even be apparent to a person who lives in the area. Other features not being affected and all the state of affairs other than the distance between Vienna and Budapest (also the distance and the structure between other neighbouring cities and the moved city) staying the same are much more probable in this particular possible world.

However, when we consider the second world, it seems impossible that all the other features of actual world could be preserved in a world where the distance between Vienna and Budapest is 3 km. This would inevitably mean that Vienna, Austria, Budapest, Hungary, Central Europe, the people who live in these areas, the buildings that normally exist between the city centres, and many more things cannot be the same or even similar in that possible world as it is in ours. Therefore, we have good reason to claim that one possible world is *closer* to the actual world, not in terms of distance but in terms of similarity. Accordingly, the claim that gives rise to the first possible world is closer to the truth or has a higher degree of verisimilitude, than the claim that gives rise to the second possible world. Therefore, with this approach, verisimilitude can be explained with how close our actual world is to the possible world that the fact we are concerned about would be true. This view is supported, formalized, and visualized in part by the propositional frameworks conceptualized by Tichý (1974) and Hilpinen (1976) to rate the truthlikeness of propositions in relation to possible worlds.

It seems that we are not only concerned with the proposition that the subject claims to know but also if they came to know it through appropriate means. This demonstrates the importance of degrees of justification has on how we evaluate degrees of mistake as we are not only concerned with the end-result but also how the subject came to acquire that knowledge. It shows that when we are concerned with knowledge and justification, we go beyond the proposition and consider the conditions that the person comes from. These conditions are evaluated not only as actual conditions but even possible. Us saying this person would know, had they had this information supports this view by focusing on the possibility of certain conditions and its effects on the actual degree of justification we ascribe to the person. The degrees of justification can be understood both in internalist and externalist terms. In the internalist picture, the person may realize that they are using the right reasoning method but are missing a relevant piece of data or it could be that they are not certain about certain pieces of it. They make an informed guess but do not know. Yet still possess a higher degree of justification compared to someone who does not know the appropriate means of reasoning for that specific purpose. On an externalist picture, we can consider that the justification they are basing their belief on is appropriate as it matches the truth and the way they arrive at that justification, by using inductive or deductive logic based on other facts they know or think is likely, is more than a lucky guess. Nevertheless, they still cannot be sure whether they have the right justification for their belief as the way they acquired it is not as reliable as certain other means. They might not know whether there are certain other facts, even if it is not a mere lucky guess. Still, they also would have better justification than someone who does not even consider these.

It might be important to point out here that it is not always clear whether the way we form our beliefs is sound reasoning or guessing. We might still be guessing even if we

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seemingly have strong justification and reason to have confidence in our belief. We might think we know many facts that allow us to deduce a conclusion and acquire a belief, but it may always depend on external factors that are not available to the subject such as certain other facts we do not have access to that would make our current conclusion invalid and the belief that depends on that reasoning unfounded. Since the subject cannot be aware in all cases, that there may be other facts that are strongly related to their particular reasoning that they do not know. Especially from an internalist point of view, it becomes harder to make a clear-cut distinction between guessing and valid reasoning. This would further make it harder for us to realize whether our belief is based on a guess or a well-founded claim, making degrees of knowledge even more useful to account for borderline cases.

For example, even if the person cannot know whether they are aware of all the related facts, they might examine their belief forming process more closely or do more research to see whether there are such facts. If they cannot find facts that are inconsistent with their view, they can have more confidence in their belief as they have good reason to believe it is likely that there are no other relevant facts that they are missing out. At the end, they can still not have knowledge even though they performed their epistemic duty to acquire that knowledge. In the process, they might have acquired enough knowledge about relevant topics to be considered to have very strong justification, had the claim turn out to be true. It seems while we give them epistemic credit, we do not only consider their existing justification but also whether we think they use the right methods or tools to acquire that knowledge. Whether they would have had knowledge when very few conditions in the actual world or a simple mistake had been corrected. Since they know many relevant facts, they might make a claim that is not only close to truth but also accurate enough in certain systems we use to serve practical purposes. As we have discussed, we see this in history of

science when the information they use in a certain technology turns out to be false, but it still produces results as it is true enough for practical purposes. The person who makes intensive research on the topic and still arrives at a false conclusion certainly deserves and receives more epistemic credit than a person who does not know but also has heard the question for the first time and took a wild guess. Hopefully, these examples make it evident that not only knowledge but also error comes in degrees.

Conclusion

I have argued that epistemic gradualism provides a more fine-grained and intuitive approach to knowledge than epistemic absolutism and that knowledge as well as error come in degrees. To argue for this point, I first introduced epistemic absolutism as the generally accepted view in epistemology. There are various reasons to endorse epistemic absolutism, I have provided some reasons why prominent defenders of epistemic absolutism, such as Ryle and Dretske, understand epistemic absolutism and gradualism to be, even if they do not use this terminology. I, then, introduced epistemic gradualism in the next section as the opposing view. I have mainly built upon Hetherington's works on epistemic gradualism to explain it, I believe his views about the topic are illuminating and representative of the view as he is perhaps the most prominent defender of epistemic gradualism. Still, I have criticized certain aspects of his view, by making use of the recent studies provided by Lai. I outlined the general debate between epistemic absolutism and gradualism, even if it does not run the course of a usual debate. In this first chapter, I mostly focused on demonstrating that both views have certain merits and valid reasons to support the views that they do such as Hetherington's claim that endorsing epistemic gradualism would help us solve important philosophical problems like skepticism, Gettier problems and problems concerning knowing that we know something.

In the second chapter, I focused on three different sources of supporting arguments for epistemic gradualism. The first is arguments about different kinds of knowledge. I have discussed that numerous philosophers agree some kinds of knowledge (know-how, objectual knowledge, knowledge of persons...) can come in degrees whereas they do not want to accept that propositional knowledge can come in degrees. However, if these kinds

of knowledge are not different in nature from propositional knowledge but distinct due to some other reasons such as the means of acquisition, then we can claim that propositional knowledge should be graded as the other kinds are. In the next chapter, I argued that contextualism gives us further reasons or can strengthen our motivation to support epistemic gradualism. This is because both views have similar practical concerns and aim to provide a more detailed and realistic, in the sense of taking place in real life, account of knowledge ascriptions. Even though contextualism does not necessarily lead to epistemic gradualism, it provides good grounds to support it. In the last section of this chapter, I have discussed the most popular arguments against epistemic gradualism, the so-called linguistic evidence. I hoped to showcase that these arguments are generally not constructed in the most charitable way towards epistemic gradualism. Moreover, they are too swift and tend to overlook other possible examples that have the same structure they give but favours epistemic gradualism. Therefore, I concluded that these arguments are not enough to refute epistemic gradualism.

In the last chapter, I focused more on what I believe to be the original contribution of this thesis. I explained how knowledge can come in degrees in relation to degrees of justification and verisimilitude. There are certainly other factors that would affect degrees of knowledge as well as degrees of error. However, I believe these two to be the most prominent. I argued that a person has a better or higher degree of justification due to many reasons, such as way of acquisition or having access to more evidence. Through examples, I argued that a higher degree of justification leads to a higher degree of knowledge. In the next chapter, I followed a similar pattern with verisimilitude and further explained why verisimilitude is a useful concept when we are dealing with knowledge. Lastly, I extended my view to apply to degrees of error as well. I have argued that error comes in degrees as knowledge does, in relation to degrees of justification and verisimilitude. I have tried to exemplify this relation through an example concerning possible worlds.

There are many points in this thesis that would benefit from further research as this is an issue that is highly related or can be related to many other views and problems in philosophy. For example, an in-depth explanation of the relationship between knowledge and understanding can help the epistemic gradualist strengthen their position even further. More research on degrees of justification and verisimilitude can provide even clearer connections amongst each other or in relation to degrees of knowledge and error. It would also be useful to provide further research on degrees of error as I believe it to be a promising topic with interesting implications. I refrained from committing to any other view than epistemic gradualism as I believe this view can be appealing to people with different commitments and views, however this is not always possible. Since the topic of the thesis is concerned with the nature of knowledge, one of the most if not the most fundamental topic in epistemology, there are almost endless connections that we can build with this approach and other topics in epistemology or philosophy in general. Given that being gradable or not is an important feature about the nature of knowledge and it has important implications about other philosophical discussions, this view provides valuable insights and deserves to be studied in further detail.

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