

**Volume XIV ♦ Issue 4**

**2023**

# Logos & Episteme

an international journal  
of epistemology

**Romanian Academy  
Iasi Branch**



**“Gheorghe Zane” Institute  
for Economic and Social  
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## RESEARCH ARTICLES



# THE REFUTATION OF INTENTIONALISM<sup>1</sup>

Daniele BERTINI

**ABSTRACT:** My purpose is to refute the intentionalist approach to perception. Drawing from mainstream literature, I identify a principle on which any version of intentional theory relies. My paper is a detailed attack on the truth of the principle. In the first section I will introduce terminology and will taxonomize various statements of the intentional view. In the second section I will briefly outline a sketch of the skeletal intentionalist theory that develops from the assumption of the principle alone. Then, in the third section, I will advance my reasons against this theory. In the fourth section, I will set forth an intuitive and definitive counterexample to the adequacy of the principle of intentionalism to accounting for ordinary perception. Moving from this, in the fifth section, I will provide some reasons explaining why intentionalism is condemned at being unsuccessful. Finally, in the last section of the paper, I will give my conclusions.

**KEYWORDS:** intentionalism, perception, direct realism, transparency, conceptualism

## 1. Terminology and Taxonomy

*Intentionalism* is the name of a wide set of theories of perception. Suppose a subject perceives something. Call ‘phenomenal character’ the way is like for the subject to undergo the perceptual experience. In other words, ‘phenomenal character’ is nothing else than the sensational component of a perception. And again: call ‘(representational) content’ the way the object of the perceptual experience seems to be to the subject of the experience. That is, ‘content’ is nothing else than the representational component of a perception (broadly speaking, *content* is what the perceptual experience is about). Now, the principle of *intentionalism* is the claim *that, for any perceptual experience, phenomenal character entirely depends on (representational) content*, i.e. *phenomenal character covaries upon (representational) content* (Byrne 2001, 204).

For example, consider the following situation. You are at your barbecue and you are grilling some vegetables. Your experience is, at least, the enjoyment of visual and olfactory sensations. In ordinary perception, you naturally believe that these sensations show you the way the vegetables appear whenever a subject experiences them as you are actually doing. That is, the enjoyment of perceptual sensations

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<sup>1</sup> My paper is dedicated to Ginevra Zoni, my soulmate and true love of my life. By sharing my destiny with her I learned what happiness is.

conveys a (putative) representation of the actual state of the environment around the perceiver. In this case, the phenomenal character of your perception are the visual and olfactory sensations you enjoy; the content is the vegetables you experience being there so and so. Therefore, according to the principle of *intentionalism*, being aware of the visual and olfactory sensations presented to you is entirely dependent on the way the vegetables look to you: for the subject of a perceptual experience the phenomenal character of the experience *always* expresses explicit information about how the object of the experience looks like.

According to Byrne, the principal versions of intentionalism can be classified by means of two categorical oppositions (Byrne 2001, 205). First, intermodal intentionalists hold, while intramodal intentionalists deny, that the phenomenal character between perceptual modalities is determined by a difference in content (intermodal intentionalists hold, while intramodal intentionalists deny, that seeing the grilled vegetables is different from smelling the grilled vegetables, since the content of the visual sensation is different from the content of the olfactory one). Second, suppose you are very hungry while you are grilling the vegetables. Because of this, the smell rising from the barbecue causes you to enjoy a strong bodily sensation of appetite. Unrestricted intentionalists hold, while restricted intentionalists deny, that intentionalism also applies to bodily sensations like your sensation of appetite excited by the smell from the barbecue (unrestricted intentionalists hold, while restricted deny, that bodily sensations, similarly to perceptual experiences, have representational content).

Further distinctions are proposed by Tye (Tye 2009, 257 and following): intentionalism is either strong or weak and either reductive or non-reductive. Strong intentionalists hold, while weak intentionalists deny, that the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience is one and the same with representational content (strong intentionalists hold, while weak intentionalists deny, that the visual and olfactory sensations you enjoy while grilling the vegetables are one and the same with the way the vegetables you are grilling seem to you). Usually, intentionalists rejecting the strong view think of the relation between phenomenal character and content in terms of supervenience (phenomenal character supervenes upon content). And again: reductive intentionalists hold, while non-reductive intentionalists deny, that the content of perceptual experiences can be spelled out either in physical or functional term (reductive intentionalists hold, while non-reductive intentionalists deny, that either the vegetables to which perception is directed are physical entities or phenomenal character is functionally associated with the vegetables causing the subject to undergo the perceptual experience). Those intentionalists rejecting the reductive view think of the relation between phenomenal character and content as



an ontologically subjective state of mind (an ontologically subjective state of mind is a state of mind whose content primarily depends on the constitution of the mind).

My purpose in this paper is to refute any version of intentionalism. For this reason I will not take into consideration cases such as intermodal or intramodal, restricted or unrestricted, strong or weak, reductive or non-reductive intentionalist theories. On the contrary, the target of my attack will be solely the principle of intentionalism: if the principle stands, a huge variety of intentionalist theories could then be true; but if the principle falls, any version of intentionalism should then result false. Therefore, that is the way I will proceed. In the first section I will briefly outline a sketch of the skeletal intentionalist theory that develops just from the assumption of the principle. Then, in the second section, I will advance my reasons against this theory. In the third section, I will set forth an intuitive and definitive counterexample to the adequacy of the principle of intentionalism to account for ordinary perception. Moving from this, in the four section, I will provide some reasons explaining why intentionalism is condemned at being unsuccessful. Finally, in the last section of the paper, I will give my conclusions.

## 2. Skeletal Intentionalist Theory

According to the current usage, I introduce the following symbols. Let:

|    |           |                             |
|----|-----------|-----------------------------|
| S  | stand for | Subject;                    |
| PE | stand for | Perceptual Experience;      |
| PC | stand for | Phenomenal Character;       |
| C  | stand for | (Representational) Content. |

Again, let:

|    |           |                              |
|----|-----------|------------------------------|
| PI | stand for | Principle of Intentionalism; |
|----|-----------|------------------------------|

Then, I define PI according to Byrne's and Tye's approaches to intentionalism and the relevant distinctions on the different kinds of it (Byrne 2001, 204-206; Tye 2009, 257-260):

PI=<sub>def</sub> whenever S enjoys PE, PC entirely co-varies upon C

Since the different versions of intentional theories flow from the qualification of terms occurring in the definition of PI, there is no need to introduce any specifically detailed characterization for PE, PC and C in sketching the skeletal intentionalist theory I am now addressing. Indeed, intentionalists debate about how PE, PC and C should be construed within the horizon of intentionalism; nonetheless, they all agree that what really matters in the intentional approach to perceptual

experiences is the assumption of the basic claim on the relationship of phenomenal character and content.

There are two main arguments which support the assumption of PI. The first one is usually called *the argument from what seems to be for the subject*, the second one is *the argument from transparency*. Typical versions of these arguments are to be found, for the former, in Byrne (2001, 206-217); for the latter in Byrne (2009, 431-451) and Tye (2009, 260-263).

Let's begin with the first one. Byrne moves from the uncontroversial and common-sense intuition that a subject enjoying two succeeding different perceptual experiences is able to detect a difference among these, if the subject is able to realize that the phenomenal character of the first experience is different from the phenomenal character of the second one. That is, suppose that:

- 1) S enjoys PE<sub>1</sub> at time  $t^n$ ;
- 2) S enjoys PE<sub>2</sub> at time  $t^{n+1}$ ;
- 3) PE<sub>1</sub> and PE<sub>2</sub> are different.

And again, assume the general definition for PC and C:

- 4) PC=<sub>def</sub> For any S enjoying PE, PC is the way it is like for S to undergo PE;
- 5) C=<sub>def</sub> For any S enjoying PE, C is what PE is about.

From (1), (2), (4), and (5), it follows that:

- 6) S enjoys PC<sub>1</sub> at time  $t^n$ ;
- 7) S enjoys PC<sub>2</sub> at time  $t^{n+1}$ ;
- 8) S enjoys C<sub>1</sub> at time  $t^n$ ;
- 9) S enjoys C<sub>2</sub> at time  $t^{n+1}$ .

Now, add the clause *that the subject is ideally competent concerning their perceptual experience*, i.e. the subject's memory is perfect; memory is completely at their disposal and they are able to compare each detail of two different perceptual experiences. If this is the case, given (3), it results that:

- 10) S detects differences between PE<sub>1</sub> and PE<sub>2</sub>.

At this moment the intentional theorist asks about *what these differences consist in*. The answer appears quite simple: the difference between PE<sub>1</sub> and PE<sub>2</sub> is to be found out by assessing the difference between what it is like for the subject to undergo PE<sub>1</sub> and what it is like for the subject to undergo PE<sub>2</sub>. Therefore:

- 11) If S detects differences between PE<sub>1</sub> and PE<sub>2</sub>, then S realizes that PC<sub>1</sub> and PC<sub>2</sub> are different.

Now, from the conjunction “(10) & (11)” it results that:

12) S realizes that  $PC_1$  and  $PC_2$  are different.

The intentionalist claims it is easy to see that “the subject can only discover the phenomenal character of their experience by attending to the world (whether external or internal) as their experience represents it” (Byrne 2001, 211); that is, *being aware of what it is like to undergo a perceptual experience is being aware of what the perception represents*. Consequently:

13) If S realizes that  $PC_1$  and  $PC_2$  are different, then S realizes that  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are different;

From the conjunction “(12) & (13)”, it follows:

14) S realizes that  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are different.

Therefore, here is the conclusion of the argument:

15) For any S, if S enjoys  $PE_1$  at time  $t^n$  and  $PE_2$  at time  $t^{n+1}$ , and S is aware that  $PE_1$  and  $PE_2$  are different; then S is aware that  $PC_1$  and  $PC_2$  are different *because* S is aware that  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  are different.

Now, a concise way to state (15) is to say that:

16) For any ideally competent subject enjoying a perceptual experience, phenomenal character entirely co-varies upon content.

As Byrne advocates, from (16) to the assumption of PI there is just a short step. Consider the difference between the idealized and the real subject. The former is able to verify what kind of relationship obtains between phenomenal character and content by the comparison of two or more perceptual experiences it once enjoyed (or by the comparison of any past perceptual experience with the present one). However, on the other hand, the second can perform the test just with those materials actually kept in their (long term) memory (or with one of these and the present perceptual experience they enjoy). Nonetheless, whenever the real subject performs the test concerning the relationship between phenomenal character and content, according to the limited number of real experiences they are actually able to compare, they behave exactly as the idealized subject does. That is to say, idealized and real subjects have the same kind of perceptual experiences, although the set of experiences at the disposal of the idealized subject in order to perform the test is extensionally wider than the ones at the disposal of the real subject. Now, if Byrne is right when claiming the intensional identity of idealized and real subjects, the clause *ideally competent* in (16) can be removed. Consequently, the argument for (16) becomes an argument for PI.

Having completed the exposition of *the argument from what seems to the subject*, I move on to *the argument from transparency*. Consider the following situation: imagine you are playing for the first time *touch rugby* with some friends in the park. During a pause one of them asks you: “Do you like this game?”. You answer: “Playing touch rugby is a nice experience” (P<sub>1</sub>). What you mean is that all which occurs to a person (like you) playing touch rugby is funny and amusing. That is, by stating that (P<sub>1</sub>) is the case, you aim at emphasizing your positive enjoyment of the given activity. Suppose that another friend sees you playing while they are walking through the park. Since they have never known anything about your interest in rugby, they are amazed by what they see, so that they approach your group. “Hey what are you doing?”, they ask you. While your answer should ordinarily sound something like “I’m playing touch rugby” (P<sub>2</sub>), assume that your answer actually is “I’m experiencing to play touch rugby” (P<sub>3</sub>).

The intentional theorist introduces the notion of *transparency* in order to account for the different usage of the notion of *experience* in (P<sub>1</sub>) and (P<sub>3</sub>). That is, when you assert the first sentence your intention is to communicate that you like what happens to you while playing, i.e. you want to refer to the sensations, the emotions, the feelings, the desires and the ends that *you (or someone like you)* actually enjoy performing a given kind of activity. Therefore, the reference to the *experience* appears perfectly reasonable. On the contrary, (P<sub>3</sub>) is evidently redundant: the sentence simply states a matter of fact about what you are actually doing, i.e. the sentence simply provides information to your interlocutor concerning your actual way of being practically engaged in the performance of an activity. Consequently, the reference to the *experience* appears here completely useless: saying *that you are experiencing to perform a given activity* is to say *that you are performing a given activity*, because the propositional content of (P<sub>2</sub>) and (P<sub>3</sub>) is one and the same.

Now, both Byrne and Tye rely on the Hintonian assumption that verbs expressing perceptual experiences behave exactly as the verb *playing* does in (P<sub>1</sub>), (P<sub>2</sub>), and (P<sub>3</sub>) (Hinton 1967, 1-13). Seeing, hearing, tasting and liking are not experiences, according to the meaning of the term in (P<sub>1</sub>). *Experiencing to see* or *seeing* have exactly the same content (unless you want to put your emphasis on what occurs to *you* while seeing). Try as much as you like—the intentional theorist proposes—to consider yourself while perceiving something: you will not perceive or misperceive anything more than properties, shapes, colours and so on, that is, the phenomenal features the environment around you apparently exhibits (Byrne 2009, 433-435; Tye 2009, 261). Hence, the moral of the story is *that you are not able to detect differences between phenomenal character and content*: what it is like for

you to undergo a perceptual experience represents to you how the environment around you appears.

As Tye writes:

Suppose that you have just entered a friend's country house for the first time and you are standing in the living room, looking out at a courtyard filled with flowers. It seems to you that the room is open, that you can walk straight out into the courtyard. You try to do so and, alas, you bang hard into a sheet of glass, which extends from ceiling to floor and separates the courtyard from the room. You bang into the glass because you do not see it. You are not aware of it; nor are you aware of any of its qualities. No matter how hard you peer, you cannot discern the glass. It is transparent to you... If your friend tells you that there are several ceiling-to-floor sheets of glass in the house and that they all produce a subtle change in the light passing through them so that things seen the other side appear more vividly coloured than is usually the case, as you walk gingerly into the next room, you may become aware that there is another partitioning sheet of glass before you by being aware of the qualities that appear to belong to non-glass surfaces before your eyes... Visual experiences, according to the representationalist, are like such sheets of glass. Peer as hard as you like via introspection, focus your attention in any way you please, and you will only come across surfaces, volumes, films and their apparent qualities. Visual experiences thus are transparent to their subjects. (Tye 2009, 261)

In the light of these considerations, the intentionalist assumes the following claim:

1)When S enjoys PE, S does not enjoy an experience (according to the meaning of *experience* in (P<sub>1</sub>)).

Hence the argument runs as follows:

2)If (1) is the case, then PC seems to be a presentation of the phenomenal features the environment around S exhibits to S;

Since "(1) & (2)" is the case, it results that:

3)PC seems to be a presentation of the phenomenal features the environment around S exhibits to S.

Now:

4)If (3) is the case, when S enjoys PE, S is aware of C via PC.

From "(3) & (4)" it follows that:

5)When S enjoys PE, S is aware of C *via* PC.

That is, the enjoyment of PC by S always conveys the enjoyment of C by S: S cannot be aware of PC without being aware of C. Consequently:

6) When S enjoys PE, PC entirely co-varies upon C.

Having concluded the deduction of PI, at this point *the argument from transparency* ends.

Equipped with two (apparently independent) arguments, the intentional theorist can happily move on to the construal of the skeletal version of intentionalism<sup>2</sup>. In order to pursue the task, the intentionalist needs basically to determine whether the relationship between phenomenal character and content is either internal or external to perceptual experiences<sup>3</sup>.

Suppose the relation is internal. The assumption of PI would then entail that perceptual experiences are metaphysically constituted by the representational nature of phenomenal characters, representations ontologically forming the phenomenal realm. If this is the case, transparency could also be the main feature of perceptual experiences; but there would be no plausible reasons to hold that this representationality of perceptions should actually represent something. In other words, it would result impossible to claim whether or not perceptual experiences (mis)represent (the noumenal) reality.

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<sup>2</sup> Theorists sometimes defend intentionalism as an inference to the best explanation for the case of illusions (and hallucinations). Since the inference relies on the assumption of the 'no experience hypothesis' (the claim that perceptions are not experiences), the inference is not independent from *the argument from transparency*. Consequently, I see no evident reasons for treating the inference as a third autonomous argument for intentionalism.

<sup>3</sup> Here is a way to derive the different kinds of intentional theories from the definition of PI:

Intermodal/intramodal. Suppose you consider the possibility that phenomenal character involves sensations from different perceptual modalities; then, if you are positive to the intuition that sensations from different sense modalities have different content, you will fall into the intermodal side, if you are not, you will fall into the intramodal side.

Unrestricted/restricted. Suppose you consider the possibility that a particular class of perceptual experiences is constituted by bodily sensations; then, if you are positive to this possibility, you will fall into the unrestricted side, if you are not into the restricted one.

Strong/weak. Suppose you consider the possibility that PC and C stand in a relationship of either identity or supervenience; then, if you are positive to the possibility that the relationship among them is a relation of identity, you will fall into the strong side; if you are positive to the possibility that the relationship among them is a relation of supervenience, you will fall into the weak side.

Reductive/unreductive. Suppose you consider the possibility that either contents are physical entities or that phenomenal characters are functionally associated to the physical entities causing the subject to enjoy its perceptual experience; then, if you are positive to this possibility you will fall into the reductive side, if you are not, into the unreductive one.

On the contrary, suppose the relation is external. Perceptual experiences would not be then metaphysically constituted by the representational nature of phenomenal character: representationality would result in an acquired feature of phenomenality. Consequently, transparency should involve that the enjoyment of the phenomenal character of perceptual experiences is a case of direct acquaintance with the environment around the perceiving subject.

Given these two possibilities to determine the relationship between phenomenal character and content, it seems there would be room for two alternative options in construing intentionalism:

- PI captures the frame of PE independently on the issue of what the representationality of C *via* PC represents;
- PI captures the frame of PE, C *via* PC ordinary representing the environment around S.

The first stance is the minority view among intentional theorists; the second one is the majority view. I name the former *undeterminate skeletal intentionalism* (USI), the latter *determinate skeletal intentionalism* (DSI). USI refuses to qualify what contents represent: this position simply describes the phenomenology of perceptual experiences. According to these intentional theorists, while perceptual experiences have to be characterized by the way their contents relate to phenomenal characters, in order to explain phenomenally how perception works it is not necessary to refer to what contents actually represent.

On the contrary, the latter stance is peculiar to the great majority of intentional theorists: they hold that contents (in case of veridical perceptions) are propositional representations of the environment around the subjects enjoying perceptual experiences. Consequently, the doctrine claims that any (veridical) perception is a case of direct awareness of the objective world. How could this happen? The answer is the following: the subject grasps cognitively what the enjoyment of a given phenomenal character represents by simply enjoying the given phenomenal character.

Because of their different interpretation of PI, DSI and USI, theorists disagree on the nature of perceptual experiences. Those theorists assenting to DSI explicitly, claim that holding PI commits them to the assumption of (at least) two main consequences. They say: since perceptual experiences are transparent, the subject is not able to detect any differences between their perceiving something and their focusing on their perceiving something. Then, perceptual experiences are not cases of direct acquaintance with mental particulars and they do not have properties. Therefore, DSI allegedly entails that:

- a)perceptual experiences are not cases of direct acquaintance with mental particulars as sense data;
- b)perceptual experiences do not have properties.

Finally, from PI, (a), and (b) it follows that:

- c)perceptual experiences are not inner states of mind;
- d)perceptual experiences are direct awareness of the environment around the perceiving subject.

Conversely, those theorists assenting to indeterminate USI hold that PI is not a reason which supports the assumption of (a) and (b). After all, the claim *that perceptual experiences are transparent to the subjects undergoing them* does not imply *that perceptual experiences actually are what subjects hold they are*. Consequently, according to the USI theorist (a) and (b) are not to be assumed as justified claims of the doctrine. The moral of the story is then the following: while the phenomenological analysis of perceptual experiences provides reason in support of PI, both (a) and (b) cannot count as evidence that contents actually represent the world, nor as reasons in support of (c) and (d) (Byrne 2001, 224-225).

### 3. Arguments against Undeterminate and Determinate Skeletal Intentionalism

Since I distinguish between USI and DSI, I develop my considerations against intentionalism into two separate refutations, because different general problems arise addressing USI and DSI.

As to the first case, the problems are mainly due to the propositional ambiguity which stems from the assumption *that the relationship between phenomenal character and content is ontologically undetermined*. That is, the indeterminacy of this version of the theory makes it appearing unable to state something important and insightful concerning perceptual experiences.

As to the second case, while DSI explicitly expresses strong claims (so that the theory provides a substantive and definite account of perceptual experiences), DSI endorses contradictory claims: it is easy to conclude that it should be problematic to hold it too (on pain of assuming a dialetheist account for contradictions).

In light of these considerations, I move on now to my first target. As any other intentional theorist, those assuming the USI interpretation of PI claim that the phenomenological analysis of perceptual experiences suggests that any perceptual experience looks like a case of direct acquaintance with the environment. Indeed, the phenomenology of perceptual experiences shows that nothing changes when the subject focuses at first on the phenomenal character of the perception they are enjoying and successively on themselves enjoying that phenomenal character. That



is, the phenomenal characters of both the perceptual experiences suggest to the subject exactly the same content: in the former and the latter cases it seems to them that the perceptual experiences represent the environment. Nonetheless, the USI theorist does not draw from this evidence the conclusion that contents propositionally grasp the way the environment around the subject actually is: the evidence simply attests *that enjoying a phenomenal character is constantly associated with a simultaneous understanding of this enjoyment in terms of the phenomenal features the environment apparently exhibits*.

Since the subject cannot be certain that what appears to them is actually one and the same with what really is, the subject cannot count perceptual pieces of evidence as reasons for the justification of perceptual beliefs. That is, suppose you enjoy a perceptual experience. If this is the case you are sensory modified. For example, you see a round and bulgy red coloured shape. The USI theorist claims that you cannot avoid understanding that shape as the representation of a red tomato. Nonetheless, you are not justified in taking for granted the belief that in the environment around you there is a red tomato. That is, USI states that while perceptions necessary incline the subject to form perceptual beliefs (whose propositional content is one and the same with the representational content of the perception), perceptions cannot provide reasons for true and justified beliefs.

A different way to consider all this is to say that according to the USI theorist, from the assumption of PI, three main consequences can follow:

- e)solely on the basis of the enjoyment of a perceptual experience, any subject acquires necessary doxastic commitments;
- f) solely on the basis of the enjoyment of a perceptual experience, any subject does not necessary acquire epistemic commitments;
- g)solely on the basis of the phenomenological analysis of perceptions, there is no transition from doxastic to epistemic commitments.

The problem of USI is exactly the claim that “PI & (e) & (f) & (g)” is the case. Here are the reasons why the conjunction sounds so unpalatable to me. The USI theorist assumes PI with the clause that *PI captures the frame of PE independently on the issue of what the representationality of C via PC represents*. Consequently, let:

P stand for Determined Perceptual Belief.

It results that:

- 1)If (e) is the case, then when S enjoys “PC & C”, S is forced to hold that P is the case;

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2) S is forced to hold that P is the case;

3) If (f) is the case, then when S enjoys "PC & C", S is not forced to hold that P is justified;

4) S is not forced to hold that P is justified;

5) If (g) is the case, then when S enjoys "PC & C", S cannot provide reasons in support of P;

6) S cannot provide reasons in support of P.

Now, from (2) and (4) it follows that:

7) S is forced to hold that P is the case and S is not forced to hold that P is justified.

And again, from (6) and (7):

8) S is forced to hold that P is the case and S is forced to prevent itself from judging on the justification of P.

At this point, consider the meaning of (8). If the USI theorist is right, any subject enjoying a perceptual experience should refrain from characterizing positively what the content of their perceptual experience actually is. Therefore, it could be the case that:

h) Phenomenal characters are either mental objects or representations of the environment around the perceiving subject, but not both;

i) Perceptual experiences either have or don't have phenomenal properties;

j) Contents are either subjective awareness of inner states of mind or objective awareness of the environment around the perceiving subject, but not both.

Let the symbol:

$\oplus$  stand for Either ... Or, But Not Both.

Evidently:

9) If "(h) & (i) & (j)" is the case, then " $[(a) \& (b)] \oplus [\neg(a) \oplus \neg(b)]$ "

Conclusion follows:

k) " $[(a) \& (b)] \oplus [\neg(a) \oplus \neg(b)]$ ".

At this point it is easy to see that USI results compatible with (at least) three alternative notions of the representationality of contents<sup>4</sup>. Consider the common philosophical views on perception:

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<sup>4</sup> Byrne seems to consider this as a positive feature of intentionalism. He writes (Byrne 2001, 204): "Intentionalism is in a sense a weak doctrine. It is neutral on the question of what our perceptual

**SENSE DATA (SD)** When S ordinarily undergoes PE, the enjoyment of “PC & C” is S’s awareness of the mental objects that the environment around S causes to appear in S’s mind;

**ADVERBIALISM (AD)** When S ordinarily undergoes PE, the enjoyment of “PC & C” is S’s awareness of the perceptual experience’s properties that the environment around S causes to appear in S’s mind;

**DIRECT REALISM (DR)** When S ordinarily undergoes PE, the enjoyment of “PC & C” is S’s awareness of the phenomenal features that the environment around them exhibits.

Because of the ontological indeterminacy of the USI theorist’s notion of content, PI and its consequences can be developed into a sense data theory, an adverbialist theory, and a direct realist theory. That is, PI and its consequences are reasons in support of one of three different views on perception, because three possible situations occur. Suppose that the first disjunct in (k) is true. If this is the case, USI involves DR. On the contrary, suppose that the second disjunct in (k) is true. Then, if (a) is false, USI involves SD; if (b) is false, USI involves AD.

Notoriously, AD opposes SD in claiming that perceptual experiences are not awareness of mental objects, while DR opposes both SD and AD in claiming that perceptual experiences are not awareness of mental states. Therefore, each of these theories competes against the others to be the most adequate account for perception.

Can AD be considered simply an improvement of SD? And can DR be considered simply the definitive upgrade of AD? Evidently not. The AD theorist usually advances their arguments against the assumption that perceptual experiences are awareness of mental objects: they basically reject the SD core idea that perception is objectival in nature. And again, the DR theorist commonly attacks both

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experiences are about. It does not take a stand on whether phenomenal character can be *explained in terms of*, or *reduce to*, intentionality—at least it doesn’t if these claims don’t follow from the mere fact of supervenience. And intentionalism is silent on physicalism, functionalism, psychosemantics, and other topics relevant to *naturalizing the mind*. He substantially advances the idea that, intentionalism being a kind of propositionalism, namely, the view that perceptual experiences have propositional content, intentionalism is compatible with any theory assenting to propositionalism, independently on which type of propositionalism is to be meant here (Byrne 2001, 225, footnote). In this regards, while he grants that intentional theorists usually argue against sense data theorists (and adverbialists too, I add), he claims that the two theories are two different versions of propositionalism, since intentionalism would be *environmental propositionalism* (the content of perception exclusively concerns the perceiver’s environment) whereas sense data theory would be *subjectivist propositionalism* (the content of perception exclusively concerns the perceiver’s inner state of mind). I hope to offer enough reasons to reject Byrne’s positive attitude to intentionalism as a general pattern accounting for the differences among these theories of perception.

SD and AD as subjectivist doctrines: they basically reject the SD and AD core idea that perception is nothing more than phenomenal awareness. Does the truth of one of these theories exclude then the truth of the others too? Certainly yes. If the subject is aware of mental objects in perceiving, they could not then be simply aware of properties (of their experience). And again, if the subject is simply aware of properties (of their experience), they could not then be aware of the real environment around them.

Now, my claim is that if USI can be developed into one or the other of three alternative and concurrent views, in the absence of binding reasons to work out the theory towards one of them, each of the three views is to be considered a possible consequence of the assumption of PI. Then, PI appears substantially useless and uninteresting from a philosophical standpoint: three theories assenting to the same principle and basically differing among them are not evidently ruled by the assumption of the shared principle.

In order to prove my claim, consider the architecture of USI:

- I) PI.
- II)  $PI \supset (e)$ .
- III)  $PI \supset (f)$ .
- IV)  $PI \supset (g)$ .
- V)  $PI \& (e) \& (f) \& (g)$ .
- VI)  $[PI \& (e) \& (f) \& (g)] \supset (h)$ .
- VII)  $[PI \& (e) \& (f) \& (g)] \supset (i)$ .
- VIII)  $[PI \& (e) \& (f) \& (g)] \supset (j)$ .
- IX)  $PI \& (e) \& (f) \& (g) \& (h) \& (i) \& (j)$ .
- X)  $[PI \& (e) \& (f) \& (g) \& (h) \& (i) \& (j)] \supset (k)$ .
- XI)  $PI \& (e) \& (f) \& (g) \& (h) \& (i) \& (j) \& (k)$ .

It results that:

- According to USI theorists three propositions directly follow from the assumption of PI alone;
- None of these characterizes a distinct view on perception, a definite view on perception being a doctrine endorsing a combination of (a) or  $\neg(a)$  but not both, (b) or  $\neg(b)$  but not both;
- Nonetheless, the assumption of PI and its consequences requires that one view between SD, AD and DR is the case; because:

- (k) states that each one of SD, AD, and DR is possibly right.
- Despite the incompatibility of SD, AD and DR, the assumption of PI and its consequences does not entail contradictory claims as “(a) & ¬(a)” and “(b) & ¬(b)”, being the *either... or* formulas in (h), (i), (j) and (k) exclusive disjunctions.

Therefore, two claims are plainly made explicit by the architectural consideration of USI:

- l) PI alone cannot characterize any views on perception;
- m) SD, AD, and DR being alternative and concurrent views, differences among them cannot be dependent on their assumption of PI and its consequences.

From all this, I draw my conclusion: the architecture of USI reveals that while SD, AD, and DR possibly are consequences of the assumption of PI, none of these are an evident consequence of that assumption. That is, none of SD, AD, and DR are incompatible with the assumption of PI, although PI alone cannot provide reasons in support of one or the others. But, SD, AD and DR are incompatible among them: if one of these is the case, the others are then to be rejected. Consequently, differences between SD, AD and DR cannot be ascribed to the assumption of PI and its consequences.

Finally, my argument against the assumption of PI by USI theorists runs as follows:

- 1) If a principle is compatible with some conflicting views, then the principle says nothing on the conflict among these views;
- 2) If some conflicting views differ essentially among them just for their conflict, then these views are necessary to be characterized by the position each of these assumes on the matter at dispute;
- 3) From (1) and (2), a principle compatible with some conflicting views differing essentially among them for their conflict, cannot characterize any of these;
- 4) If a principle cannot characterize a view which possibly follows from its assumption, the principle is philosophically useless and uninteresting as regards to this view;
- 5) SD, AD and DR are conflicting views;
- 6) PI is compatible with SD, AD and DR;
- 7) From (1), (5) and (6), PI says nothing on the conflict among these;
- 8) SD, AD and DR differ essentially among them just for their conflict on the truth of a combination of (a) or ¬(a) but not both, (b) or ¬(b) but not both;
- 9) From (3), (7), and (8), PI cannot characterize none of SD, AD and DR;

10) SD, AD and DR possibly follow from the assumption of PI and its consequences;

11) From (9) and (10), PI is philosophically useless and uninteresting as regards to the theory of perception.

Having completed my refutation of USI, I turn to attack DSI. Contrary to the USI theorist, the DSI theorist holds that PI is a reason in support of the conjunction of (a), (b), (c) and (d). Indeed, according to the DSI theorist, *the appeal to transparency* and *the appeal to what seems to a subject* justify the subject in considering true the perceptual belief that the (veridical) perceptual experience they are actually enjoying forces them to form.

Since DSI assumes the conjunction of (a), (b), (c) and (d), DSI opposes both SD and AD. Particularly, the assumption of (a) implies the rejection of the main claim of SD, whereas the assumption of (b) implies the rejection of the main claim of AD.

What is wrong with these views? They hold perceptions to be awareness of purely subjective states of mind—the DSI theorist claims. That is, both SD and AD entail that the subject does not directly perceive the environment around them, being *sense data* or the *perceptual ways of experiencing* mental particulars. Now, while the SD and the AD theorist disagree on the nature of these mental particulars (objects *vs* properties), both SD and AD claim that when the subject enjoys a perceptual experience, the subject is directly aware solely of those mental particulars that the environment around them causes to appear in their mind. Therefore, DSI opposes those views of perception holding *that perceptual experiences are something like presentations of pictures viewed by the subject's inner eye*: according to the DSI theorist, SD and AD should then be rejected because they hypostatize (namely, they ascribe substantial and independent existence to) perceptual experiences.

The problem here concerns the kind of relation perception is (or is not) thought to be: the phenomenological analysis of perceptual experience by SD and AD theorists leads to the claim that when the mind perceives something, the mind is indirectly related to the environment by means of its experience. That is, the mind is somehow in front of its experience as something distinct from both itself and the environment: perceptual experiences interpose between the mind and the world. As a consequence, perception is meant to be an ontologically ternary relation (the mind is in relation to its perceptual experience, which is in relation to the environment causing it). On the contrary, the phenomenological analysis of perceptual experiences by DSI suggests to the theorist that when the mind perceives something, the mind is directly related to the environment, its experience being the direct representation of the environment. That is, the phenomenal features it is presented with by its enjoyment of the phenomenal character of its perceptual experience are

the direct appearances of the properties the environment around itself intrinsically possesses. As a consequence, perception is meant to be an ontologically binary relation (the mind is in relation to the environment).

In light of these considerations, DSI evidently appears as a version of DR: “intentional theories [...] assert that mind-independent objects can be presented to the mind in having perceptual experiences” (Martin 2002, 392). Particularly, DSI *is* the contemporary mainstream version of DR: the reduction of phenomenal character to content is the reduction of the phenomenal to the noumenal, i.e., *the way the perceived object ordinarily appears to the perceiving subject is the way the object actually is*. In the intentionalist jargon: what is for me to undergo a perceptual experience directly represents the appearance of the environment around me. Consequently, the reduction of phenomenal character to content is equivalent to saying that I necessarily enjoy a perception understanding my sensory modifications as the informational presentation of reality.

The DSI theorist claims that (c) and (d) clearly express these stances of intentionalism. Nonetheless, something goes wrong with the alleged direct realist flavour of DSI. Consider the following situation (Sit<sub>1</sub>)<sup>5</sup>:

- S<sub>1</sub> enjoys PE<sub>1</sub>;
- S<sub>1</sub> is provided with a visual sensory modification presenting a round and bulgy red coloured shape in front of them;
- PC<sub>1</sub> conveys C<sub>1</sub> to S<sub>1</sub>;
- S<sub>1</sub> is then aware that a tomato is in front of them;
- S<sub>2</sub> enjoys PE<sub>2</sub> (from S<sub>1</sub>'s standpoint S<sub>2</sub> looks at the same region of the environment as S<sub>1</sub> does);
- S<sub>2</sub> is provided with a visual sensory modification presenting an oval and bulgy yellow coloured shape in front of them;
- PC<sub>2</sub> conveys C<sub>2</sub> to S<sub>2</sub>;
- S<sub>2</sub> is then aware that a lemon is in front of them.

Suppose S<sub>1</sub> states to S<sub>2</sub> that they hold the belief that the object in front of them is a tomato. Naturally, S<sub>2</sub> replies immediately to S<sub>1</sub> that their belief is false: the object in front of them is a lemon indeed. As a consequence, S<sub>1</sub> and S<sub>2</sub> begin to quarrel about the nature of the object they think to perceive. Because of this, they ask a friend to testify whether the object is a tomato or a lemon. Then, S<sub>3</sub> performs the test and confirm S<sub>2</sub>'s belief that the object in front of them is a lemon. At this point S<sub>1</sub>

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<sup>5</sup> Capital letters with subscript numbers represent different particulars.

confesses that short time before enjoying the perceptual experience, they have swallowed a psychofarmacological drug able to induce strong hallucinations. Therefore, they all agree to repeat the perceptual experience the day after when the effects of the psychofarmacological drug would be completely vanished. Finally, this new situation (Sit<sub>2</sub>) results:

- S<sub>1</sub> enjoys PE<sub>3</sub>;
- S<sub>1</sub> is provided with a visual sensory modification presenting an oval and bulgy yellow coloured shape in front of them;
- PC<sub>3</sub> conveys C<sub>2</sub> to S<sub>1</sub>;
- S<sub>1</sub> is then aware that a lemon is in front of them;
- S<sub>2</sub> enjoys PE<sub>4</sub>;
- S<sub>2</sub> is provided with a visual sensory modification presenting an oval and bulgy yellow coloured shape in front of them;
- PC<sub>4</sub> conveys C<sub>2</sub> to S<sub>2</sub>;
- S<sub>2</sub> is then aware that a lemon is in front of them.

Now, does the difference between Sit<sub>1</sub> and Sit<sub>2</sub> constitute a problem for DSI? In a way, it should. After all, DR being true, it seems reasonable to think that the sensational component of a perception should not be fallible: directly perceiving the environment around me seems to imply that the sensory component of my perception is a veridical presentation of its appearance to me. Then, I cannot be in error here. Nonetheless, according to the DSI theorist, the answer should be *no*, because DSI is ready to construe perceptual experiences in terms of the success or failure of the representative process (Brewer 2006). That is, if the representative process is successful, then the perceptual experience has a veridical content; if it is unsuccessful, it has a non-veridical one. Consequently, DSI claims that when a subject enjoys a perceptual experience, content either represents or misrepresents the environment around them (when a subject enjoys a perceptual experience, content ordinarily represents the environment around them, being illusion and hallucination cases of misrepresentation).

Byrne pictures this feature of DSI contrasting the treatment of the relationship between phenomenal character and content by SD and AD with that of DSI. SD and AD hold, while DSI denies, that phenomenal characters are infallible and incorrigible, the understanding of content being a matter of judgement (Byrne 2009, 435-438).

What does this mean? That according to the DSI theorist, when S<sub>1</sub> experiences Sit<sub>1</sub>, S<sub>1</sub> sees a tomato because PE<sub>1</sub> presents to their the non-veridical PC<sub>1</sub>; on the



contrary, when  $S_1$  experiences  $Sitz_2$ ,  $S_1$  sees a lemon because  $PE_3$  presents to them the veridical  $PC_3$ .

As a conclusion it results that DSI holds that when a subject enjoys a perceptual experience, then the environment around them either veridically or non-veridically appears within the phenomenal character they are provided with.

It seems then that some problems arise for DSI. Let:

|      |                |            |
|------|----------------|------------|
| $v$  | stand for      | Veridical; |
| $nv$ | stand for Non- | Veridical; |
| $t$  | stand for      | True;      |
| $nt$ | stand for Non- | True.      |

I define:

$PC_v$  For any  $S$  enjoying  $PE$ ,  $PC_v$  successfully presents to  $S$  the phenomenal features the environment around them possesses;

$PC_{nv}$  For any  $S$  enjoying  $PE$ ,  $PC_{nv}$  unsuccessfully presents to  $S$  the phenomenal features the environment around them possesses;

$C_t$  For any  $S$  enjoying  $PE$ ,  $C_t$  successfully expresses to  $S$  the phenomenal features the environment around them possesses;

$C_{nt}$  For any  $S$  enjoying  $PE$ ,  $C_{nt}$  unsuccessfully expresses to  $S$  the phenomenal features the environment around them possesses;

Now, consider the following argument:

- 1)  $PI$ ;
- 2) For any  $S$  enjoying  $PE$ ,  $C$  *via*  $PC$  either represents or does not represent the environment around  $S$ ;
- 3)  $S$  enjoys  $PE$ ;
- 4) " $PC_v$  &  $C_t$ "  $\oplus$  " $PC_{nv}$  &  $C_{nt}$ ".

At this point, assume the following principle:

- n) For any  $S$  enjoying  $PE$ , if " $PC$  &  $C$ " either successfully or unsuccessfully *presents and expresses* the environment around  $S$ , then " $PC$  &  $C$ " is not the direct presentation of the environment  $S$ .

To the best of my knowledge (n) is uncontroversially true. Consider the following lines of argumentation. The representative process the DSI theorists hold to characterize perceptual experiences ends with the presentation of " $PC$  &  $C$ " to the subject. The possibility that " $PC$  &  $C$ " either successfully or unsuccessfully *presents and expresses* the environment necessarily requires that " $PC$  &  $C$ " is not the direct

awareness of the phenomenal features the environment actually possesses. Indeed, suppose that “PC<sub>nv</sub> & C<sub>nt</sub>” is the case: the failure of the representative process means that the subject actually enjoys a phenomenal character and a content that do not correctly represent the appearance of the environment to them. That is, the phenomenal features of the environment that the phenomenal character and the content of the perceptual experience present to the subject do not correspond to the phenomenal features the environment actually possesses. Consequently, at least for the unsuccessful cases it results that “PC & C” is not the direct presentation of the environment around the perceiving subject: the phenomenal cannot be reduced to the noumenal. But, if “PC<sub>nv</sub> & C<sub>nt</sub>” is not the direct presentation of the environment around the perceiving subject, *do we have reasons for thinking “PC<sub>v</sub> & C<sub>t</sub>” to be something like that?* Obviously not, because the successful case cannot but parallel the unsuccessful one: the success of the representative process means that the subject actually enjoys a phenomenal character and a content that do correctly represent the appearance of the environment to them. That is, the phenomenal features of the environment that the phenomenal character and the content of the perceptual experience present to the subject do correspond to the phenomenal features the environment actually possesses. Now, although in the positive case the phenomenal can be reduced to the noumenal, according to the DSI theorist’s understanding of the representative process, the phenomenal and the noumenal remain two ontologically distinct states of being, which are related: while the former is a mental particular, the second is not<sup>6</sup>.

Consequently:

5) If “(4) & (n)” is the case, then for any S enjoying PE, “PC & C” is not the direct presentation of the environment around S;

6) But, if “PC & C” is not the direct presentation of the environment around S, “PC & C” is the medium by means of which the environment around S is perceived by S;

7) Consequently, “PC & C” is an ontologically different state of being from the

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<sup>6</sup> Intentional theorists can be tempted to defend direct realist intentionalism by means of the disjunctive approach to perception. In this case they say: whenever the subject veridically perceives something, the subject is directly acquainted with the environment around them, misperception being a completely different state of mind. Nonetheless, I confess I do not understand how this is to be argued without infringing the consequences of PI. For it follows from PI that differences in phenomenal character are differences in content, whereas disjunctivism grants that two different states of mind can share their phenomenal characters and differ in content (for example, a veridical perception of a lemon and a hallucination of a lemon have the same phenomenal character and different content) (Tye 2009).

environment around S;

8) Since the environment around S is not mental in nature, "PC & C" is a mental particular state of being.

Given this argument, it results an objection to the consistency of DSI:

- 1) DSI endorses PI;
- 2) If PI is the case, then "(c) & (d)" follows;
- 3) DSI endorses (8);
- 4) ¬["(c) & (d)" & (8)];
- 5) DSI endorses contradictory claims.

It goes without saying that a theory endorsing contradictions cannot offer any plausible view on the truth of its claims. Consequently, DSI cannot evidently provide any consistent and compelling reasons in support of its treatment of the phenomenon of perception. Since DSI is the claim that from the assumption of PI the conjunction "(a) & (b) & (c) & (d)" follows, I hold that PI should be rejected, **as** it is not possible to reject any of "(c) & (d)" and (8).

#### 4. A Counterexample to the Principle of Intentionalism

The two refutations of USI and DSI show that the assumption of PI puts the intentional theorist into the horns of a dilemma. On one hand, they can avoid ontologically characterizing the representative nature of perceptual experiences. But all they obtain is simply a vague principle which results in no philosophical importance or usefulness in accounting for perception. On the other hand, they can ascribe positive and substantive ontological features to the representative nature of perceptual experiences. But eventually they fall into a non-removable contradiction.

I believe there is a plain reason for all this: PI is definitely false, since it makes particular features of a narrow class of perceptual experiences to be universally sound; i.e., it expresses the view that the representationality some perceptions exhibit should characterize the nature of any kind of perceptions *tout court*. In order to make explicit why intentionalism necessarily does not succeed in accounting for perception, consider the following counterexample to its main claim.

I live in a small town on the coast, at the back of which a mountain range rises. If one looks at these mountains from the sea coast, they look fascinatingly alpine. Therefore, despite the fact that my town is a sea town, many people living here do love mountains. Me too. Reaching the summits of the mountains by the old paths is quite a marvellous experience: when one walks up to the peaks through the

woods, the ruins of human settlements, the pastures, the wide mountainsides, it is possible to enjoy the view of both alpine environments and marine panoramas.

As many other mountain lovers, I have my favourite hikes. Commonly, I carry out my excursion with friends. We usually reach those paths by car, well equipped. During the excursion we chat and observe nature, we listen to natural ground sounds, we focus on birds and other animals we could possibly meet and pay attention to notable trees and so on. Sometimes, we take pictures as well or we stop for a pause near a spring to eat or drink something.

It is worth noting that trekking a known path requires a new performance of a previously enjoyed experience. Indeed, knowing a hike means knowing the path to go from the start to the end. That is, *knowing a hike means acknowledging the signs which point the right way to take and behaving accordingly*.

Now, leave aside the characteristic events occurring during a trekking experience of a known hike and consider solely the perceptual acknowledgement of signs. Evidently, each time a subject enjoys the experience, the environment appears different. That is, the phenomenal features the environment exhibits during an experience differ from the phenomenal features the environment exhibited in previous experiences. For example, trees change their look year after year; the elements composing the path change too (e.g., rocks change their positions and many kinds of different grasses grow interposing among them). And again, if I experience my ascent in a sunny day, things and their colours would look very different from experiencing them in a cloudy day. Moreover, in two different periods of the year the sounds I hear would possibly result very different: walking on the snow causes different sounds from walking on fallen leaves.

Naturally, there is a simple reason to account for all this: any natural place (phenomenally) changes by passing time. Consequently, experiences of the same natural places (phenomenally) differ among them.

Therefore, whenever I enjoy a trekking experience of a hike I know, the perceptual acknowledgement of signs during my trekking experience provides me with a phenomenal character that is not the same with the phenomenal characters I once enjoyed performing my previous experiences of the same hike.

If PI is true, the content of my different experiences in perceptually acknowledging signs should then differ. Nonetheless, this is evidently false: content is always the same, content being the information about the right way to take. This information is carried by the phenomenal appearance of signs; that is, the phenomenal character I enjoy when I acknowledge a sign. Consequently, perceptually acknowledging signs entails attributing identity to different

phenomenal appearances; namely, attributing the same content to different phenomenal characters.

According to me the truth of this conclusion is supported by the heuristic value of its generalization.

What is my perceptual experience about (during my trekking)? Although I competently realize that my present enjoyment of phenomenal features in perceptually acknowledging signs differs from my past enjoyments, all I am aware of (during my experience) suggests me that my present and any past experiences of the same hike concern significantly the same objects. Exactly, the same pathways, the same woods, the same ruins of human settlements, the same pastures, the same mountainsides, the same peaks; namely, the same mountains. It does not matter if many (even most) single elements constituting these entities have changed (whatever *being constituted* means for these entities): things look different, but their appearance conveys to me the same packages of information as previous instances of the same experience did.

Evidently, this counterexample suffices to reject PI: if phenomenal character entirely co-varies upon content, it is not possible that two perceptions of the same environment present the same content, the phenomenal character of the first experience being different from the one of the second. But more important, the analysis of the trekking experience clearly shows where intentionalism fails.

## 5. Reasons against the Principle of Intentionalism

According to me there are two main reasons in support of the claim that phenomenal character and content are not in a relationship of direct covariance. They both rely on the following idea: if phenomenal character covaries upon content, and content is representational in nature, then phenomenal character should be completely representational in nature too. But phenomenal character is not completely representational in nature. Therefore, phenomenal character does not covary upon content.

First reason in support of my claim. Phenomenal character is not completely representational as content is, because phenomenal character and content differ from an extensional standpoint. That's why: phenomenal character presents to the perceiving subject much more phenomenal features than those actually referred to in content. That is, when a subject enjoys a perception, despite the fact that they are aware of many phenomenal features the enjoyment of phenomenal character provides them with, they are actually related to a set of propositions expressing a low number of them. Consequently, phenomenal character exhibits a narrow representational role in perception, phenomenal character being representational in

nature if and only if all phenomenal features it presents to the subject are actually expressed by propositions the subject is in relation to. Suppose that while I am hiking, I find a difficult passage. At this point I look carefully for the better way to proceed observing the shape of the rocks I am in front of, in order to find the right grip. Nonetheless, I do not take into consideration any single property of these: even if I am obviously provided with the presentation of their colour, their fine texture, their smell and so on, these features do not matter to me. In fact, the package of information about the environment my perception furnishes me with is a limited part of the phenomenal character which passes from implicitness to explicitness; e.g., when my selective attention focuses on the shape of the rocks looking for the right grip, most phenomenal features I am perceiving never acquire a propositional status I am related to. That is, I am not in actual relationship with each proposition which expresses the phenomenal features presented to me by enjoying the phenomenal character of my perceptual experience.

In conclusion, two different phenomenal characters (widely differing in reason of what remains propositionally implicit) may have the same content insofar as they both suggest the same explicit information.

Naturally, the intentional theorist might be tempted to appeal to the claim that phenomenal character and content extensionally differ solely for real subjects, the difference of ideal and real subjects being a difference in degree, not in essence. Unfortunately, this assumption is definitely vague and does not answer the charge.

Consider two alternative hypotheses (which cover the range of psychological models in the theory of perception):

ENDORSEMENT OF COGNITIVISM (EC): ideal and real subjects differ in degree, not in nature, since both of them are computing machineries (at least as to the performance of cognitive tasks); where the computational skills of ideal subjects are much greater than those of real ones;

REJECTION OF COGNITIVISM (RC): ideal and real subjects differ in nature, not in degree, since ideal subjects can, while real ones cannot, run exactly the same cognitive performances of a computing machinery<sup>7</sup>.

Suppose EC is the case. Then, the intentionalist argues for the claim that the cognitive difference between ideal and real subjects simply consists in the fact that ideal subjects lack, while real subjects possess, psychological apparatuses conditioning the performance of cognitive tasks. Once psychological bias is left aside, real subjects parallel ideal ones. In terms of degree: the more real subjects can

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<sup>7</sup> Cognitive scientists, philosophers and psychologists commonly agree that *perception involves the exercise of cognitive skills* (Nicoletti & Rumiati 2006). Consequently, it is usually assumed that perceptual experiences should be included into the set of cognitive performances.

avoid their psychological apparatuses to exercise influences on their cognitive performances, the more they approximate ideal subjects.

*Why would this answer not work?*—the intentional theorist asks. Obviously, because even if real subjects are computing machineries differing from ideal ones just in degree, their actual performance of cognitive tasks is *always* conditioned by their psychological equipment. In terms of degree, again: since real subjects cannot really avoid their psychological apparatuses to exercise influence on their cognitive performances, the difference in degree between real and ideal subjects is so much, that the performance of cognitive tasks by real subjects cannot parallel that of the ideal ones.

In regard to this, consider how Byrne pictures ideal subjects. They should have a perfect memory, whose accessibility should be complete, so that subjects could exercise their perfect cognitive skills in comparing each detail of a present perception with past perceptions without being mistaken. Now, I strongly claim that even if real subjects possess a perfect and completely accessible memory, they could not be able to manage the materials contained in it as ideal ones can. Indeed, consider (at least) *selective attention*, *purposive behaviour* and *individual inclinations*: these features determine real subjects to acquire a propositional relation just to a selected portion of the whole phenomenal character they enjoy. Consider again my trekking experience: assume that I am ready to grant that while walking I can actually access to a perfectly complete memory. Suppose that as soon as we enter a small wood after walking many hours, we come to a fork. The step of the path preceding the wood is on a steep slope. The ascent is hard, because the steep slope is uncomfortable to overcome and too much sunny: when my friends and I reach the fork we feel tired and walk in silence. Consequently, in perceiving the environment around us we probably look just for those proper signs pointing to the adequate side of the fork to take: given each one's personal stamina, our attention focuses on these signs because our behaviour is directed to completing our hike. It does not matter how many phenomenal features my perceptual experience furnishes me with at the fork: the package of information my cognitive skills translate into propositional content just represents the side of the fork to take (although I obviously perceive many other elements in the environment). Therefore, I conclude, since I cannot avoid being (at least) selectively attentive, purposive behaving and individually endorsing inclinations in perceiving, different phenomenal characters possibly vary upon the same content<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> It is not by chance, I am afraid, that the most part of perceptual situations considered in literature are trivial cases of perception of simple objects. If a subject in a laboratory is asked to say whether those chips passing in front of him are red or blue, it is certainly true that the phenomenal features

However, these considerations do not express my view on the topic, because I have simply supposed that (what seems to me) the most charitable assumption for intentionalism is the case; i.e., EC is the right hypothesis for answering the extensional objection to the direct covariance of phenomenal character and content. But this is not the option I prefer: a big amount of recent scholarship in cognitive science apparently demands for a paradigm shift from cognitivism to at least one of the other two anticognitivist psychologies. Both of them challenge the claim that real subjects are computing machineries. Consequently, according to the two anticognitivist psychologies, RC is to be assumed.

From a materialist standpoint, connectionism, broadly construed, is the claim that mental states are epiphenomena caused by physical processes, each individual state depending on the actual constitution of the subject's nervous system. That is, mental states are physically embodied (they are the results of determined interactions among singularly determined neural units) and contextually situated (they are the outputs of singularly located networks of units, inputs being neural records of environmental stimuli): when a subject performs a cognitive task, each state they experience is a particular event consisting in the activation of a local network of some neural units (the activation of the local network solely occurs by physicochemical interactions) (Calabretta 2002). Consequently, no mind abstractly acts on mental contents. That is, mental contents are not to be understood as symbols, and cognitive performances are not to be understood as logical computations on symbols. Rather, mental contents are direct, empirically acquired and locally embodied vectorial interpretations over sets of neurophysical data (Edelmann 1992; Churchland 1995). Namely, while cognitivists claim that when a subject experiences a cognitive performance, the phenomenal character of their experience is translated by the subject's cognitive skills into packages of symbolic information which are to be processed by their by means of logical computation, connectionists advocate that any subject experiencing a cognitive performance simply responds to the environment around them by direct, empirically acquired and locally embodied reactions to the environmental stimuli they enjoy. Therefore, cognitivism and connectionism basically disagree on the ontology of the states of mind.

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presented to them by the enjoyment of subsequent phenomenal characters incline them to hold that their perception represents *that in front of them there are passing chips, some of which are red and others blue*. Simple cases of perception provide *prima facie* evidences for PI. Nonetheless, this does not imply that this kind of perception is normative in respect to the fundamental nature of perceptual experiences. In fact, it is not: perceptions commonly are *perceptions of scenario*; and this involves that psychological bias cannot be bracketed.



Cognitivism is dualist about the relationship of mental states and brain states; i.e., the mind cannot be reduced to the brain, because the former is a software whereas the latter is a hardware (different brain states can instantiate the same mental state). On the contrary, connectionism is monist; i.e., the mind should be eliminated from the ontological analysis, because there is no software apart from the hardware, the hardware architecture directly implementing the performance of the functions usually ascribed to the software running (against cognitivists, connectionists claims that the software cannot be treated as independent on the actual constitution of the hardware) (Di Ferdinando 2002, 126-129).

As a consequence, connectionism evidently endorses RC. In particular, connectionists hold that computing machineries serially operate quickly processing (univocally established) data one-by-one, while real subjects parallelly operate slowly processing a big amount of (equivocally managed) data (Edelman 1992; Churchland 1995). Therefore, according to connectionists, the notion of an ideal subject running the same cognitive performances of a computing machinery does not make sense. Consequently, since from RC immediately follows that the extensional objection to the covariance of phenomenal character and content cannot be answered by appealing to the identity in nature of the cognitive performances of ideal and real subjects, I conclude that if connectionism is the case, the intentional theorists should search for some reasons (others from those which can be found in literature) in support of their reply to the observational evidence that two perceptual experiences possibly present different phenomenal characters and the same content<sup>9</sup>.

Now, the connectionist assumption of RC is not the kind of assumption I am sympathetic to. This is how I see the whole story. From a neutral towards materialism point of view, narrative psychology, broadly construed, is the claim that mental states are the results of the narrative construction of personal life and socio-psychological identity. When a subject performs a cognitive task, each state they experience is the section of a plot; because, for any subject, *cognitive performances consist in meaning understanding* and *meaning understanding is dependent on the context the subject lives in*. That is, cognitive performances are based upon the way personal experience is narratively managed and handled within the whole set of

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<sup>9</sup> Connectionism easily accounts for the occurrence of perceptual experiences with different phenomenal characters and the same content. Consider the subjective enjoyment of two different phenomenal characters: although the interactions among the networks of neural units generating the epiphenomenon of the enjoyment of the first phenomenal character differ from those generating the enjoyment of the second, both of them activate the same corresponding pattern of networks of neural units generating awareness of content.

(cognitive, ethical and emotive) presuppositions any subject implicitly assumes by their own being contextualized in the community life (Bruner 1992). Consequently, for any subject, cognitive performances depend on the socio-psychological narrative arrangement of experiences according to their own implicitly assumed storied worldview.

Evidently, narrative psychology opposes cognitivism. Particularly, narrative psychology rejects the claim that the action of thinking concerns logical computation on symbol. Indeed, thinking is a matter of meaning understanding, and meaning understanding is a matter of translating third person viewpoint stories into first person viewpoint stories (Schank & Abelson 1995). If this is the case, narrative psychology endorses RC. Therefore, as for the connectionist assumption of RC, the narrative psychology assumption of RC prevents the intentional theorist from answering the extensional objection to the covariance of phenomenal character and content<sup>10</sup>.

All considered, since neither of the terms of the disjunction “EC or RC” provides reasons in defence of PI from the extensional objection, I conclude that if the intentional theorist intends to vindicate their doctrine, then they should find out how it is possible that observational evidence attests that two different perceptual experiences have different phenomenal characters notwithstanding their having the same content.

Therefore, I move on to the second reason against PI. My claim is the following: phenomenal character and content differ from an ontological standpoint, since the former is non-conceptual in nature, while the latter is conceptual; representationality implying representation to be conceptual. That is, if my claim is true, from the ascription of non-conceptuality to phenomenal character and conceptuality to content, it follows that it is necessary that phenomenal character does not covary on content. Indeed, if phenomenal character is not completely representational, two different perceptual experiences may differ in phenomenal character as to their non-representational features, their representational features remaining the same; namely, content remaining the same.

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<sup>10</sup> Narrative psychology easily accounts for the occurrence of perceptual experiences with different phenomenal characters and the same content. Consider the subjective enjoyment of two different phenomenal characters: since content is the meaningful interpretation of the phenomenal features phenomenal character provides the subject with, content depends on the way the whole set of presuppositions they implicitly assume are narratively handled and managed by them. Consequently, different perceptual experiences can be interpreted in terms of the same meaning, that is different phenomenal characters can convey the same content.

I begin with the common assumption that a representation represents something if and only if this something *is acknowledged* to be a *this-such* (McDowell 1998, 453-462). For example, while experiencing my hike, I see a tree on the side of the path. My visual sensations provide me with an approximately cylindrical shape (irregularly constituted at the top), which is vertical as for spatial orientation, and brown and green as for colour. These visual sensations present to me phenomenal features trees commonly exhibit. Consequently, *this particular* arrangement of phenomenal features is understood to be a tree because it is acknowledged to be the instantiation of generic properties of trees.

That is, acknowledging that a particular arrangement of phenomenal features individuates an individual is to exercise the conceptual capacities any subject is provided with. Indeed, an individual is concretely sorted into a kind by acknowledging that it is the case that that individual *correctly* instantiates a basic set of generic proprieties (Ginsborg 2006, 360-361). In conclusion, representing implies exercising conceptual classifications.

Now, remember that the intentional theorist qualifies intentionalism as a form of propositionalism. According to their treatment of the notion, enjoying phenomenal character determines the subject of perceptual experiences to acquire a propositional attitude towards the representational content of their perceptual experiences. Seeing a tree at the side of the path involves being in relation to the proposition (*there is*) *a tree at the side of this path*. As a consequence, intentionalism claims that when a subject perceives something, being aware of the phenomenal features of the environment determines the subject to be in relation to (a set of) propositions attesting how these features actually appear. Then, according to the intentional theorist, perceiving should require that the subject actually possesses, exercises, and employs definite, substantive and complete conceptions of the environment.

But, what does conceptual precisely mean here? I grant what seems to me the most generous assumption for intentionalism, that is, a state conception of the opposition of non-conceptuality and conceptuality (Byrne 2003, 268). Namely:

NONCONCEPTUALITY=<sub>def</sub> Mental state MS<sub>nonconc</sub> with content C (enjoyed by S) is non-conceptual iff S being in MS<sub>nonconc</sub> does not require that S actually possesses the concepts characterizing C;

CONCEPTUALITY=<sub>def</sub> Mental state MS<sub>conc</sub> with content C (enjoyed by S) is conceptual if S being in MS<sub>conc</sub> does require that S actually possesses the concepts characterizing C;

Consequently, according to the definitions:

- for any subject enjoying a perception, if phenomenal character is a non-

conceptual state of mind, it is not necessary to exercise the conceptual capacities characterizing the content of perception in order to experience what it is like to undergo this perception;

- on the contrary, for any subject enjoying a perception, if understanding the content of perception is a conceptual state of mind, it is necessary to exercise the conceptual capacities characterizing the content of perception in order to experience what the perception is about.

That is, when a subject enjoys a perception of the environment around them, if phenomenal character is non-conceptual, it is not necessary that they experience an *actual conception* of their environment in order to (definitely, substantively, and completely) enjoy what it is like to undergo a perceptual experience of their environment. On the other hand, if content is conceptual, it is necessary that they experience an *actual conception* of their environment in order to (definitely, substantively, and completely) understand what their perception is about. As a consequence, it results that for any perceptual experience, either content is conceptually expressed (by a set of propositions) or the perceptual experience does not have content at all.

In light of these considerations, let me draw an evident conclusion: if PI is true, then phenomenal character should be a conceptual state of mind. Indeed, if phenomenal character covaries upon content, and content is representational, phenomenal character should be representational too. But *being representational* entails *being conceptual*. Therefore, phenomenal character should be conceptual.

Now, my claim that phenomenal character is not conceptual appears *prima facie* intuitively true. Consider the trekking experience: after having passed through a little wood, the path my friends and I are walking on starts ascending to the peak of the mountain through pastures and grass. I do not need exercising actual conceptions of the wood, the path, the pastures, the grass and the peak of the mountain in order to undergo what it is like to enjoy the phenomenal character of my perception. Indeed, I can walk without paying attention to the phenomenal features I am presented with, because I am strongly focused on a conversation with my friends concerning the beautiful hawk we have seen flying in the sky half an hour earlier. In this case, I am sensory modified by the environment in a way that undergoing my perceptual experience presents to me a whole of phenomenal features; but, since I am not attentive to these, it does not seem that I actually exercise my conceptual capacities in order to form conceptions of the environment. That is, enjoying phenomenal character does not appear inevitably enjoying a conceptual state of mind.

Nevertheless, the enjoyment of the phenomenal character of my perception could be attended by the understanding of the content of my perception. That is, the

particulars I come across during my trekking experience could be exactly the content of my perceptual experience. Suppose that when my friends and I proceed through the wood, the pastures, the grass, the peaks of the mountains, we all pay attention to the environment around us since we are looking for the right way to go. If this is the case, we acknowledge the wood, the pastures, the grass, the peaks of the mountains, because we all exercise our own conceptual capacities in grouping pieces of phenomenal features under perceptual patterns we recognize as presentations of the required particulars. These materials are packages of information about the environment we perceive. That is, some of the phenomenal features I am aware of fall under actual conceptions.

Naturally, the most part of what I perceive does not fall under any concept. Not even it could: what it is like to undergo a perception seems for large part unattainable to conceptuality (in reason of the world's fine texture and richness of phenomenal features) (Heck 2000, 489-499). Suppose that as soon as the ascent to the peak starts after the wood, a big beech tree becomes visible far on the pastures. I see the tree, I acknowledge it to be a tree. Moreover, I acknowledge it to be a beech tree. Evidently, I employ concepts here (I exercise actual conceptions of what I see)<sup>11</sup>: TREE and BEECH TREE. Now, consider I made a category mistake concerning the identification of the tree: I see the tree, I acknowledge it to be a tree, but it seems an elm to me. Again, I employ concepts: TREE and ELM. Finally, consider a third kind of situation: I see the tree and I acknowledge it to be a tree, but I cannot acknowledge what kind of tree it is. My questions are: is my perceptual experience occurring according to the first situation different from the perceptual experience occurring according to the second? Is my perceptual experience occurring according to the third situation different from the perceptual experience occurring according to either the first or the second?

My idea is that the right answer to both questions is *that it depends on which component of perceptual experiences I focus on*. Assume that I simply take into consideration the phenomenal features the environment around me exhibits. In this case I see the visible appearance of the tree far on the pastures. It does not matter whether or not I can correctly identify if this appearance is the appearance of a tree which I do not know, the one of a beech or of an elm. I look at the appearance: all I perceive are visible phenomenal features as colours, shapes, spatial orientations, and like. I can look at these with a great degree of attention. I can scrutinize them. I can obtain a bright and clear awareness of the phenomenal features I am provided with. Carefully performing these operations on the phenomenal character of my

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<sup>11</sup> Following the current usage capitalized words refer to concepts. Example: the word RED refers to 'the concept of red'.

perceptual experience does not depend on concepts possession, exercise or use. Suppose I cannot acknowledge which kind of tree the appearance presents to me. One of my friends then says it is a beech tree. I look again at the appearance: it has not changed. But I usually acknowledge beech trees. I do not agree with my friend. This tree is not a beech tree. Another friend proposes: this tree is an elm. We look again at the appearance. The tree is still there, appearance remaining the same. Consequently, when I perceive something, if I focus on my enjoyment of the phenomenal character, then the three situations I sketch seems not to differ.

On the contrary, consider a different situation. Suppose that, before departing for our hike, one of my friends have come across the information *that in sunny days an archipelago is visible from the viewpoint of the elm standing on the upper side of the path at two hours and forty-five minutes from the beginning of our trekking*. Since he would like to see the archipelago, in order to individuate the right tree, he takes with him a map where its position is marked. Consequently, at the right time we all consult the map and look for the tree by projecting the image of the euclidean space the map represents on the topological visible environment around us. One of my friends points at a tree and says: *that is the tree!* Another replies: *You are wrong. It is not an elm, it is a beech tree*. I look carefully then, and I say: *there are three trees. One is an elm, the other one is a beech tree, I do not know the third one. Give me the map, please. I would consider again the exact position of the tree and see if I can individuate the right one*. A third friends then states: *It doesn't matter. There are two beeches and one elm. Look at the appearances: only the elm's branches depart really near from the ground. That is our tree!*

What is the difference between the previous situation and the present one? The former is non-conceptually observational since a subject can have a state of mind whose content is the phenomenal character of their perceptual experience without possessing, employing and exercising actual conceptions of the environment around them. On the contrary, the latter is conceptually observational since the subject enjoying the experience is lead to understand the content of their perceptual experience by their actual conception of the environment.

My conclusion is that the sensational and the representational components of a perception are clearly to be distinguished in terms of their being either non-conceptual or conceptual. If this is the case, the sensational and the representational cannot be in a relation of direct covariance. Consequently, neither the phenomenal character and content can.

## 6. Conclusions

Both the reasons in support of the claim *that the difference between phenomenal character and content imply they cannot directly covary* picture a very traditional approach to perception. Particularly, they endorse the idea that while perception is (at least in some degree) a manner of making use of concepts, the conceptual exercising involved in perception mainly concerns the judgements the subject implicitly draws from the enjoyment of the sensational component of their experience. Probably, my claim will result unsound to most contemporary philosophers. Indeed, philosophers nowadays show the tendency to identify judgement and belief. Contrary to this view, I affirm that the kind of phenomena related to judgement is different from the one related to belief. Every time I experience something I take that something to be in some determinate manner. This means that my experience is judgement sensitive. Naturally, being judgement sensitive implies that the subject drawing that judgement is virtually committed to possibly hold the correspondent belief. But there is no metaphysical necessity determining a subject to explicitly hold all those beliefs they would be committed to by their judgement sensitive activities.

Now, perception is evidently a judgement sensitive activity: the sensational component of perceptual experiences is the simple presentation of phenomenality; the representational component is the meaning understanding of such a presentation. All considered, what is wrong with intentionalism is the reduction of the sensational to the representational, that is, the reduction of phenomenality to noumenality in order to vindicate a direct realist approach to perception. My paper pursues the opposite end: vindicating direct realism is to reduce noumenality to phenomenality; that is, putting in the due light the fact that perception is not a propositional experience of representations, but a direct experience of objects, phenomenal character being the presentation of the state of the world around the perceiving subject.

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# COLLECTIVE EPISTEMIC TRAITS AS SYSTEM PROPERTIES<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The essay deals with the issue of how a non-summative account of collective epistemic traits can be properly justified. We trace the roots of this issue in virtue epistemology and collective epistemology and then critically examine certain views advanced to justify non-summativism. We focus on those considered by Fricker, including Gilbert's concept of plural subjects, which she endorses. We find her analysis of these views problematic for either going beyond the parameters of the summativism-non-summativism debate or contradicting common intuitions about epistemic trait ascriptions. As an alternative, we advance the idea that collective epistemic traits are system properties; or that epistemic traits act as system properties when attributed to collectives taken in their own right. Working as a system, the individual members of a collective perform their designated roles or tasks in coordination and cooperation with each other to achieve their joint intentions. Being attributes exclusive to systems, collective epistemic traits cannot, therefore, be attributed in the same respect to the individuals comprising these systems, thereby blocking any summative account of these traits. This model also easily sidesteps the problems besetting Fricker's preferred one.

**Keywords:** virtue epistemology, vice epistemology, collective virtue, collective vice, collective intentionality

## Introduction

We usually attribute intellectual character traits, also called *epistemic traits*, to human individuals either in the form of virtues or vices. We say, for instance, that a person is intellectually humble or that someone is gullible. In addition to human individuals, we also attribute such traits to social collectives, such as when we say that a particular committee is fair-minded or that a specific political group is closed-minded. Since a collective consists of individuals and given that we usually use the same expressions for these traits when attributing them to both individuals and collectives, the attribution of such traits to a collective can give rise to ambiguities and confusion.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors express their gratitude to Joyce Fungo and Kurt Christian Tubera for their support in developing this article.

A question arises about what we are actually doing when attributing an epistemic trait to a collective. Either we are simply saying, in a rather convenient way, that all or a sufficient number of the collective's individual members have the trait, or we are saying that the collective, in its own right, has the trait independent of the traits that its individual members may have. In current discussions on this topic, those who subscribe to the former construal endorse the view of *summativism*; while those who subscribe to the latter endorse the view of *non-summativism* (see, for instance, Fricker 2010; Lahroodi 2007; Astola 2021; Byerly and Byerly 2016; and Ziv 2011).

The question is deemed critical, among others, when determining one's epistemic accountability for the beliefs held by one's group. For instance, when someone accuses a group of being racist, should we think that she is necessarily likewise accusing the individual members of the group of being racists and thus holding them accountable for being so? A master argument for a negative response here, which supports the case of non-summativism, is the possible occurrence of the so-called *divergence phenomenon* where the collective's individual members do not share an epistemic trait attributed to a collective. As Fricker (2010, 237) notes: "Summativism does not work as a general account of group features, for there can be cases where a group possesses a feature that few or even one of its component individuals possess...."

It is possible that a group is racist while its individual members are not, and this is deemed sufficient to block the reasoning that attributing an epistemic trait to a collective is a mere shorthand for attributing the same trait to the group's individual members. However, the possible occurrence of the divergence phenomenon cannot be merely justified by its coherence with common intuitions. It needs grounding in some theory or model which can provide a plausible explanation for how the phenomenon comes about.

In this essay, we aim to provide such theoretical grounding. First, we show why other such attempts failed. For our purposes, we focus on those analyzed by Fricker (2010), including the model she endorses, namely, Gilbert's concept of plural subjects. Then we propose an alternative model which easily explains the divergence phenomenon without falling into the same problems besetting Fricker's preferred model. In this alternative view, we regard (non-reducible) collective epistemic traits, those epistemic traits attributed to collectives taken in their own right, as system properties. Working as a system, the collective's individual members perform their designated roles or tasks in coordination and cooperation with one another to carry out their joint intentions. It is then their joint actions, resulting from the coordination of their individual tasks and their cooperation with one another, that

warrant the attribution of the collective epistemic trait to the group. As such, this trait cannot be attributed to any of the individual members of the group in the same respect.

We divide the paper into three parts. First, we put the issue in perspective by tracing its roots to virtue epistemology and collective epistemology. And then, we tackle Fricker's analysis of certain views intended to justify non-summativism, along with her preferred model based on Gilbert's concept of plural subjects. Finally, we lay down the basic elements of the alternative model that we are advancing to justify non-summativism.

### The Issue in Perspective

Baehr (n.d.) defines virtue epistemology as "a collection of recent approaches to epistemology that give *epistemic virtue concepts* an important and fundamental role." Hookway (2003) defines it as an approach to the most central problems of epistemology which give states called 'intellectual' or 'epistemic' virtues a central or 'primary' explanatory role. Virtue epistemologists, consequently, have come to "analyse or define knowledge or justified belief in terms of the virtues" (Hookway 2003, 186). As Hookway (2003, 192) puts it: "knowledge may be explained as virtuously acquired true belief." Lahroodi (2007) explains that virtue epistemology, as an area of study in epistemology, emerges partly as a reaction to the *belief bias* in mainstream epistemology. The bias has led epistemologists to overlook or neglect the importance of the intellectual traits of the epistemic agents in explaining the nature of knowledge. If for virtue ethics, the shift in focus is from acts to agents in terms of their character traits; in virtue epistemology, it is from beliefs to the agents in terms of their intellectual traits (Baird and Calvard 2019).

There are two main considerations with regard to the concept of 'intellectual virtues.' First, given the general understanding of virtues as excellences, what kind of intellectual excellence is an intellectual virtue? Second, what constitutes the primary role of intellectual virtues in epistemology? Disagreements among virtue epistemologists regarding these considerations have given rise to the two general versions of virtue epistemology, namely *virtue reliabilism* (or *reliabilist virtue epistemology*) and *virtue responsibilism* (or *responsibilist virtue epistemology*). Virtue reliabilism understands intellectual virtues as referring to well-functioning intellectual abilities or faculties such as good vision, good memory, and good introspection. Their epistemic primary role refers to their being *truth-conducive* or being *reliable* for getting to the truth. For instance, good vision is a reliable ability trait to get to the truth about appearance of one's immediate surroundings; good introspection ability enables one to know the truth about one's inner experiences

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such as pains and pleasures; and a good memory is necessary to accurately describe one's past experiences like what they have seen or heard.

On the other hand, virtue responsibilism understands intellectual virtues as referring to intellectual character virtues or good intellectual character traits such as inquisitiveness, fair-mindedness, open-mindedness, intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, and tenacity. Their epistemic primary role consists in making epistemic agents responsible knowers or inquirers. Being responsible, such knowers are able to use their intellectual abilities or faculties properly. As Hookway explains:

If someone is observant, he uses his good eyesight and his recognitional capacities appropriately. His open-mindedness is reflected in his readiness to admit appropriate or relevant questions and challenges to his views. His carefulness is manifested in the fact that he knows when to check inferences and observations and rarely makes mistakes. And his intellectual perseverance, is shown in, for example, his ability to acknowledge the consequences of his views without wavering. Such virtues regulate the ways in which we carry out such activities as inquiry and deliberation: they enable us to use our faculties, our skills, and our expertise well in pursuit of our cognitive goals. (Hookway 2003, 187)

Proponents of virtue responsibilism acknowledge the epistemic importance of the intellectual faculties, but they argue that one needs the intellectual character traits to put such faculties to good or proper use. Hookway explains: “we would not be reliable seekers after the truth or effective solvers of theoretical problems if we did not possess specific skills and capacities: good eyesight and hearing, a reliable memory, good knowledge of specific subjects but our success also requires us to possess traits of character which enable us to use our skills and capacities effectively while inquiring and deliberating.” (2003, 187) Baehr (n.d.) further explains:

An important scientific discovery, for example, is rarely explainable primarily in terms of a scientist's good memory, excellent eyesight, or proficiency at drawing valid logical inferences. While these things may play a role in such an explanation, this role is likely secondary to the role played by other qualities, for instance, the scientist's creativity, ingenuity, intellectual adaptability, thoroughness, persistence, courage, and so forth.

Unlike good intellectual abilities, intellectual virtues are regarded as closer to moral virtues. For instance, Baehr (n.d.) notes that intellectual abilities, unlike intellectual character traits, do not make their possessor a better person in any relevant sense. Following Lahroodi (2007), Baehr (n.d.) explains: “It is commonly agreed that, roughly, people can be praised for displaying both these types of properties, while they can be blamed only for the absence of ‘character virtues’ but not for the absence of ‘faculty virtues (or faculties).’ This distinction is based on the

assumption ‘that character traits are those dispositions over which we can exercise certain types of control’ (Lahroodi 2007, 285).”

Virtue epistemology has a number of subfields, foremost of which is *vice epistemology*, “defined as ‘the philosophical study of the nature, identity, and epistemological significance of intellectual vices’” (Cassam 2016, 159). Hookway (2003, 198) makes a distinction between virtues and vices, claiming that: Intellectual character vices impede “effective and responsible inquiry,” while intellectual character virtues abet effective and responsible inquiry. Intellectual virtues are cognitive excellences, intellectual vices are cognitive defects. Just like in the case of intellectual virtues, intellectual vices can also refer either to intellectual faculty/ability vices, manifested when we form beliefs by guesswork, wishful thinking, and ignoring contrary evidence; or to the intellectual character vices such as closed-mindedness, gullibility, dogmatism, prejudice, and negligence. Cassam (2016) refers to the former as intellectual vices that are not character traits, and the latter as intellectual vices that are character traits.

Vice epistemology intends to fill a gap in virtue epistemology. While virtue epistemology includes the study of both intellectual virtues and vices, the focus of virtue epistemologists had been on virtues. Intellectual vices are equally interesting and important as intellectual virtues, especially since we are most prone to intellectual vices. As Cassam (2016, 159) points out: “When it comes to the epistemological predicament of human beings, vices are arguably more important. Few of us are model epistemic citizens.”

Another subfield which we can call *collective virtue epistemology*, results from the intersection between virtue epistemology and *collective epistemology*. Lahroodi (2007) explains that if virtue epistemology arises as a reaction to mainstream epistemology’s focus on beliefs which leads to the neglect of the epistemic agent’s epistemic traits, collective epistemology arises as a reaction to mainstream epistemology’s focus on individual epistemic agents leading to the neglect of collective or group epistemic agents. Collective epistemology, in this regard, studies social collectives as epistemic agents in their own right. Given that collectives are such, it naturally follows that they can also be bearers of epistemic traits. As Lahroodi (2007, 282) explains: “Combined together, they suggest the possibility that some collectives too may have cognitive character traits and be worthy of epistemic assessment as virtuous or vicious.” Lahroodi, in this regard, notes that in fact: “We sometimes speak of groups as if they could instantiate epistemic virtues.” (Lahroodi 2007, 282) Some of the examples he gives are the following: “(1) The jury in the murder trial was thorough and diligent... (2) The investigative committee gave a fair hearing to all sides; it was open-minded... (4)

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Our family is open-minded. (5) The investigative committee was patient and tenacious.” If virtue epistemology studies the epistemic traits of epistemic agents in general, collective virtue epistemology would then focus its study on the epistemic traits of epistemic collective agents. Correspondingly, *collective vice epistemology* would be another subfield which focuses its investigations on the vicious intellectual traits of collective epistemic agents.

Collective virtue epistemology is generally concerned with understanding the nature and justification of collective epistemic trait attributions. Specifically, those working on this area question the plausibility and implications of the two main accounts, summative and non-summative. Fricker (2010, 236) explains: “If for instance a member of the jury in a contentious court case were to privately remark, ‘The jury was fair-minded’, she might quite properly be describing the jury under either of the first two aspects. That is, she might be saying (1) that enough of the *individual* jurors displayed fair-mindedness; or she might be saying (2) that the jury taken collectively displayed fair-mindedness.” The first interpretation has been called the *summative account* (or *summativism*, for short); while the second is referred to as the *non-summative account* (or non-summativism, for short) (see also Lahroodi 2007).

On the summative account, Group G has trait T if, and only if, all or most members of G have T. Virtues are not ultimately attributed to groups but to certain individuals. As there are only individual human virtues, there are, therefore, no irreducible collective virtues. While there may be traits that can only be attributed to a collective taken as a group, such as ‘hierarchically organized,’ ‘cooperative,’ ‘interactive,’ and ‘well-coordinated,’ epistemic traits normally attributable to individuals such as ‘fair-mindedness,’ ‘closed-mindedness,’ and others cannot be attributed to a collective taken as a group. When such is being done, it is actually just a shorthand for saying that all or some members of the group have such and such traits (Lahroodi 2007). One argument in support of this view is that only individuals have minds, and intellectual traits can only be attributed to those having minds. Since groups do not have minds of their own, intellectual traits cannot be attributed to groups (Lahroodi 2007).

For the non-summative account, it is possible for epistemic traits to be attributed to collectives taken as a group. One main supporting argument for this account is the so-called *divergence phenomenon*, which refers to the possibility for a group to possess a trait not possessed by its members. As Fricker (2010, 237) explains: “Summativism does not work as a general account of group features, for there can be cases where a group possesses a feature that a few or even none of its component individuals possess (so individual possession of the feature is not

necessary); and there can be cases where the group lacks a feature even though it is possessed by many or even all of the component individuals (so individual possession of the feature is not sufficient).” Lahroodi (2007) demonstrates this by showing the possibility of a church committee being closed-minded with regard to gay rights even if the individual members of the committee are open-minded about it. Fricker (2010, 237) gives the example of a team that is competitive when its individual players are not. As a corollary to this argument, Lahroodi (2007, 288) likewise argues the fact that it is possible for two groups having identical membership to have two contrasting epistemic traits proves summativism to be wrong.

It is not enough for proponents of non-summativism, however, just to give examples showing the possibility of the divergence argument. To fully rule out the possibility that these examples can be given a summative account, there needs to be a plausible explanation of how the divergence comes about. Such an explanation may be in the form of some phenomenon or theory grounding the irreducibility of some epistemic trait attributions to a collective.

### Justifying Non-Summativism

To justify non-summativism is to provide a plausible explanation for what makes the divergence phenomenon possible. For our purposes, let us examine those views intended to explain this phenomenon whose plausibility was analyzed by Fricker (2010) along with the model she herself endorses. Fricker begins by considering three explanations which we shall conveniently refer to as the *views of social pressure*, *practical identities*, and *invisible hand*. Fricker (2010, 237-238) refers to these explanations or views as “styles of examples” for the divergence phenomenon.

For the social-pressure view, the divergence phenomenon is due to pressures imposed on individuals when they join a group. Fricker (2010, 237) explains: “Social contexts can bring all sorts of pressures to bear on how we behave, how we think, and what judgments we make—sometimes these pressures may be to good effect, sometimes bad.” The reason that a group trait is not shared by the group’s individual members is that membership in a group may exert certain pressures on the individual members to behave in certain ways. As private individuals they may not possess trait X but as members of the group they may be pressured to display trait Y. Fricker gives the example of the individual players of a football team who are not competitive as private individuals but are pressured to be so as members of the team.

Some other authors also consider this view as a possible explanation for the divergence phenomenon. Lahroodi (2007, 288), for instance, notes: “A related factor is the pressure on members to reinforce their group membership by performing conforming behavior. The members’ specific expectations about the rewards of

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membership and the comparable penalties for losing it often put considerable pressure on them to avoid what could threaten their ability to maintain their membership.” Mathiesen (2011) advances the view that the divergence phenomenon is due to the differences of epistemic risk settings of a group and its individual members taken as distinct agents. Such differences, she further notes (2011, 40), “may be due to their different pragmatic interests.” Such pragmatic interests, however, may in turn be shaped or influenced by social pressures.

For the practical-identities view, the divergence phenomenon is explained by fact that the individual members of a group, as private individuals, assume various practical identities which engender conflicting commitments. Fricker (2010, 238) explains:

The mere fact that social subjects have a range of practical identities (so that one may confront a situation, decision, or choice as a professional, as a parent, as a friend, as a gay man, as a Christian, as interested or disinterested party, and so on) means that there can be tension, and sometimes downright conflict, between commitments associated with different practical identities of the same person. This in turn generates the possibility of that individual having a certain attribute only as a group-member and not as a private individual.

Lastly, for the invisible-hand view, the divergence phenomenon is due to the accidental canceling out of the prejudices of the individual members of a group. Fricker (2010, 239) gives the following example:

Imagine a debating society, the members of which are thoroughly prejudiced individuals. But their prejudices are all opposed and equally balanced, so they cancel each other out in debate and the debate overall displays not prejudice but rather neutrality... Such a debating society, then, is itself non-prejudiced, even while all of its members, and their contributions.

Among these views, Fricker (2010) considers the practical-identities view as the most decisive explanation for the divergence phenomenon because it avoids the problems of the other two. On the one hand, she finds the social-pressure explanation still susceptible to a summativist account. Fricker (2010, 237-238), referring to her football example, notes that: “even if the individuals ... lack competitiveness in other contexts, still the team’s competitiveness is to be understood as none other than the sum of the individuals’ contributions of competitiveness... The summativist can therefore maintain that the group feature is simply the sum of the individual features, and a summativist reduction beckons.” On the other hand, while she finds the invisible-hand explanation not susceptible to a summativist account, she finds it conflicting with a common understanding of what makes a trait virtuous or vicious. For being accidental in its generation, the trait is



neither creditworthy nor blameworthy. Speaking of fair-mindedness as a group trait achieved through such process, Fricker (2010, 239-240) writes:

For the fair-mindedness exhibited here is not achieved because of any group sensitivity to the demands of fairness—it is a mere accident of the way the individuals' prejudices happen to cancel one another out. Accordingly, there is no sense in which the jury is creditworthy for its conduct. In such a case as this, the group's behaviour might display something like group fair-mindedness, but it would be too much of a stretch to say it possessed the virtue.

In her analysis of the three views, Fricker goes beyond the parameters of the issue between summativism and non-summativism. First, in her response to the social-pressure view, Fricker deviates from or goes beyond the standard understanding of summativism, which Lahroodi (2007, 285) puts as follows:

According to summativism, let us recall, for a group *G* to have a cognitive character trait *T*, it is *logically* necessary that most members of *G* have *T*. *Simple summativism* asserts that a group *G* has the trait *T* if, and only if, all or most members of *G* have *T*. The collective trait, in other words, is the *common and widespread* trait in a group.

Fricker (2010, 236) herself understands summativism in the same way: "According to a basic summative account, if someone says 'The jury is fair-minded', this must be understood as the claim that enough of the jurors are fair-minded individuals."

Recall that for Fricker, the social-pressure view does not work since it is susceptible to a summativist account whereby the individual traits of the individual members contribute to the formation of the group trait. This clearly deviates from the way summativism is defined above. Now, arguing that summativism, defined in a certain way, is false using an argument against summativism defined in another way is a clear case of equivocation. Interestingly, however, when Fricker says that the practical-identities and invisible-hand views are not susceptible to the summativist account, she goes back to the standard definition of summativism. For it may be asked, are not the different commitments of the individual members associated with their practical identities and the canceling out of the prejudices of these individuals to form a group trait likewise cases of the process whereby the individual traits contribute to the generation of the group trait? Fricker here seems to be using a certain definition of summativism according to what will suit her purposes.

Second, it seems clear that the divergence phenomenon concerns the relation between the traits of a group and the traits of the group's individual members as members of the group, and not as private individuals. When summativism claims

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that to say that group X has trait Y is to say that all or enough members of group X have trait Y, it means members of the group in their capacity as members of the group, and not as private individuals. As private individuals, they are not members of the group; as such, their traits as private individuals have nothing to do with the divergence phenomenon or the whole issue between summativism and non-summativism for that matter. When Fricker (2010, 236) says "According to a basic summative account, if someone says 'The jury is fair-minded,' this must be understood as the claim that enough of the jurors are fair-minded individuals," it seems clear that is the jurors, as jurors and not as private individuals, who are regarded as fair-minded individuals. Accordingly, to say that the individual members of a group, as private individuals, have such and such traits which are different from the collective trait of their group does not really constitute a critique of summativism.

If the practical identities of the individual members of a group outside of their membership in the group were considered in the debate, two problems, among others, would arise. First, which of these practical identities, considering their innumerability, should be considered? Take Fricker's example of the football team. She says that as private individuals, the members of the team may be uncompetitive while they become competitive as they become members of the team. Outside of the team, their private life would consist of multifarious private identities, a fact that Fricker herself recognizes. Which practical identities of these individuals should be covered when she says that the individual members of the team are uncompetitive as private individuals?

The most likely scenario is that these individuals may be competitive in some of their practical identities (say, when playing games with competitors in a job promotion) while uncompetitive in some of their practical identities (say, when playing games with family members for relaxation). If they become competitive as football team members, they may also become competitive or uncompetitive as members of other groups with their own distinct characteristics. Lahroodi (2007, 287-288) gives the example of the same group of individuals forming two different groups in which they assume a certain trait in one group and a different one in the other. This only involves two groups. In reality, however, we are involved in so many groups at the same time.

Second, if the claim of summativism would be made to include these practical identities of the individual members of a group in their private individual lives, then it becomes an absurd position. For we cannot meaningfully claim that saying that group X has trait Y means that all or enough individual members of group X have trait Y when in their private lives, given their many aspects (such as different group

memberships) and depending on which one is considered, they may or may not have this trait Y. Consequently, the debate between summativism and non-summativism would be meaningless.

After endorsing the practical-identities view, Fricker proceeds by grounding it philosophically in Gilbert's concept of plural subjects. For Fricker, Gilbert's concept of plural subjects provides an "excellent template for our thinking about group virtue and vice of the collective sort" (Fricker 2010, 240). While Gilbert's concept of plural subjects is intended to explain the nature of collective actions and beliefs, Fricker believes that it can be extended to cover collective virtues. For a short review of the basic features of the Gilbert's plural-subject model, let '*J*' to refer to any joint action (e.g. to walk together, to paint the house together), and 'we' to refer to you and I. According to Gilbert, we intend to *J* if and only if: you and I jointly commit as a body to *J* (or that "we commit to '*J*-ing' as a body"). For Gilbert, you and I, as a result of our collective commitment, form a plural subject—the proper subject of our joint intention to *J*. A plural subject, in this context, simply refers to any group whose members are jointly committed as a body to perform a joint action. It must be noted that the plural subject exists not in the ontological sense, but merely in the as-if or functional sense. As such, it does not refer to some supra-individual entity.

Furthermore, it is assumed that collective commitment is common knowledge to the members of the group. That is, there is a mutual belief among the members that they are engaging in some collective commitment to perform a joint action. For Gilbert, this collective commitment not only explains the irreducibility of joint action but, more so, the normativity that goes with the joint action. More specifically, it explains why the individual group members of a group have certain rights and obligations when engaged in performing a joint action. An example of this right is the right to rebuke a nonperforming member. For example, suppose Jose and Maria commit to walking together, and Jose suddenly walks fast, thereby leaving Maria behind. Maria has the right to rebuke Jose. What gives Maria such a right is the collective commitment that she has with Jose to walk together.

Using Gilbert's model, Fricker regards collective virtues as plural virtues, that is, as the virtues of plural subjects. If, under conditions of common knowledge, a number of individuals commit to a virtuous moral motive, they thereby constitute themselves as the plural subject of the collective moral motive. But for the plural subject or the group to have the collective virtue, Fricker (2010, 242) needed to add the *reliability condition*, which would assure that the collective motive will be put into action: "Let us now add to this group motive the requisite reliability condition; and voilà, we have a collective virtue." For instance, the group members may jointly commit to a moral motive, say achieving fair-mindedness as a group, but for the

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group to have the desired trait it must carry out the motive. Fricker (2010, 241) also notes that “the group members need not possess the motive as individuals (*qua* private individuals). Rather, in jointly committing to it, they each come to possess it *qua* member of the group.” Fricker, in this regard, reiterates the practical-identities explanation in which “there is room for considerable tension between one’s personal motives/beliefs and the motives/beliefs one comes to have in virtue of this or that group identity” (241-242).

Fricker (2010, 242-243) identifies two challenges to the Gilbertian model. As the Gilbertian collective commitment requires the *condition of common knowledge*, the model necessarily entails: (1) that the commitment is unanimous among the members of the group, that is, each member of the group has the said commitment; and that (2) the members are *self-aware* in their commitment, that is, each of them knows about the collective commitment. Clearly, the unanimity requirement conflicts with the divergence phenomenon. On the other hand, the self-awareness requirement conflicts with an essential feature of virtues and vices in which it is not necessary for the bearer of virtue or vice to be aware that one has the virtue or vice or to consciously aim for virtue or vice. As Fricker (2010, 245), in this regard, notes: “A compassionate person need not be aware that he is compassionate; an intellectually courageous person need not be aware that she is intellectually courageous; and indeed it is famously plausible that a modest person is necessarily unaware that he is modest.”

Fricker, in defense of the Gilbertian model, tries to overcome these challenges. On the self-awareness problem, she first identifies two reasons for the possibility that an individual subject may not be aware of having virtue or vice. First, they may not conceive of their good motive or skill as virtuous. Second, they may not be aware that they are reliable in achieving their motive. Then Fricker claims that the same reasons may apply to collectives. She explains: “... even while all parties must indeed be aware of the joint commitment to a given motive or skill, it does not follow from this that they are aware of all features of that to which they are committed (such as that it is virtuous), or again of their performance in relation to it (such that it achieves reliability).” (245)

Earlier, Fricker remarks: “If, under conditions of common knowledge, a number of individuals commit to a virtuous moral or epistemic motive, they thereby constitute themselves as the plural subject of that *collective motive*... Or, as we might put it, a joint commitment to a virtuous motive is a matter of jointly committing to the virtuous end for the right reason.” (Fricker 2010, 241) As an illustration, Fricker speaks of a night watch with the moral motive of displaying the virtue of vigilance. Using the same illustration, what Fricker, in her defense of the

self-awareness challenge, in effect, is saying is that the individual members of the night-watch team are aware of their collective motive to display the virtue of vigilance, but they may not know that their motive is virtuous. It may be asked: *how can individuals collectively commit to a virtuous motive without them knowing that such a motive of theirs is virtuous?* In the sense that her defense would require individuals to know and not know something simultaneously, Fricker's defense falls into a contradiction.

Fricker then identifies two possibilities for a group virtue to occur without its members unanimously possessing such virtue. First is when the commitment of some members is half-hearted, that is, when "they lack the good motive/skill as (private) individuals" and "they all merely 'go along with' it *qua* group members (minimally acting according to it)". Second is when the commitment of all members is half-hearted; that is, when "they all merely 'go along with' the motive/skill of conducting themselves in a manner that promotes equal opportunities" (Fricker 2010, 246-247).

What Fricker is implying is that the individual members' commitment may vary in terms of degree; some may commit half-heartedly while some may commit whole-heartedly. Fricker thinks that since the individual members are not all whole-hearted in their commitment, this then overcomes the problem that the members are unanimous in their commitment. The issue is not the degree of commitment but the commitment. Whether half-hearted or whole-hearted, the question is whether all the members commit. Regardless of how one signifies their commitment to the collective motive, the normativity arising from the commitment applies equally to all those who make the commitment. They, for instance, will be subject to the same rebuke if they renegade from the collective commitment. This makes Fricker's defense of the unanimity challenge off tangent.

In sum, Gilbert's concept of collective commitment is indeed necessary to explain the normativity of collective action and belief. It clearly explains why members of a group acquire duties and rights when performing a collective action. It does not, however, sufficiently explain why a collective, taken in its own right, can acquire virtue or vice. It sufficiently explains why we should rebuke a member of our group not honoring our group's collective commitment. But, as endorsed and defended by Fricker, this model fails when used as a framework to philosophical ground non-summativism. First, the model is incomplete. For a group to have virtue or vice, it is not enough for the group to make a collective commitment to pursue a virtuous motive. The group should actually perform the motive, which explains why Fricker needs to add the *reliability condition* to the model. Second, the model is premised on the practical-identities explanation, which we have earlier shown to be

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problematic for several reasons. Third, Fricker fails to defend the model from the challenges arising from its condition of common knowledge with regard to collective commitments. Consequently, an alternative model that will avoid all these complications is necessary. In the following section, we shall outline the features of one such model.

### **An Alternative View**

There are undoubtedly traits, epistemic or otherwise, that can only be attributed to groups, and not to their individual members as well. Consequently, their attributions cannot be given a summative account. As Lahroodi (2007, 285) notes: "... consider predicates such as 'hierarchically organized,' 'cooperative,' 'interactive,' and 'well-coordinated.' These are predicates that can only be applied to groups, not to their individual members. Clearly enough, summativism does not hold for the traits corresponding to such predicates." When we say, for instance, that a committee is well-coordinated and hierarchically organized, we cannot mean that each of the individual members of the group, or a sufficient number of them, is well-coordinated and hierarchically organized.

What is it about groups that these exclusively collective traits are describing such that these traits cannot likewise be attributed to the group's individual members? One possible explanation is that these traits describe groups working as systems. When we say, for instance, that a group is well-coordinated and hierarchically organized we are saying in effect that the group is functioning as a system in a well-coordinated and hierarchically organized way, or, more simply, that the group is a well-coordinated and hierarchically organized system. This cannot be a shorthand for saying that each member of the group is functioning in the same way, for what is being described here is the dynamics among these members in terms of how they perform their designated tasks or roles in coordination and cooperation with one another to achieve their joint intentions or their group's objectives. In short, these traits are what may be called 'system properties.'

As system properties cannot be given a summative account, we contend that the simplest and best model for justifying non-summativism with regard to collective epistemic traits is to regard these traits as system properties. Fricker, in fact, hints at this when she explains a possible way by which a speaker's utterance of "The jury was fair-minded" can be interpreted non-summatively. Accordingly, she refers to a possible follow-up statement by the speaker which describes the jury as a system. She writes: "If, following up with a more general reflection, she were to add 'The jury is a just system', she would be referring to the institution of trial by jury defined purely structurally and procedurally in the manner specified in (3)—

that is, in abstraction from the performance of any particular collective jury or number of jurors who realize the institutional procedures in any given instance.” (Fricker 2010, 236) For Fricker, this would indicate that the speaker likewise intended her first utterance to mean that she was referring to the jury as a system—that, as a system, the jury was fair-minded. In this case, the speaker regarded the epistemic virtues of justice and fair-mindedness as *system properties* of the jury.

Two theories, among others, may philosophically ground this model. One is Plato’s theory of justice which gives plausibility to the idea that some epistemic traits are system properties. The other is Searle’s theory of collective intentionality which can serve as a framework for explaining the irreducibility of system properties and thus the divergence phenomenon as well. In Plato’s theory of justice, the virtue of justice is regarded as a *master virtue* and which can very well likewise be regarded as a *system virtue*. Justice is attributable to both human individual and state, which Plato regards as systems consisting of three interacting correlative basic elements. On the level of the human individual, justice is achieved when the three basic components of her soul achieve their respective excellences and are harmoniously working together.

On the level of the state, justice is achieved when the three basic classes of society, corresponding to the three basic elements of the individual human soul, achieve their respective excellences and are working harmoniously (see Evangelista and Mabaquiao 2020; Denise et al. 1996). For Plato, the three basic elements of the soul are (1) reason, to which the rulers of the state correspond; (2) spirit or passion, to which the military or soldiers of the state correspond; and (3) appetite or desire, to which the merchants and workers of the state correspond. When working excellently, that is, performing their designated natural functions, and harmoniously with the other elements, reason and the rulers achieve the virtue of wisdom, spirit and the military achieve the virtue of courage, and appetite and the merchants and workers achieve the virtue of temperance. When these three virtues are achieved, both individual soul and state achieve the virtue of justice. Justice is not a virtue of each of the basic elements; it is a virtue of the system formed by these three basic elements. It can be said that the virtue of justice supervenes on these three individual virtues. In any case, justice is here regarded as a system virtue or, generally, a system property.

Searle’s theory of collective intentionality begins with the thesis that “There really is such a thing as collective intentional behavior that is not the same as the summation of individual intentional behavior” (Searle 1990, 402). Searle’s classic illustration for this thesis involves two different groups of people whose external bodily movements were indistinguishable but were clearly *internally* different. One

group consisted of random people who all got up from the places in the park where they were sitting and ran to a shelter when the rain suddenly started to pour; the other consisted of actors in an outdoor ballet where the choreography called for the actors to perform an act in ways that incidentally resembled what the first group did. Searle contends that while the members of the ballet group performed a collective intentional action, the members of the random group did not.

Members of a group perform a joint action (collective intentional behavior) when the members jointly intend to cooperatively do their part in the joint action. The group's collective or joint intention entails certain specific roles or tasks for the individual members to intentionally perform. Searle's illustration for this feature of joint actions involves a football team intending to execute a pass play. To begin with, the players, individually, cannot execute the play. What the players can execute individually are their particular roles in the play, which they must do in cooperation with one another. For this cooperation to be possible, the individual players should perform their roles in the play as part of their joint intention to perform the play. That is, they should derive their individual intentions from their joint intentions. This means that each individual player, in performing their individual actions, has two simultaneous intentions in their mind: one is their intention that their team execute a play (Searle calls this the individual's 'We-intend.');

the other is their intention to do their part of the play (Searle calls this the individual's 'I-intend.'). As Searle (1990, 403) explains: "Each member of the team will share in the collective intention but will have an individual assignment that is derived from the collective but has a different content from the collective. Where the collective's is 'We are doing A,' the individual's will be 'I am doing B,' 'I am doing C,' and so on."

While virtues may generally be understood as an agent's traits of character dispositions to behave in certain ways (Lahroodi 2007, 291), their attribution is nonetheless usually made based on the actions performed by the agent. To use Lahroodi's example, we say, for instance, that an agent is open-minded when they perform actions, which may come in the form of making decisions, which accord a certain degree of plausibility to views contrary to what they already believe. In this light, the mode of attribution of an epistemic trait to a collective, whether distributively or not, would depend on the kind of action that the group does, which serves as the basis for this attribution. In Searle's theory of collective intentionality, if the action of the group is just an aggregate of individually independent 'I-intends' which are not derived from a 'We-intend' that the member of the group share with one another, then the trait attributed to this group can be understood summatively—just a shorthand for attributing the trait to the individual members of the group. But if such action is a collective or joint action, in which their



individual “I-intends” are derived from their shared ‘We-intend,’ then the trait attributed to this group cannot be understood summatively or as a system property.

To further elaborate take this example given by Lahroodi (2007, 287):

Now we can conceive of a church committee that is narrow-minded about gay rights as a group, while all or most of its members are open-minded about gay rights. As individuals, all or most members of the committee routinely resist their initial tendency to dismiss ideas favoring gay rights that are contrary to their own and to grant them enough plausibility to take them seriously. The group, however, moves in the opposite direction. It fails to assign any plausibility to a wide range of contrary views about gay rights, summarily dismisses them and does not consider them worth of discussion, let alone adoption.

The first thing to note here is that the way by which the members of the church committee will individually decide on what actions to do about gay rights will be different from how the church committee will decide as a group. So, it is possible that the decision of the church committee as a group may be different from the individual decisions of the members of the committee. The case here is analogous to Searle’s example of the two groups performing the same external behaviors in the park and so is also explainable using Searle’s conceptual apparatus in explaining the internal difference between the behaviors of these groups. The members of the church committee can perform individual actions regarding gay rights that may be derived or not from their committee’s joint intentions. In the first case, where the committee members are open-minded about gay rights, their ‘I-intends’ are not derived from the ‘We-intends’ of their committee; whereas in the second case, where the committee as a group is narrow-minded about gay rights, the members’ ‘I-intends’ are derived from the ‘We-intends’ of the committee. Or we can also say that the committee is not functioning as a system in the first case, but they do in the second one. The joint intentions or We-intends of the committee, which entails the designated I-intends of the members, may consist of the objectives that the committee is tasked to pursue upon its creation.

Let us now discuss the advantages of our model for justifying non-summativism in which irreducible collective epistemic traits are regarded as system properties. First, this model can easily explain the divergence phenomenon. Obviously, a system property, being a higher-level property, cannot be predicated on the individual elements consisting of a system. Using a familiar example provided by Searle (1997, 451-459) in explaining his theory of *biological naturalism* in the philosophy of mind, the properties of water such as liquidity, transparency, and wetness cannot be reduced to the properties of hydrogen and oxygen. The properties of water are emergent properties arising from the causal interaction of the properties of hydrogen and oxygen. Searle claims that consciousness is an emergent property

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of the brain arising from the causal interactions of properties of the brain's neurons. For Searle, conscious states cannot therefore be equated with the brain's neural states.

Second, which follows from the first, it does not need to make the problematic distinction between members of a group as members of the group and members of a group as private individuals to explain the divergence problem. As system properties cannot be attributed to individuals, the divergence phenomenon becomes a necessary consequence of regarding collective epistemic traits as system properties.

Third, it is not susceptible to the challenges of Fricker's Gilbertian Model. In our model, it is not necessary for a group to aim for a collective virtue to be eligible for an attribution of such virtue. What is necessary for the group to aim for is the proper execution of its intended collective action through the coordinated individual efforts of the group's individual members. The virtue or vice is attributed to the group on the basis of the quality of the collective action it does. For instance, if a government, through its collective actions, promote the common good of its people, then the government, as a collective, can be said to be virtuous. This avoids the self-awareness issue. On the other hand, as the virtue or vice attributed to the group in virtue of its collective action is a system virtue, the individual members, being elements of the system, cannot possess the system virtue or vice. They may, for instance, possess the virtue but not in its form as a system virtue. Individually, the members of the jury may be fair-minded; but they, individually, cannot possess the fair-mindedness attributed to the jury working as a system. This then avoids the unanimity problem. Moreover, as this model takes the joint actions of a collective as the primary basis for attributing the epistemic traits, not the collective commitment of the Gilbertian model, there is no need to supplement the model with a 'reliability condition.'

Finally, language plays a critical role in the analysis of the issue between summativism and non-summativism. This is in light of the possible effects of the ambiguities in the language used to refer to the epistemic traits in the various contexts of their attributions on how we understand the nature of these attributions. First, it shall be observed that we use the same expressions when referring to epistemic traits attributed to individuals and to collectives. As Byerly and Byerly (2016, 35) note: "Just as one might call an individual researcher, Bob, 'thorough,' 'cautious' or 'intellectually humble,' one might call a research team of which Bob is a member 'thorough,' 'cautious' or 'intellectually humble.'" Following this, one may incline one to analyze the epistemic traits attributed to both individuals and collectives in the same way. While a group taken in its own right and each of its individual members happen to be fair-minded, how an individual will arrive at

his/her action that will manifest the virtue will be different from how a group, working as a system, will arrive at its own action to manifest the same virtue.

More importantly, one plausible reason why epistemic traits attributed to collectives non-summatively are not readily recognizable as system properties is the following linguistic fact. On the one hand, most linguistic expressions for exclusively collective traits (such as hierarchically organized and well-coordinated) already indicate that these traits are taken as system properties which make it awkward to attribute them to individuals. On the other hand, linguistic expressions used for epistemic traits attributed to collectives taken in their own right does not have such indication which makes it still meaningful to attribute these traits to individuals.

Second, it shall be observed that when we are attributing epistemic traits to collectives, we can use the same expressions for these traits in both contexts where we are attributing them to collectives as a shorthand for attributing them to the individual members of the collectives, and where we are attributing them as traits of these collectives taken in their own right. Again, the following situation described by Fricker (2010, 236) shows this very clearly: “If, for instance, a member of the jury in a contentious court case were to privately remark, ‘The jury was fair-minded’, she might quite properly be describing the jury under either of the first two aspects. That is, she might be saying (1) that enough of the *individual* jurors displayed fair-mindedness; or she might be saying (2) that the jury taken *collectively* displayed fair-mindedness.” An ambiguity could arise given that the speaker used an expression that could legitimately lend itself to the two significations. Of course, had the speaker formulated his/her expression in a way that would clearly show his/her intention, say he/she instead remarked that “The jury as a system was fair-minded,” the ambiguity would not arise.

Given the different significations that the same expression for an epistemic trait can have we may need, in order to avoid unnecessary complications in our analysis, to stipulate some linguistic indicators to mark these differences. Take the case of being ‘fair-minded.’ We can, for instance, distinguish between ‘fair-minded<sub>IND</sub>’ to mean that it is to the individual members of a group the trait are being attributed, and ‘fair-minded<sub>SYS</sub>’ to mean that it is to the group as a system that the trait is being attributed. So, when a speaker states that “The jury is fair-minded<sub>SYS</sub>” we know that she is describing the jury as a system. Or when she says that “The church committee is open-minded<sub>IND</sub> about gay rights,” we know that she is describing a sufficient number of the committee’s individual members.

## Conclusion

Collective virtue epistemology, an area of epistemology that intersects between virtue epistemology and social epistemology, investigates the nature and implications of attributing epistemic traits to a collective or a group of individuals. We examined two main issues concerning this, namely, the problems of (1) understanding collective epistemic trait attributions and (2) justifying non-summative collective epistemic trait attributions. With regard to the first issue, we showed that the debate between summativism and non-summativism is falsely framed as an issue of generality, which results from some sorts of linguistic confusions, referring to the failure to consider the intention of the speaker and the ambiguities inherent in ordinary language. With regard to the second one, we demonstrated that the challenges of the Gilbertian model as a framework for justifying non-summativism, referring to the problems of unanimity and self-awareness, have not been successfully overcome.

As an alternative model for the same purpose, we advanced the view, partly patterned after Plato's theory of justice and Searle's theory of collective intentionality, which regards epistemic traits non-summatively attributed to collectives as system properties. We have shown that this model can easily explain the divergence possibility and is not susceptible to the same challenges faced by the Gilbertian model. As system properties, collective epistemic traits are attributed to the group as a result of their collective intentional action, and thus irreducible and unattributable to the individual members of the group. It follows from this that collective epistemic trait attribution does not require that the members aim for or are aware of the epistemic trait that could or would be attributed. Instead, what is necessary is that the members properly execute their collective intention. And while individual epistemic traits may be attributed to the individual members of a group, it is only when the members have successfully executed their collective intention can a collective epistemic trait as a system property be attributed to the group.

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# THE POST-EPISTEMOLOGICAL INQUIRY AND THE ULTIMATE FATE OF PHILOSOPHY. A CRITICAL DISCUSSION

Mohammadreza ESMKHANI

**ABSTRACT:** This essay examines the different fates of philosophy in Bloor's and Rorty's *post-epistemological* inquiries, tracing their sharp disagreement to their distinct conceptions of 'naturalism' and 'language.' To this end, the first section outlines their main reasons for overcoming the epistemologically-centered philosophy, as well as their reassessments of key concepts such as objectivity. The second section draws a comparison between their proposed post-epistemological inquiries, i.e., Bloor's empirically-informed 'sociologism' and Rorty's pragmatist 'conversationalism,' emphasizing that while the former implies the 'end' of philosophy in a scientific culture, the latter proposes a 'new role' for philosophy in a conversational culture. The third section shows how, in contrast to Bloor's dismissive attitude toward philosophy and the potential of intervocabulary discourse, which can chiefly be attributed to his *scientific* naturalism and his Wittgensteinian *rule-governed* view of language, Rorty's conception of philosophy as a cross-cultural, conversational practice is enabled and sustained by his *non-scientific* naturalism coupled with his Davidsonian *communicative* view of language. Finally, as opposed to Rorty's attempt to completely dismantle the 'epistemology industry,' the fourth section briefly explores the extent to which Bloor's 'theory'-oriented viewpoint is still affected by it.

**KEYWORDS:** epistemology, sociologism, conversationalism, philosophy, language, naturalism, epistemology industry

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary philosophy has been characterized by heated debates concerning a wide range of problems, goals, and methods derived from modern philosophy. Epistemology, in particular, has been heavily criticized from a variety of perspectives. Many philosophers have striven to develop a naturalistic account of knowledge, with the aim of eliminating 'epistemology' as a philosophical discipline that aims to define and justify knowledge claims. Amidst these disputes, however, a crucial question arises: What is the ultimate fate of philosophy? Will it be reduced to the natural sciences and subsumed as a 'chapter' of a specific scientific field?

Alternatively, is it possible to establish a novel role for philosophy in the post-epistemological era?

In this vein, this paper presents a critical examination of the works of two renowned figures involved in this critical debate. In their seminal works, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) and *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (1976), Bloor and Rorty proffer a larger framework for analyzing knowledge (i.e. the social or society), which propose different approaches to moving beyond traditional epistemology and standard epistemologically-centered philosophy, and present alternative visions for post-epistemological inquiry. Moreover, as this paper will show, predicated on different conceptions of naturalism and language, they hold different views about the ultimate fate of philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

This piece is divided into the following sections: The first section outlines their arguments for overcoming epistemology-based philosophy and describes how they reassess fundamental concepts, such as objectivity and rationality. The second section compares their proposed post-epistemological inquiries, namely Bloor's empirically-informed sociologism with Rorty's pragmatist conversationalism, and discusses the different fates that they envision for philosophy, ranging from the 'end' of philosophy to a 'new role' for it. The third section delves into the stark contrasts between the two, arguing that their disagreement stems from their opposing views on 'naturalism' (reductionist, scientific versus holistic, non-scientific) and 'language' (the Wittgensteinian rule-governed notion versus the Davidsonian communicationism). Finally, the paper briefly considers the extent to which Bloor's theory-oriented view still keeps the overall structure of the so-called 'epistemology industry,' as opposed to Rorty's attempt to dismantle it completely.

## 2. The Post-epistemological Inquiry: the Cases and Consequences

Epistemology is a fundamental branch of philosophy that deals with the nature, limits, and sources of human knowledge, as well as the criteria for justifying beliefs. Historically, with the prevalence of Cartesian-Kantian philosophy in modern times, its status has shifted to the heart of philosophical inquiry. While debates about the nature of knowledge and its underlying principles date back to ancient times, the 'epistemologization' of philosophy marked a new phase that captured significant attention from philosophers. Despite its long-standing significance, the discipline of epistemology, especially the Kantian epistemological tradition, has faced

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<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that despite their broad and shared backgrounds—such as an overall Wittgensteinian approach to language that prioritizes use over meaning, and a general Kuhnian approach that accentuates historical contingencies in the process of knowledge-making—there is scarcely any significant reference to each other's work.



considerable criticism in contemporary philosophy, with critics challenging its methods, goals and problems from a variety of angles.

Aligned with this movement, Rorty and Bloor are prominent figures in contemporary thought who expressly dispute the image of epistemologically-centered philosophy. By criticizing the basic characteristics that make up such an image, they aim to supplant it with more viable alternatives. As evidenced by the appellations of their major works, Rorty (1979) concentrates on the modern invention of the mind as a 'mirror of nature,' whereas Bloor (1976) is more concerned with the individualistic, mentalistic and normative orientation of traditional epistemology, showing how notions of knowledge are contingent on 'social imagery.' In what follows, we will outline their main rationales for dismissing epistemology-based philosophy, their reassessment of pivotal concepts like objectivity, and the post-epistemological inquiries they propose.

## 2.1. The Demise of 'Epistemology'

In liberating philosophy from the dominance of epistemology (i.e. the 'theory' of knowledge), Rorty launches a historical and conceptual assault on the modern view of philosophy-as-epistemology, wherein epistemology is regarded as the 'first philosophy' and the 'general theory of representation' (Rorty 1979, 3). In concurrence with Rorty's concept of 'contingency' and the transitory nature of philosophical problems (1998, 275-278), Rorty holds that by revealing the historical 'sources' of the metaphors (especially the mind as a mirror of nature) that drive philosophers to focus on their traditional concerns as mere 'historical contingencies,' we come to realize that their supposedly timeless problems are not inevitable. Once this episode is deconstructed, there is no need to bother ourselves with such matters as determining the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to qualify as knowledge or how the mind can accurately represent reality. For a particular case, he demonstrates that the 'intuitions' behind Cartesian dualism have a historical origin (Rorty 1979, 10), hence there is nothing inevitable about them.

After deconstructing the modern mind historically, he argues that the philosophical project of determining when mind/language accurately represents the world, or rather the quest to uncover the conditions under which accurate representation occurs, is fundamentally flawed (see Tartaglia 2020). In this vein, he sees Kant as the prototypical proponent of modern epistemology, as he sought to establish "the a priori structure of any possible inquiry, or language, or form of social life" (1982, 166), thereby providing "a history of our subject, fixed its problematic and professionalised it" (Rorty 1979, 149) through the development of a 'theory of knowledge' premised on his intuition-concept division.

To dismantle this philosophical project, Rorty draws on Sellars' critique of the 'given,' Quine's attack on the 'contingent-necessary' distinction, and Davidson's holistic anti-representationalist theory of meaning and belief. According to Rorty, these critiques together exhibit the 'theoretical bankruptcy' of Kant's discipline, since without such distinctions, we will not recognize what would count as a 'rational reconstruction' of our knowledge,' nor will we know what the objective or method of epistemology might be (Rorty 1979, 169), such that 'philosophy-as-theory-of-knowledge' is no longer a viable concern. Instead, he proposes a holistic thesis known as 'epistemological behaviourism,' according to which one must "explain rationality and epistemic authority by reference to what society lets us say, rather than the latter by the former" (Rorty 1979, 174). In this view, the notion of philosophy as a discipline seeking 'privileged representations' becomes unintelligible, since a thoroughgoing holism "has no place for the notion of philosophy as 'conceptual' ... as explaining which representations are 'purely given' or 'purely conceptual'..." (Rorty 1979, 170-71).

Bloor (1984a, 1984b, 2004), on the other hand, takes a different approach to move beyond epistemology and its normative orientation. He rejects the rational-social dichotomy, known as the two-factor model, which treats epistemic and social factors as having two distinct natures or kinds. Instead, he subsumes the rational factors, such as experimental evidence, theoretical assumptions, logical evaluations, and evidential relations, which are the eminent domain of epistemology, under the purview of the social. This move clearly dissolves the realms of epistemology and philosophy into that of social or sociological theory.

Bloor employs a variety of strategies to substantiate his point of view. First and foremost, founded on a naturalistic approach, he argues that the problems of knowledge should be addressed within a scientific framework, without which any epistemology will amount to 'implicit propaganda' (Bloor 1976, 80). In emphasizing the importance of a naturalistic approach to the nature of knowledge, he rejects all 'philosophical' accounts that do not share the same dynamic as empirical studies (80-81). This approach, instead of dealing with end products like proofs and propositions, focuses on productions such as natural inclinations, habits, patterns, and institutions (154-155). Moreover, one of the most notable features of Bloor's naturalistic stance is his 'symmetry requirement,' which states that the explanation of both true/rational and false/irrational beliefs must be 'symmetrical' (Bloor 2004, 937), preventing any intrusion of a non-naturalistic notion of reason into the causal story.

Bloor's stance situates him in opposition to 'rationalist' philosophers and epistemologists, as well as 'philosophical critics' of the sociology of knowledge, including Newton-Smith, Brown, Laudan, and Haack. These thinkers seek to

preserve a privileged domain for epistemological concerns by relying on a (false) dichotomy between the rational and the social, distinguishing between the intellectual virtues of knowledge claims (e.g., truth, objectivity, and rationality) and the sociological properties surrounding their formation and development. For instance, in response to Haack (1996), who ostensibly adheres to the social/rational (=evidential) dualism by distinguishing between 'acceptance' as a social phenomenon and 'warranting' as a matter of being supported by good evidence, Bloor (2004, 949-950) points out that the social is always present "in the midst of the rational process of warranting," because warranting itself is a process whose structure and content cannot be adequately examined without identifying its conventional and social dimension.

A special case is the rationalist idea that purely epistemic relations, such as the logical relation of premises and conclusions, lie outside the scope of sociological analysis. This idea implies that different methods of inquiry are required for different areas of knowledge, giving rise to the notion of the 'autonomy of knowledge' and indicating the existence of transcultural principles of rationality. In contrast, Bloor asserts that 'epistemic factors' are actually 'social factors' (Bloor 1984b), in the sense that the actual connections between premises and conclusions, as well as the specific implications involved, are socially constituted, and the patterns of relevance assumed by the agents are contingent upon an array of social factors (e.g., patterns of training or conventions of use) that jointly compromise the background at hand. As a result, studying the social background of epistemic factors is tantamount to demonstrating the social character of the epistemic (303), indicating the total compatibility of assuming that inferences can be 'rational' (e.g., inductive) while also being 'social' (e.g., conventional) (Bloor 2004, 931-32).

Overall, both Rorty and Bloor repudiate the traditional framework for the epistemological analysis of knowledge. Rorty contends this framework is historically and conceptually flawed, whereas Bloor discards the entire corpus of traditional epistemology with its teleological model that assumes the rational as self-explanatory (Bloor 1976, 10-11). Consequently, while Rorty replaces the modern epistemic subject with the community of contemporary peers, Bloor emphasizes the social is an integral part of the rational and human knowledge.

## 2.2. The Reassessment of Key Concepts

From the aforementioned considerations, it follows that knowledge is a social institution (as per Bloor) or a social practice (as per Rorty), which implies that it cannot be reduced to the categories that epistemologists focus on, and to some extent, they are both committed to 'the ontological priority of the social,' which

indicates that “all matters of authority or privilege, in particular epistemic authority, are matters of social practice, and not objective matters of fact” (Rorty 2007, 7). Consequently, both seek “to reinterpret these notions naturalistically” (Rorty 2000e, 151) and ‘reassess’ much of the vocabulary associated with traditional philosophy’s most valued notions, such as objectivity, truth, and rationality.

First, both Rorty and Bloor embrace a distinctly pragmatic approach to knowledge. As a pragmatist who believes that “what you talk about depends not on what is real but on what it pays you to talk about” (Rorty 2000k, 374), Rorty asserts that distinctions such as ‘what is correct/incorrect’ should be resolved on the basis of pragmatic criteria determining which options more effectively serve particular purposes. Moreover, he views beliefs and vocabularies as tools to be evaluated in terms of the particular purposes they can serve or the usefulness they can have in action. Similarly, in keeping with the long-standing tradition in sociology that study the interaction between knowledge and ‘human interests,’ Bloor (see Barnes, Bloor, and Henry 1996, 110-139) emphasizes the role that interests and goals play in shaping and structuring beliefs. Thus, both underscore the connection between the theoretical and the practical, and insist that knowledge is a goal-driven and interest-oriented activity, thereby giving no cash value to the idea of the ‘disinterestedness’ of the traditional epistemic subject.

Second, rather than conceiving of ‘rationality’ as the expression of a ‘natural order of reason’ or as a matter of applying of ‘ahistorical criteria,’ Rorty and Bloor construe it as a social phenomenon, in that it is a function of and contingent upon ‘society.’ Simply put, it is the structure of a given society that determines and guide the overall model of rationality, not the other way around. Moreover, by abandoning large entities like ‘Rationality’ or ‘Justification’ that can be articulated in an epistemological theory, they provide a ‘historically determined,’ ‘context-dependent’ account of epistemic categories. For Rorty (2000a, 59; 2000b, 56-57; 1998,2), justification and betterness-to-believe are always “relative to an audience,” and all arguments are reasons for particular people bound by social conditions. Similarly, Bloor (1983, 3) emphasizes that rationality is something that we shape as we construct and develop a form of collective life, and that any normative phenomena such as rationality requires an institutional character, implying that “no group, no rationality” (Bloor 1996, 848).

The same is true of the notion of ‘objectivity.’ Rorty and Bloor both discard the traditional view of objectivity as being based on external facts and objects, and instead, ground objectivity in such intersubjective structures as agreement or convention. In this regard, Rorty (1991, 38-9) replaces the ‘desire for objectivity’ with the ‘desire for solidarity’ with a community, implying that the ultimate source

of objectivity is the social agreement that arises from communication and negotiation among subjects rather than something that exists independently of human practices. Similarly, following Durkheim and Wittgenstein, who argue that sense experience lacks objectivity, Bloor (1983, 58) locates the source of objectivity in society, and, in providing a sociological response to Popper's 'third world' (Bloor 1974), claims that 'objective' knowledge, far from being the 'content' of an individual, actually refers to social factors such as collective customs and institutions, and relies on a social group's 'currently accepted beliefs.'

Third, both Bloor (2007; 2020) and Rorty (1991, 21-34), in their own ways, support a relativistic perspective on knowledge that refutes any absolute, socially independent criteria for evaluating other cultures. In accordance with the agenda of the 'Strong Program,' Bloor ardently endorses relativism in the only acceptable sense, namely 'anti-absolutism,' which repudiates the existence of absolute knowledge and absolute justifications for any knowledge claim. As a result, all beliefs and justifications are a product of, and relative to, the limitations of human nature and our status as social beings. Likewise, Rorty, who renounces any absolute knowledge, could be classified as a relativist in this sense. Nevertheless, since he does not believe that the "critique of absolutism leads to relativism" (Rorty 2000a, 11-12), and in congruence with his general 'anti-dualism,' he endorses 'ethnocentrism' as a variant of coherentism so as to circumvent the vexing problems associated with certain forms of relativism. This view holds that there is nothing to be said about, say, rationality other than descriptions of the familiar justifying procedures for sound knowledge acquisition that are operative in a given community, such as ours, and employed in this or that area of inquiry (Rorty 1991, 23). This view is, of course, more consistent with his pragmatism, which rejects presenting a 'theory' (of truth) or an 'epistemology,' let alone a 'relativistic' one (1982, xiv).

Furthermore, Rorty and Bloor take a minimalist approach to truth, denying that there is much, or anything constructive, to say about the nature of truth. Thus, in the general Wittgensteinian vein, suggesting that "there is nothing to be understood about the concept of X except the various uses of the term 'X'" (Rorty 2000b, 56-57), they bring to our notice distinct 'uses' of the term 'true.' In this context, Rorty (1991, 127-128; 2000a, 11-12), who rejects the truth-as-correspondence account and any attempt to 'hypostatize' the adjective 'true,' distinguishes three important functions or uses that the predicate 'true' has in our linguistic-conceptual practices: The endorsing use, as a way of using the concept of truth to confirm or affirm certain assertions; the cautionary use; which we make when we contrast justification and truth, in that a belief can be justified but not true; and the disquisitional use, by saying metalinguistic things of the form " 's' is true iff-

--." Similarly, Bloor (1976, 37-45) singles out some functions that our notion of truth serves, including the 'discriminative' function, which orders and sorts beliefs; the "rhetorical" function, which plays a role in argumentation and criticism, recommending this or that particular claim; and the 'materialist' function, which indicates how the world stands as the cause of our experience. Thus, both impugn that there is something universal and useful to be said about 'Truth,' and that the most one can do is to describe or explain the various uses such a predicate has in our social-historical practices.

Finally, both Rorty and Bloor emphasize the radical notion of 'contingency,' denoting that every knowledge claim, no matter how inevitable and stable it appears, 'could have been otherwise,' and is bound up with socio-historical contingencies. Rorty (1989, 3-22) holds the idea that everything in our conceptual-linguistic systems is infected by 'time and chance' leads to the conclusion that, for example, languages are fashioned by an ensemble of unpredictable socio-historical forces, devoid of any essential relation to extra-linguistic elements. A similar idea can be found in Bloor's sociological finitism as applied to basic cognitive activities, like classification and concept application. According to Bloor (see Barnes, Bloor, and Henry, 46-80), the instance-to-instance development of any classification and the case-to-case movement of concept-application are determined by contingent social processes, with each act reliant on local contingencies and ultimately on the contingent judgments of historical agents and their goals and interests. Thus, both Rorty and Bloor regard contingency as a pivotal component of human knowledge production and meaning construction, culminating in a variable image of the growth and development of knowledge/meaning making.

### **3. The Post-epistemological Inquiries and the Fate of Philosophy**

Given the demise of 'epistemology,' which implies a fundamental shift in our understanding of knowledge and its accompanying categories, it is unsurprising that we expect radical alternatives for pursuing inquiry in the post-epistemological era.

After deconstructing the epistemological orientation of modern philosophy as a contingent phenomenon, Rorty concludes that viewing knowledge as 'a matter of conversation' rather than as an attempt to 'mirror nature,' abolishes the need for a 'metapractice' that critiques "all possible forms of social practice" (Rorty 1979, 171). In doing so, he points out a distinct role for the practice of philosophy: rather than pursuing objective truths or discovering what is really real in a 'philosophical' or 'scientific' theory (2007, 104), it clarifies "how things (e.g., all the different vocabularies of all the different cultures) hang together" (Rorty 1982, xiv-xxxviii). Considering this, Rorty proposes a variety of inquiries to fill the gap left by the

rejection of epistemology, including pragmatism, conversational philosophy, edifying philosophy, and hermeneutics (see Malachowski 2002, 59-62), each fulfilling a specific role in his post-epistemological inquiry.

Generally speaking, these proposals share a vision of a culture that is emancipated from a God's-eye view, where agents strive for new descriptions for social purposes (Rorty 1979, 360). Hermeneutics, in essence, expresses "the hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled - that our culture should become one in which the demand for constraint and confrontation is no longer felt" (Rorty 1979, 315) and involves the "attitude of openness to fresh and innovative descriptions" (see Grigoriev 2020, 414-415). Edification, as opposed to systematic and constructive philosophy, is the "project of finding new, better, more fruitful ways of speaking" (Rorty 1979, 360), which can be accomplished through the hermeneutical practice of comparing and connecting one's own culture and a foreign one, or by means of the poetic exercise of envisioning new ends, new vocabularies, or new disciplines. Finally, the philosophy-as-pragmatism contends that all knowledge claims are solely pragmatic, and that we should focus on what people do when they make truth claims.

Central to his new vision is the notion of conversation and conversational philosophy. For Rorty, conversation is an ongoing intersubjective-interpretive process in which appropriate members of a relevant community make claims and converse about, for instance, how things are. This process takes the place of confrontation as "the determinant of our belief" (Rorty 1979, 163) and constitutes "the ultimate context in which knowledge is to be understood" (1979, 389). Hence, according to the new view that highlights poetic self-creation, where free conversation is a key component, the legitimate goal of philosophy, as a "continuation of a conversation that began in the Platonic dialogues" (Rorty 2000e, 152), is to "keep the conversation going."

Bloor (1983, 182-185), on the other hand, after systematically examining the sociological-naturalistic themes in Wittgenstein's works and reconstructing the idea of language-games in a comparative framework, proposes the 'sociology of knowledge' as the apt "heir to the subject that used to be called Philosophy." The gist of the proposal, which asks why different social groups produce different socially grounded images, is that the formation and development of language-games can be made law-like, allowing for a systematic, empirical study of language-games in various forms of sociological inquiry by capitalizing on interests as the social location of knowledge claims. In this way, his proposal offers a comparative framework for understanding the 'variation' of language-games and for tracing its causes and laws (137-138).

Moreover, Bloor sees the sociology of knowledge as an integral part of the scientific project, as an attempt to understand knowledge within the vocabulary of science, which particularly follows its non-evaluative pattern (see Barnes, Bloor, and Henry 1996, ix). In his reformed sociology of science, best exemplified in the four tenets of the ‘Strong Program’ (i.e., causality, impartiality, symmetry, and reflexivity), a body of knowledge is unavoidably shaped and sustained by social forces, and the goal is to use (social) science to demonstrate this point (Bloor 1976, 6-8). It is clear that Bloor’s ideal inquiry has a positivist flavor because of the heavy emphasis on the scientific side of sociology, which emphasizes the ‘value neutrality’ of science (Collin 2011, 63). This strong positivist stance is evident in the sociologist’s efforts to identify general regularities and construct theories to explain these regularities: “The search for laws and theories in the sociology of science is absolutely identical in its procedure with that of any other science” (Bloor 1976, 21).

Thus, diverging from Rorty’s conception of a ‘new role’ for philosophy, Bloor’s critique of epistemology appears to lead him to put an ‘end’ to this discourse: “‘Philosophy’ is to be replaced by the positive science of sociology” (2020, 161). That is, Bloor, who views philosophy as equivalent to epistemology and sees philosophers as those who have assumed the role of “guardians of absolute values,” has a tendency to exclude the entire practice of philosophy from the study of (scientific) knowledge because its efforts are rendered fruitless by the division of labor among the empirical sciences. According to this radical viewpoint, even ‘conceptual clarification’ is better left to the specialized fields of empirical inquiry, so that “the sociology of knowledge is the latest offspring. ... The long, historical task of philosophy may be close its end” (Bloor 2004, 952).

Of course, Bloor (1976, 5) has already departed from the philosophical project of defining knowledge as justified true belief by defining it as the appropriate subject of the sociology of knowledge, i.e. those beliefs that are collectively taken for granted or institutionalized. Nevertheless, the outcome is anti-philosophical as well, as once the empirically-oriented sociologist has exhausted all relevant data, there is nothing left for philosophy. In contrast, Rorty manages to preserve a novel role for philosophy in the post-epistemological era despite getting rid of the whole body of ‘philosophy-as-epistemology’ with its key assumptions. In alternative terms, contrary to what one might expect from Bloor’s viewpoint, Rorty’s answer to the question, “If epistemology fell apart... would that be the end of philosophy?” is emphatically negative (Rorty 2000g, 218), as he opines that one can be deemed a ‘philosopher’ by specifically rejecting the core problematic presupposition of ‘Philosophy’ (Rorty 1982, xviii). Moreover, he recognizes the pressing need for a dynamic discourse that concentrates not on the objective foundations of different



discourses, but rather on the 'reconciliation and reconciliation' of the human present with the human past. (Rorty 1999, 218)

In sum, Bloor views the post-epistemological era as a scientific culture in which scientific disciplines use their conceptual frameworks to explain other disciplines, leaving no room for the kind of work that traditional philosophers tend to do. Rorty, on the other hand, sees it as a multivoiced conversational culture in which anti-representationalist philosophers can make genuine contributions and actively participate in the ongoing human conversation by producing better redescriptions for reconciling the old and the new.

#### **4. A Critical Discussion: the Different Characters of Naturalism and Language**

While Bloor and Rorty are in agreement with regards to their critique of philosophy-as-epistemology, there are notable discrepancies between the two on the role and status of philosophy in the post-epistemological era. As far as this paper is concerned, the root of the matter can be traced to their opposing views on 'naturalism' and 'language.' As will be explored, it is Rorty's holistic, non-scientific naturalism versus Bloor's reductionist, scientific naturalism, coupled with his Davidsonian communicative view of language versus Bloor's Wittgensteinian 'rule-governed' notion, that endorses his idea of philosophy as a non-scientific, cross-cultural, and conversational practice.

##### **4.1. Two Different Naturalisms**

Bloor's viewpoint is heavily influenced by scientific naturalism and 'scientism,' which takes the form of a radical sociology that places 'society' or 'sociological variables' at the heart of the explanation of epistemic problems, giving 'sociology' a privileged status for understanding knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Congruent with this sociology, he seeks to scientifically understand the case under consideration by providing a satisfactory explanation of the social basis of the language-game at hand, which includes a comprehensive account of the social rules, goals, and interests at play, all of which together make up the social imagery behind well-established knowledge. This essentially scientific inquiry, located in the realm of 'causation,' appeals to social causes to explain the knowledge generated.

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<sup>2</sup> Bloor (2020, 161) uses the term 'sociologism' in a more limited, but closely related sense, to denote the position that knowledge, as a fundamentally social phenomenon, has been mischaracterized in traditional 'philosophical' accounts, thus requiring the 'sociologist' to correct the distortions caused by philosophical doctrines.

Scientism involves a plethora of theoretical commitments, the most important of which are fully embraced by Bloor. The first major one is a reductionist approach, wherein the structure of human knowledge is identified with the structure of, say, human society. The adoption of this position is manifest in Bloor's emphasis on the 'reductive' character of 'social interests,' which makes 'interest explanations' a standard part of the sociologist's toolkit. In this distinctly 'reductive' and 'causal' view (Bloor 2004, 942-943), the growth of knowledge production is seen to be boiled down to how the 'pattern of (social) interests' functions and is structured.

Relatedly, there is also a hierarchical view of the structure of scientific discourses, according to the weight and importance assigned to the basic units of scientific knowledge. In this view, 'natural science' is regarded as a privileged discourse at the apex of all human inquiry, which implies that, unlike the humanities and the arts, it is in touch with the 'intrinsic nature of reality,' giving its knowledge claims a special character. Moreover, every natural scientist favors one of the natural sciences to serve as the ultimate arbiter. For Quine, for example, (behavioristic) psychology is the proper scientific discourse for dealing with the problems of knowledge. Bloor, on the other hand, maintains that empirically-based causal sociology that does the work.

Finally, there is a non-evaluative orientation, or 'value-neutrality,' built into strict scientific naturalism that is palpable in Bloor's position on evaluation. Put simply, Bloor seems to have a dismissive attitude toward the evaluation of epistemic systems and has nothing constructive to say about any inter-vocabulary discussion in which the established rules and interests themselves might be the subjects of debate. Instead, as the 'symmetry' principle sanctions, both rational and irrational aspects of knowledge should be treated equally, and their credibility attributed should be assigned to the same kinds of causes. In other words, the symmetrical position, which entails 'bracketing' evaluation for the purposes of causal explanation, is merely the other side of the 'scientific attitude itself' (Bloor 2004, 936-938). He sums up all the essential components addressed in the following passage:

I have taken for granted and endorsed ...the standpoint of most contemporary science. In the main science is causal, theoretical, value-neutral, often reductionist, to an extent empiricist, and ultimately materialistic like common sense. ...The overall strategy has been to link the social sciences as closely as possible with the methods of other empirical sciences. (Bloor 1976, 157)

Evidently, when scientific naturalism of this kind is taken to its limit, little room is left for any genuine philosophical work, and, along the way, one of the privileged scientific discourses takes its place in solving the problems of knowledge.

Interestingly enough, Rorty, who is sceptical of these components and points out the non-scientific, non-reductive character of naturalism, is able to propose a new transformative role for philosophy.

First, when it comes to dealing with other cultures, Rorty takes an essentially non-scientific approach. This stems from his denial of the possibility of an 'epistemologically pregnant answer' to questions like "What did Galileo do right that Aristotle did wrong?" as well as any epistemological hope of grounding knowledge. (Rorty 1982, 193) Consequently, the most reliable approach to encountering other cultures involves a hermeneutic understanding that stays away from reducing them to our own view. Such an engaged, 'interpretive' understanding, typified by ethnographic and anthropological inquiry, seeks to 'sympathize and associate' with people of a certain kind and to provide adequate 'narratives' (rather than laws) and appropriate 'redescriptions' (rather than predictions) in order to see them as familiar counterparts. Thus, in contrast to Bloor's scientific approach, which is heavily concerned with 'explanations,' Rorty's approach is non-scientific, signaling a shift of interest from what can be gotten right once and for all (as in a systematic theory) to what can only be repeatedly reinterpreted and recontextualized (Rorty 2007, 182).

In fact, the two have different orientations. Bloor basically aims at reducing meaning and knowledge to sociological and institutional processes (Bloor 1997, 134-135), whereas Rorty's approach, centered on the modest task of 'reweaving webs of belief,' is primarily holistic. In simpler terms, instead of searching for some foundational variables, this approach involves a 'hermeneutic circle,' in which understanding the parts of a culture or language is interconnected with how the whole functions, and vice versa (Rorty 1979, 318-319). This substantial notion of understanding implies that coming to understand is more analogous to getting to know a person than following an algorithmic method.

Such a radical difference of opinion is underscored by their divergent views on the nature of 'content' (or meaning) and the best way to study it. Remarkably, Bloor (2004, 928; 1996, 853) sees meaning as a 'social institution' and every concept-application as a 'conventional' move, so that studying it amounts to discovering the 'sociological machinery of interaction' and the 'sociological variables' (e.g. traditions, authorities, goals and interests) that are responsible for the formation and development of the cognitive macrostructure. Conversely, Rorty (2007, 182-183; 176-179), dissatisfied with the concept of 'concept,' imagines it as a 'person,' an ever-evolving entity that can be understood only by telling a satisfactory story about its 'life history,' i.e., how its present behavior connects to its past. To phrase it differently, in contrast to Bloor's static approach, the study of 'content' is a matter of holistically understanding the evolution of the cultural practices in which its users

engage, to the extent that it “cannot be separated from its genealogy” (see Malachowski 2020, 323; emphasis added).

Moreover, Rorty’s approach to human knowledge varies from Bloor’s second commitment, in that he embraces a unified or integrated image of human knowledge. In this regard, against ‘positivistic’ philosophy of science, he explicitly defends the anti-scientific, holistic, pragmatist thought in American philosophy (which is shared with Dewey, Kuhn, Quine, Davidson, and Putnam) (Rorty 1991, 65-66), which attempts to be ‘naturalistic’ without being ‘reductionist’ and ‘scientific’ (113-124). In other words, he promotes a naturalistic philosophy that seeks “to avoid having the natural scientist step into the cultural role which the philosopher-as-superscientist vacated” (75).

In particular, Rorty (1982, 193-195), following Dewey, asserts that the very distinctions that allegedly distinguish the natural from the cultural are questionable, concluding that different disciplines can be distinguished only by the different purposes they pursue, rather than by such confusing terms as ‘scientific,’ ‘objective,’ ‘value-free,’ and ‘a reliable method.’ On the other hand, Rorty (1991, 113-116), following Davidson, sees no point in drawing philosophical lines of demarcation through culture, dividing it into science-poetry by relying on distinctions between, say, sentences expressing ‘hard facts’ and those expressing ‘soft values.’ Instead, we can replace it with a distinction between sentences that fulfill a particular purpose and those that serve other purposes, thereby treating both science and poetry equally. Thus, Rorty (2000a, 217) sees all knowledge claims arising from different disciplines as equal, with none having a special relation to the world or being more in touch with ‘the intrinsic nature of reality’ than others. Significantly, instead of the ‘method’ orientation of the alternative view, the overall pattern of all inquiry is ‘deliberation’ on alternative consequences of speculation (Rorty 1982, 163-164) or the ‘problem solving’ that we all undertake in every human pursuit (1982, 193-195).

Thus, in contrast to Bloor’s scientific naturalism, Rorty (1991, 35-45) maintains that science is merely one of many ways of coping with our environment, and that the only sense in which science is exemplary is that it serves as a ‘model of human solidarity.’ In other words, Rorty, who views different epistemic systems, including science, as different solidarities developed on the basis of different goals, sees each of them as distinct threads of the unified ‘human conversation.’ Combined with his hermeneutical notion of knowledge, which claims that knowledge is essentially a matter of conversation, and the Dewey-Davidsonian point that there is neither a fundamental distinction between human discourses nor an ‘inviolable’ barrier between them (see Rorty 2007, 172), Rorty concludes that culture is a conversational matrix rather a structure built on (social or epistemic) foundations,

in which a vast space is opened up for inter-vocabulary proposals ranging from the seemingly irrational to the evaluative and transformative.

Thereby, in contrast to Bloor's dismissive view regarding evaluative considerations, Rorty influentially points out the imperative potentials and transformative possibilities within conversational culture (see Ramberg and Dieleman 2021), such as expanding "our repertoire of individual and cultural self-descriptions" (Rorty 1989, 80), "enlarging our acquaintance" (1989, 80), altering 'truth-values candidates' at the inter-vocabulary level (1979, 320), offering 'new descriptions' to ensure social progress, expanding our 'horizons of inquiry' in order to "encompass new data, new hypotheses, new terminologies" (2000a, 17), constantly "reweaving the web of beliefs" to accommodate new stimuli (2007, 125), making an "indefinite number of novel claims, frame an indefinite number of novel purposes" (2000f, 189), and constructing ever "bigger and better contexts of discussion" (2000a, 13).

Significantly, as a key participant in the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural forum, conversational philosophy has the potential to reshape the landscape of conversational culture through two edifying strategies. First, instead of epistemology's focus on studying the familiar or the normal, hermeneutic philosophy is tasked with exploring the open, abnormal, inter-vocabulary, unfamiliar areas where no shared consensus has yet been established (Rorty 1979, 321; 1982, 141). In this open and flexible domain for abnormal discourse, which can be called the 'post-logical space of reason' or 'post-language-games discourse,' anything "from nonsense to intellectual revolution" (1979, 320) can be expected and produced.

The other is philosophy's transformative role in cultural politics, with the aim of renewing social progress and cognitive growth. The new kind of philosophizing, which does not seek to discover 'natural starting-points' apart from 'cultural traditions' (Rorty 1982, xxxvii-xl), endeavors to "compare and contrast cultural traditions" and "play vocabularies and cultures off against each other" in order to produce better ways of talking. Accordingly, philosophy, as a 'cultural criticism' that is free from the 'secure path of a science,' strives to attain the objectives appropriate to the conversational culture, such as enriching and maturing our conceptual repertoire (Rorty 2007, 124), making a genuine difference to social hopes (x), suggesting fresh novelties in human conversation (ix), proposing "new paradigms of argumentation" (Rorty 1982, 40), recommending changes in using words to make the conversation more fruitful (124), and synthesizing the achievements of the poems and 'sociologies' of the day into a larger unity (77). Consequently, in stark contrast to Bloor's stance, without reducing the substantive enterprise of philosophy

to that of the 'natural science,' Rorty favors philosophers who are 'historicist' enough to see themselves as participating in a conversation rather than practicing a 'quasi-scientific' discipline. (Rorty 2007, 126)

Rorty (1998, 5-11; 1982, Introduction) thus envisions a non-scientific, 'non-positivist' culture in which no particular part (literature or science) has 'priority' over others, where there are no 'transdisciplinary and transcultural criteria' beyond the accepted intra-disciplinary ones, and in which its participants are content with 'solidarity' and 'intersubjectivity' instead of objectivity. Significantly, although there is no place in this culture for the 'Philosopher' who could explain the superiority of certain areas of culture, there is plenty of room for a kind of philosophy that, without trying to be 'methodical' or scientific, can progress by finding a way to 'integrate the worldviews' handed down by our ancestors with novel theories.

Overall, Rorty's work presents a significant opportunity for substantive philosophical inquiry as a conversation-based practice, owing to his holistic, non-scientific conception of naturalism, which is lacking in Bloor's thought. Accordingly, not only is there no privileged discourse in human conversation that claims to be more 'accurate' or 'in touch with reality,' but pragmatic hermeneutic philosophy is a key participator in conversational culture.

#### 4.2. Two Different Views of Language

Rorty's approach to language is another dimension that affords him a discernible edge regarding the potential for inter-vocabulary and cross-cultural discussions, with no counterpart in Bloor's underlying assumptions.

Bloor's view, undoubtedly influenced by the works of the later Wittgenstein, is centered on a conventionalist, rule-following notion of language, according to this which language use is governed and structured by a set of rules as conventions, implying that linguistic understanding of language requires mastery of the techniques for applying these rules. In this context, Bloor's conception (1997, 1983) has several implications. First, building on Wittgenstein's slogan, "A game, a language, a rule is an institution," he emphasizes the collectivist aspect of rule-following and language, in the sense that they are shared conventions or social institutions. He thus opposes individualistic, psychological, and mentalistic views of meaning and rule-following. Second, taking up the famous slogan that the "meaning of a word is its use in language," he develops the sociological finitist theory of meaning, according to which meaning is created incrementally as we go along in response to the contingencies that accompany each act of concept use. Obviously, this view is opposed to any deterministic view of meaning and any attempt to reify meaning. Third, based on the well-known statement, "When I obey a rule, I do not

choose. I obey the rule blindly,” Bloor emphasizes the fact that there is a ‘blind’ dimension to rule-following, indicating the ultimate non-interpretive, non-logical step in the practice of rule-following. In this way, he emphasizes the practical basis of all language-games, showing a non-reflective level that has been socialized into institutional customs.

Most crucially, there is a radically relativistic approach, implied in Wittgenstein’s work but more explicit in Bloor’s, which views cultures as self-contained linguistically based activities, each with its own internal rule-governed logic that gives it its significance. In this view, not only is there no reason to seek common ground (e.g., universal standards of rationality) among diverse language-games and cultures, but the analyst’s primary task, besides description and interpretation, is to ‘explain’ the general pattern of using words and connect it to relevant social-practical aspects, as best exemplified by Bloor’s sociology of knowledge. Thus, the windows of language-games and cultures seem to be closed to each other. In this regard, while some contends that Wittgenstein cannot be classified as a relativist (Bell 1984, 298), Bloor’s sociological interpretation is closely aligned with Winch’s classical reading and other anthropologists, like Lyotard, who believe that Wittgenstein showed that there is no ‘unity of language,’ but rather ‘islets of language,’ each governed by a system of rules untranslatable into those of the others (see Rorty 1991, 215).

Turning to the opposite side, while respecting Wittgenstein’s critique of the Cartesian notion of ‘pre-linguistic awareness’ and even considering him a key figure in the development of the ‘linguistic turn,’ Rorty is more drawn to the Davidsonian approach offering a more radical standpoint on language and thought by placing intersubjective interpretation and communication at the forefront. Interestingly, while there are similarities between the two, including the social dimension of language, meaning holism, and an anti-reductionist account of meaning, Davidson’s philosophy encompasses additional ideas that set it apart Wittgenstein’s, all of which are highly relevant to Rorty’s thought that seeks a more expansive sphere for cross-cultural conversation.

First and foremost, Davidson’s view of language is characterized by two intertwined strands of thought: interpretationism<sup>3</sup> and communicationism (which can be regarded as an early version of Rorty’s conversationalism). The former

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<sup>3</sup> This usage of the term is somewhat different from, albeit closely related to, the view commonly attributed to Davidson and also to Dennett, which is that we can learn everything constitutive of the mental by reflecting on our practices of attributing propositional attitudes. (see Glüer 2011, 135)

(Davidson 2001a, 125-170; 2004, 87-100; see also Malpas 2023), which places the interpreter's third point-of-view at the center, is concerned with attributing intentional content to a speaker's linguistic utterances 'from scratch.' This viewpoint yields certain un-Wittgensteinian consequences. First, meaning is essentially public and tied to its function in interpersonal communication, such that the scope of meaning is delimited by what a radical interpreter can glean. Second, in the interpretive process, attributions of beliefs and assignments of meanings are intertwined, so that detecting meaning is tied to certain (normative) assumptions about the mental, epitomized best in the hybrid character of the 'principle of charity' as the amalgamation of considerations of 'coherence' and 'correspondence.' In a similar vein, interpretability eventually becomes a necessary condition for the capability of thought and mentality, as only through interaction with the worldly objects and its interpreter can a subject have 'genuine thinking.' More importantly, Wittgenstein's restricted view of language 'use' is virtually deserted in favor of interpersonal interpretation and the communicative intentions involved, and the notion of 'language-games' as essential contexts of meaning, so dear to Bloor and Wittgenstein, is largely abandoned. (see Bridges 2017)

Furthermore, Davidson (2001a, 265-280; 2005, 89-182) deepens interpretationism by discarding the fact-language dichotomy, which blurs the boundary between the knowledge involved in linguistic understanding and general knowledge of our way around the world. As a result, he comes to the view that understanding a language is ultimately a matter of constantly constructing and modifying interpretive hypotheses for copying with 'speech transactions' with our fellow humans, in such a way that the meanings of utterances are reestablished fleetingly in each particular 'communicative exchange' (Glüer 2011, 5, 12). This dynamic dialectic of 'prior' and 'passing' theories (on the part of the speaker and the interpreter), which depends on mutual communicative interactions, requires the same practical skills and knowledge that we employ when dealing with other parts of the world. In this manner, instead of Wittgenstein's pre-existing, agreed-upon rules defining the legitimate moves inside language-games, the emphasis is on the moment-to-moment agreements formed over the course of the conversation, which ultimately form the basis of understanding.

Such a radical view leads to several important conclusions. First, 'meaning' and 'language' ultimately depend on 'successful linguistic communication' as the only purpose that matters. Second, akin to any other theory construction in other domains, the theory an interpreter develops for dealing with a speaker's utterances is always "a work in progress" (Joseph 2004, 89-90). Third, and most importantly, this communication-without-conventions view implies that the very idea of



‘language’ as a shared medium or set of agreed-upon conventions is ontologically deconstructed in favor of language users, their communicative intentions, and their use of linguistic signs for the purpose of ‘mutual understanding.’ Alternately stated, in such an anti-theoretical, anti-essentialist view of language, which deprives language of any essential structure, even Wittgenstein’s ‘rules’ are deemed unnecessary for (linguistic) communication. In this way, Davidson’s “no-language claim” (Glüer 2011, 97), which avoids “hypostatizing Language” (Rorty 1982, xviii), radicalizes Wittgenstein’s anti-reificationist approach to meaning (also shared by Bloor) by extending it to ‘language’ itself.

Davidson also offers a series of interrelated ideas that directly oppose any form of relativism. First, by dropping the ‘scheme-content’ dichotomy (see Davidson 2001a, 183-198), i.e., the metaphor of a scheme that organizes or divides up experience or reality, he relinquishes the presuppositions of a number of related dualities that dominate in modern philosophy: the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity, the dichotomy of the linguistic and the empirical, and the grammar-experience distinction. In particular, he challenges the very distinction that the relativism thesis hinges upon, namely the relative-absolute dichotomy that forms the cornerstone of Bloor’s exposition of relativism (2011).<sup>4</sup> Since by refuting the ‘scheme’ metaphor, any doubt regarding whether our knowledge is merely ‘relative’ to our schemes (our perspectives, our societies, or our cultures) or really in contact with ‘objective realities’ is gone.

In a related vein, Davidson (2001b, 135-192) espouses the idea of the ‘veridicality of belief,’ which is mutually reinforcing and supported by interpretationism, and suggests that beliefs are mostly true. This crucial thesis, which creates an inherently harmonious relationship between belief/mind and reality/world, is connected to the overarching idea that the rational is constitutive of the mental, and is built into the metaphysics of the mind (Glüer 2011, 253), implying that there are certain normative constraints (such as correspondence and coherence) that are a necessary condition for the very capacity of having thought and meaning something. This view, which “foundationally links ... the mental and the nonmental, the rational and the nonrational in general” (Glüer 2011, 9), is radically at odds with any viewpoint that separates the mind from both the world and the rational. In particular, it opposes Bloor’s emphasis on “from mental images to social interactions” (Bloor 1983, 6-21) and the “social construction of mental states” derived from Wittgenstein’s philosophy (1983, 50-82), where the question of the ‘veridicality’ or ‘rationality’ of the mental in itself is irrelevant, most likely

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<sup>4</sup> Bloor articulates the key messages of his sociologism (2020, 171) as follows: “Whenever relativism is denied—and absolutism implied—look for a social process that has been misdescribed.”

because his anti-epistemological sociological view already asserts that it is ‘the social that defines the rational, not vice versa.’

Third, Davidson claims that the concept of an untranslatable language or a radically different belief system, associated with the idea of conceptual relativism, is incoherent. This is owing to his famous argument that failing to ‘translate’ into one’s own language serves as solid evidence for the absence of any kind of language (see Malpas 2023). The strong connection established by Davidson between meaning and truth, which is absent in Bloor’s Wittgensteinian view, suggesting that our understanding of truth is not separate from our ‘understanding of translation’ (Rorty 1998, 3), apart from anchoring meaning in an objective world “available to all” (Joseph 2004, 185), implies that we cannot understand the notion of a language-game that is largely true but untranslatable (Glüer 2011, 220). With this rejection, the ideas of ‘unbridgeable divisions’ between linguistic islands and ‘separate worlds’ brought about by cultural differences are also discarded (Rorty 2007, 53), and, thanks to the cross-cultural power of communicationism, the theoretical issues of ‘untranslatability’ dissolve into practical problems like lack of sympathy. As a result, when combined with the verticality of belief, this thesis implies that any two beings engaged in linguistic communication with each other (including Bloor’s ideal sociologist and the scientific culture involved) must share a vast number of (true) beliefs, so that cultural differences differ not so much in kind as they do in degree.

Last, in line with his anti-conventionalism in semantics, Davidson (2001a, 243-264) dismisses the idea that conventions play a philosophically important role in metaphorical language (see Joseph 2004, 88-89). From his point of view, ‘metaphors’ do not have any distinct non-literal meaning and solely rely on using sentences with their standard meanings in fresh, novel, interesting ways. On the strong reading (see Camp 2013, 361-365), according to which metaphors do not express cognitive content in any way but simply induce or cause us to see things in a certain way, it follows that the creative power of metaphor-making, which involves ‘re-describing’ a part of reality in a novel way, enables us to “enlarge logical space” (Rorty 1991, 124). Remarkably, using the notion ‘language-game,’ which is pivotal to Bloor’s Wittgensteinian thought, it can be seen that metaphors express sentences that are initially incongruent with the current language-games; nonetheless, they present prospects for modifying those language-games and engendering novel ones.

On the whole, Davidson’s philosophy furnishes Rorty with plentiful resources that Bloor’s Wittgensteinian perspective lack, bolstering his notion of conversationalism and conversational philosophy. In contrast to Bloor’s stance, which renders it difficult to refer to ‘one’ language game or to identify ‘common’

ground between language games, Rorty claims that all human discourses make up a unified human conversation, implying that all human beings, as rational language users, share a broad common conceptual scheme and partake in an intersubjective conversation. Additionally, in response to the charge of 'linguistic idealism'- frequently leveled against Bloor- Rorty maintains that our constant 'contact/touch with the world' is ensured, so that human conversation inherently contains a generally true picture of the world, which, when combined with the rejection of the scheme-content dichotomy, indicates that "the world is present in thought" (Luntley 1999, 139-140).

Furthermore, in contrast to Bloor's ardent endorsement of relativism, Rorty's notion of conversation is 'post-relativistic' in character, and, contrary to Bloor's satisfaction with demonstrating the contextual framework of knowledge, Rorty (2000a, 13), while acknowledging "the ethnocentric contextuality of all argumentation," regards it as perfectly harmonious with the development of claims that 'transcend' the local context in which they are articulated. This view implies that there are no crucial 'barriers' to mutual understanding, no sharp distinctions between disciplinary vocabularies, and no 'mutually unintelligible language games,' so that all aspects of the conversational culture are in principle 'open' to one another: "in real cases representatives of different traditions and cultures can always find a way to talk over their differences" (2000a, 12). Specifically, in contrast to Bloor's rule-governed conception of language, which sees languages as separated from one another by incompatible sets of linguistic rules, Rorty repudiates the very distinction between questions of fact and questions of language, as well as the possibility of dividing true sentences into those that 'correspond to something' and those that are 'true' only by convention (Rorty 1982, xviii-xix). Crucially, based on the idea of the 'ubiquity of language,' Rorty offers a more coherent vocabulary and inquiry in which the identity and status of each concept are "up for conversational grabs" (2000h, 236; 2000c, 79) and the only constraints that matter are 'conversational constraints' derived from the considerations of our fellow-inquirers in the course of conversation (1982, 165).

Additionally, in contrast to Bloor's conservative thought, which primarily focus on established rules and conventions, as well as 'the past' or 'the present' uses, Rorty entertains a reformist, future-oriented view, asserting that human agents have the capacity to deliberate and criticize pre-existing agreements and uses, break current rules, transform the interests that guide their actions, and, if necessary, create new ones through dynamic interpersonal communication. This capacity specifically is enhanced by creativity through the use of metaphor, since Rorty (1991, 163) perceives metaphor as the 'causes' of our ability to, for instance,

‘emancipate’ ourselves from tradition or ‘transvalue’ our values, without which there would be “no scientific revolution or cultural breakthrough” (123-125). Consequently, according to Rorty’s (14) alternative image to the ‘inference-based scientism,’ by enlarging our imagination primarily through the ‘metaphorical use of old marks,’ our minds expand and strengthen by incorporating new candidates for belief or by formulating ‘a new use of words,’ thereby opening the door to scientific and cultural development.

All in all, Rorty’s distinct background, which includes a non-scientific naturalism and a communicative conception of language, enables him to create a broad space for cross-cultural discussion, to which conversational philosophy could make substantial contributions. Put differently, if ‘Philosophy’ as an overarching project of discovering the objective ‘Truth’ is no longer a viable option, contrary to Bloor’s eliminative strategy that presents no other possibilities, Rorty sees ‘philosophy’ as the moderate project of ‘constructing and comparing vocabularies’ as a living alternative that effectively takes part in the conversational culture supported by post-relativism, communicationism, and interpretationism.

## 5. The Ultimate Fate of ‘Theory’ and ‘Epistemology’

Given Bloor’s and Rorty’s different perspectives on post-epistemological inquiry, this section briefly explores the extent to which Bloor’s fixation on ‘theory’ (concerning meaning and knowledge), while rejecting the individualistic versions of traditional epistemology, is still affected by the so-called ‘epistemological industry,’ which Rorty, following Dewey, seeks to completely dismantle, seeing it as “consuming resources that, though appropriately used in a previous cultural epoch, should now be devoted to more worthwhile ends” (Rorty 1998, 277).

Before proceeding, a brief word about the ‘epistemology industry’ and two major pragmatism-based critiques of it is in order (see Talisse and Aikin 2008, 30-36). Simply put, this industry, as a modern professionalized framework for the analysis of knowledge, has two major problematic components, both of which are prevalent in Bloor’s perspective. One is the heavy focus on ‘knowledge’ and ‘knowing’ as the proper subject of inquiry, and the other is the dogmatic selection of a set of ‘theoretical’ principles for theorizing about knowledge. From the standpoint of historicist pragmatism, the traditional epistemologist’s guiding question, “How does the knowing mind orient itself to correspond to known objects?”, which construes all experiencing as a ‘mode of knowing’ and knowledge as a unique relationship between knowers and known objects, should be replaced by the Deweyan question, “How are things experienced when they are experienced as known things?” This alternative view collapses the distinction between the

knowing, theorizing, and contemplative mind and the “responsible participant in social practices” by considering the knower as an ‘experimenter’ or, in Rorty’s interpretation, a ‘participatory interlocutor’ (Rorty 2000k, 371).

Of even greater importance is the fact that, despite the theoretical aspirations of epistemologies, there is no objective way to determine the truth of the narratives presented by epistemologies, and there is no non-circular argument to support the methods and principles adopted that shows their superiority over others. Instead, different epistemologies are designed to address different problems and serve different purposes. In truth, epistemologists’ narratives or accounts, like any other knowledge claims, are historically situated, purpose-dependent, and interest-laden.

On the one hand, Rorty’s ‘practical’ view of knowledge (2000i, 237-240), which he shares with Dewey, makes it more plausible to simply drop ‘knowledge’ as a serious topic and instead treat all beliefs as ‘artifacts’ skillfully constructed to serve particular purposes. Rorty’s ‘anti-essentialist’ view of knowledge, on the other hand, rejects the very assumption that there should be a ‘theory’ about such a notion, although much useful can be said about knowledge in the “vocabulary of practice rather than theory, of action rather than contemplation” (Rorty 1982, 160-164). All in all, after rejecting the ‘vocabulary of contemplation and theoria’ and finally considering epistemology to be a ‘quaint antique,’ the need for a new ‘theory of knowledge’ is ultimately ignored (2000i, 264-6).

Now, based on everything we know about Bloor, it is quite clear that the main focus of his project revolves around ‘knowledge,’ which consequently makes it vulnerable to the first criticism. More significantly, as will be shown below, Bloor’s ‘theory’-focused approach is exposed to a variation of the second, more radical, objection.

Before discussing Bloor’s ‘theory’ of knowledge, it is worth noting that Rorty would identify another anti-Wittgensteinian theory-focused theme in Bloor’s work. As noted earlier, sociological meaning finitism is a ‘theory’ of meaning that asserts that meaning is always open-ended and created in a step-by-step fashion (Bloor 1996, 850). Regardless of its specifics, Rorty would see this attempt as hostile to Wittgenstein’s anti-theoretical, practical alternative approach. First, it goes against Wittgenstein’s maxim “Don’t look for the meaning, look for the use,” which, far from being a ‘use theory’ of meaning, refutes the very need for a way of determining meanings (Rorty 2007, 172). Second, it is at odds with the emphasis on simply ‘describing’ the uses and employments of words and how they function within a form of life. More importantly, Rorty explicitly sees the main debate as being over whether the content of a sentence varies from one utterer/context/audience to another. Evidently, if something remains ‘invariant’ and unchanging in such a

‘constant flux,’ then there must be entities with intrinsic properties that a philosophical or scientific theory can articulate (122-125). Thus, despite his deconstructive stance, Bloor still seems to cling to the idea that we can extract certain theoretical aspects from the ever-changing flow of uses and insert them into a rigid ‘theory’ for scientific study.

In this regard, Rorty would consider his ‘holistic social practice’ view to be more faithful to Wittgenstein. This view, which grounds the meaning of a sentence in the ‘social practices’ of the people who use it, has several anti-theoretical implications. First, it eschews the theory-oriented hope that language can be viewed ‘sideways-on’ (Rorty 2007, 172-173) and avoids trying to draw a relation between the large entities ‘Language’ and ‘World.’ Instead, it simply ‘describes’ common linguistic behavior and merely ‘distinguishes’ between uses of linguistic expressions (Rorty 2000c, 77). Second, it naturalizes ‘language use’ in a way that leaves no room for ‘scientific encroachment’ (Malachowski 2020, 360-362) by abandoning the goal of discovering ‘non-empirical conditions for the possibility of linguistic description’ and dropping the notion of language as a ‘bounded whole’ (Rorty 1991, 57). Third, as implied by its Davidsonian background, it indicates that a ‘systematic theory’ of the meaning of language is unattainable (57), implying that a complete scientific theory, as in Bloor’s systematic study of language-games, cannot be constructed.<sup>5</sup>

Most notably, Rorty would discern another prominent theoretical aspect in Bloor’s sociologism that does not seem implausible, namely his attempt to present a ‘theory of knowledge’ that portrays knowing as a social process and knowledge as a collective achievement (Bloor 2004, 919). Rorty would see Bloor’s attempt to establish a correlation between ‘society’ and ‘knowledge’ as yet another attempt to restore modern philosophy’s fixation on the ‘subject-object’ relation. In this context, ‘society’ takes the place of the ‘knowing subject’ of modern epistemology, and, as evidenced by the title of Bloor’s seminal work, society becomes the ‘mirror’ of nature and ‘social representations’ replaces ‘mental representations.’ Thus, from a Rortyan perspective, the whole project of the ‘sociology of knowledge,’ as best represented by Bloor, appears as a social ‘theory of knowledge’ that has simply changed the unit of analysis from the individual mind to the collective group. In doing so, Bloor not

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<sup>5</sup> Remarkably, Rorty has such a remarkably robust anti-theoretical, anti-constructivist orientation that, as a self-proclaimed Wittgensteinian who is “happier with uses than with meanings” and truth-conditions make him nervous (Rorty 2000c, 74-75), he sees no need for the Davidsonian truth-conditional ‘theory of meaning’ built on a Tarskian ‘theory of truth’ to capture a knowledge-how of the sort involved in linguistic communication. Nor does he see any point in treating ‘our constant coping with’ linguistic behavior as the construction of formalized, systematized, structuralized theories for ‘nonce languages.’

only presents a 'theory' of knowledge that Rorty considers anti-Wittgensteinian, but also grapples with the same problems that besets traditional epistemology in attempting to establish firm relations between knowledge claims and the social forces that (causally or constitutively) construct them, including the vexing problems surrounding the metaphors of 'constitution' or 'construction' (Rorty 1991, 113-125; 1999, introduction).

Furthermore, Bloor's 'theoretical' orientation could also be criticized from the angle of his commitment to 'facts,' namely the social facts that form the basis of his social explanations. In this respect, Rorty's attack on the so-called 'facts' can be redirected to Bloor. First, 'fact' as a 'worldly item' seems to be the other side of the coin of 'representation,' which Rorty (2000k, 376) considers to be debunked: "Talk of representing goes along with talk about sentences being made true by facts" (see also Rorty 1991 1-20; 151-161). According to his anti-representationalist holism, there is no room left for the philosophical or scientific picture that depends on it, i.e. for any fact/representation-oriented theory. After all, the key point of getting rid of representation is to discard the whole Platonic image of beliefs 'cutting reality at the joints,' which aims to identify an objective, vocabulary-independent way of dividing culture into legitimate 'factual' parts and other illegitimate non-factual parts, which now seems to be transferred to 'society.' At the bare minimum, among a range of possible alternatives for sociological inquiry, Bloor's preferred theory suggests that his vocabulary is more adept at cutting at the joints, in that the 'sociological interests' that are to be individuated by his theoretical apparatus are the best window into the social life of a group and its epistemic world.

Second, if one insists on invoking 'fact' (or representation), it seems to be intelligible only 'relative to' a vocabulary, as the 'hardness of facts' is only "an artifact produced by our choice of language game... simply the hardness of the previous agreements within a community about the consequences of a certain event" (1991, 80). Accordingly, 'facts' are ultimately seen as 'hybrid entities' (1991, 81) due to the entanglement of 'fact-stating' (or "being in touch with reality") and 'communicating' ("being in touch with a human community") (see 2000a, 15-17). Therefore, from Rorty's perspective, Bloor's chosen facts for explaining knowledge, those that are constituted within his 'sociological theory' and reliant on his 'methodological claims' about the proper way of conducting sociological inquiry, as well as the final narratives or explanations produced by such a theory, are merely a reflection or 'image' of his adopted conceptual framework that, in the end, reproduces his own social interests. Consequently, despite Bloor's best efforts, the 'objectivity' of his claims is only an 'intersubjective' achievement (in Rortyan jargon, a certain 'solidarity' among other solidarities) that depends on the chosen sociological

vocabulary and on his social group and its interests (literally, the Edinburgh School supporting the ‘Strong Program’).<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, while Rorty has given up the whole project of the ‘epistemology industry,’ asserting that epistemology should finally give way to philosophy as a form of cultural criticism, it appears that Bloor, whilst radically putting an end to any individualistic epistemology, maintains a form of social ‘theory’ of knowledge that Rorty’s anti-theoretical approach finds objectionable.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has undertaken a critical discussion of Bloor’s and Rorty’s post-epistemological works, exploring their contrasting approaches to the fate of philosophy. After outlining their reasons for moving beyond epistemology, and elucidating the different fates of philosophy in their post-epistemological inquiries, the paper traced their profound disagreements back to their distinct interpretations of ‘naturalism’ and ‘language.’ It was shown how Rorty’s ability to pave the way for philosophy as a cross-cultural, conversational practice is enabled and sustained by his non-scientific version of naturalism combined with his Davidsonian communicative version of language, in contrast to Bloor’s scientific naturalism coupled with his Wittgensteinian ‘rule-governed’ conception. Finally, it was argued that, in contrast to Rorty’s total rejection of the ‘epistemology industry,’ Bloor’s ‘theoretical’ approach is still influenced by some of its key components.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Bloor’s entire ‘sociology of scientific knowledge’ (SSK) has come under analogous criticism in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) from those who challenge the ‘ideology of representation’ and the ‘interest’-based theory of knowledge (see Woolgar 1988). Notably, similar to the critique of the ‘epistemology industry,’ there has been vehement criticism from scholars who, drawing on the richness of scientific culture and practice, argue that SSK’s account is thin, idealized, and reductive (see Pickering 1992), to the point where some even suggest removing both the ‘K’ and the first ‘S’ of SSK.

<sup>7</sup> This paper is supported and funded by the Iranian Institute of Philosophy (IRIP 20314657).



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# IDENTIFICATION AND APPEARANCE AS EPISTEMIC GROUNDWORK<sup>1</sup>

Nicolas C. GONZALEZ

**ABSTRACT:** The idea that appearances provide justifications for beliefs—the principle of phenomenal conservatism—is self-evidently true. In the case of cognitive penetration, however, it seems that certain irrational etiologies of a belief may influence the epistemic quality of that belief. Susanna Siegel argues that these etiologies lead to ‘epistemic downgrade.’ Instead of providing us with a decisive objection, cognitive penetration calls for us to clarify our epistemic framework by understanding the formative parts of appearances. In doing so, the two different but inseparable ideas of sensation and intellection provide us with a basis of our appearances. These appearances, in turn, provide us with the objective evidence needed to test our judgements. Thus, the extra-sensory concepts of intellectual identification and the appearances they help form become an epistemic groundwork.

**KEYWORDS:** phenomenal conservatism, cognitive penetration, direct realism

Common sense justifications are found everywhere in our everyday lives, yet scientists and philosophers tend to be skeptical of them. We hold beliefs because there is some appearance that they are true—and this is generally thought to be justified. Still, this principle, known as phenomenal conservatism, is contentious among epistemologists because it seems almost too broad. Instead, to others, some justificatory criteria must be more constrained or precise in order to form a reliable epistemology. If something that is false appears to be true to us, for example, it may seem odd to say that we are justified in believing the false appearance. I disagree—and so do Huemer, Aristotle, and others.<sup>2</sup> Even in the face of these seemingly odd instances, it makes sense to talk about justification in terms of appearances. Nevertheless, some believe that certain dispositions or schematic frameworks can alter our perception and thus ‘downgrade’ our appearances. In this context, known as ‘cognitive penetration,’ there may be some issues posed to phenomenal conservatism that an epistemologist may need to answer. I hope to do so in what follows, allowing epistemologists to save appearances from the illusory threat of

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<sup>1</sup> I should like to thank Ziren Yang for his time and effort in helping me with this research, as well as Luke Pennella, Miguel Chehadeh, and Hunter Sacrey for their insightful comments.

<sup>2</sup> Although Huemer is not a self-identifying Aristotelian, I find his views concurrent with those of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, as I will argue.

schematic imposition in cognitive penetration by laying the proper epistemic groundwork.

### The Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism

Phenomenal conservatism is rather commonsensical. When we form beliefs, we often do so because of something that makes that belief appear correct—phenomenal conservatism takes this as its starting point. The principle's basis is upon appearances; more specifically, that appearance is the foundation for justification. Michael Huemer, a leading epistemologist in favor of phenomenal conservatism, defines it as such: "If it seems to *S* that *p*, then, in the absence of defeaters, *S* thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that *p*" (Huemer 2007, 30). A wide variety of appearances can be counted within this principle—not just intuitions or similar internal mental states. Experiences and perceptions can also be included in these appearances, so long as they are what *seem* to be the case. This does not mean that all justifications should be equally considered, however; by adding the phrase, "in the absence of defeaters," Huemer recognizes that some of these justifications can be fallible and defeasible. If it seems to someone that *p*, but then some stronger appearance (be it sensory or rational) negates this, the appearance that *p* is no longer justificatory. Additionally, not all appearances are equal, as some may be ill-formed through rash consideration (cf. Huemer 2007, 37). Still, these appearances provide some sort of justification for believing in what *seems* to be true.

There are a couple of reasons for accepting this principle. First, as I've said above, the principle is intuitive. To say that a belief is justified if it seems to be true would itself seem to be as if one was simply speaking commonsensically in plain English. I believe that I am sitting in this chair because it very strongly appears that I am; people believe that the sky is blue because it very strongly appears so. In both cases, we would commonly say that one has good reason to believe both things—it would be odd to deny this. Huemer would add, moreover, that denying this is not just odd—it is self-defeating. To him, denying the principle of phenomenal conservatism does not preclude any justification; but if we base our beliefs on the fact that they appear to be true and still reject the principle then we have no justified beliefs:

If, that is, appearances do not confer at least some defeasible justification on propositions that are their contents, then since our beliefs are generally based on what seems to us to be the case (the reason we believe what we do is that it appears true to us; our method of forming beliefs is to believe what seems true to us), our beliefs are generally unjustified. Therefore, if Phenomenal Conservatism is false, those who believe it to be false do so unjustifiedly (Huemer 2007, 41).

According to this argument, it is almost nonsensical to reject phenomenal conservatism. Still, people tender arguments for this rejection. Cognitive penetration is one of these; and while it can call for us to clarify our conception of belief and justification, it does not ultimately defeat the principle.

### Cognitive Penetration

Cognitive penetration, as discussed by Susanna Siegel, is the phenomenon that certain dispositions or pre-existing schemas can alter the “phenomenal character of experience,” and thus lead to “epistemic downgrade” (Siegel 2013, 697-722). In her words, “An experience E is epistemically downgraded if it has a checkered past” (703). This ‘checkered past’ can include epistemically irrational or negative aspects that led to the formation of the belief. This ‘downgrade’, then, can be discussed regarding justification. Siegel discusses both doxastic and propositional justification—justification for holding a belief and the proposition that justifies that belief, respectively—but seems to place greater emphasis on the former. Perhaps, in her eyes, the lower standard of propositional justification causes the lack of doxastic justification, but the basis of the idea of epistemic downgrade is upon doxastic justification.

Nevertheless, what seems to be at play is some unjustified belief. If the etiology of the experience can somehow leave the subject epistemically worse off, there must be some sort of lack of justification upon which our belief would be based. The etiologies of our experiences can be judged as to whether they are rational or irrational (699). If our experiences, upon which we find justificatory foundation for our beliefs, arise from a kind of irrational etiology, the whole experience might be thought of as unjustified, or at least having a much lower justification. Expanding upon this, Siegel (704) formulates the Doxastic Downgrade Thesis as follows:

If S forms a first-order belief B with content P, on the basis of an experience E that is checkered with respect to its content P, B is thereby doxastically unjustified, assuming that S has no other basis on which she believes P.

Therefore, to Siegel, the etiology of experience matters because it can provide certain aspects that lead to a lack of justification. The pre-existing dispositions and schemas that provide origins for irrational considerations to enter into our beliefs also entail some epistemic downgrade. Siegel provides several examples that illustrate the issue whereby the etiology of these perceptions influences their content. Two of these examples, however, seem to be the paradigmatic examples of her point, and I will thus focus on these:

**Anger:** Before seeing Jack, Jill fears that Jack is angry at her. When she sees him, her fear causes her to have a visual experience in which he looks angry to her. ...

**Pliers:** When primed with pictures of Black men, White American subjects more often misclassify a tool (pliers) as a gun when asked to indicate by keystroke which one they have seen (they're told they will see either one or the other), compared with White American subjects who have been primed with pictures of White men (698).

Siegel anticipates that one might say that these examples are overplayed and only provide possible defeaters for justifications. Critics argue further that we may allow for these etiological considerations to concern us, but that lack of justification is not entailed by this supposed 'epistemic downgrade.' To this, Siegel replies that such a standpoint does not properly explain the intuition that the paradigmatic cases above are still somehow epistemically dubious. We already know of this checkered etiology, and seem to have some sort of insight into how such a checkered etiology impacts the belief of one thing over another:

If the kind of knowledge-defeat in question is somehow expanded to include these cases, then it cannot accommodate the comparative dimension to the original intuition. Intuitively, Jill's fear-penetrated anger-experience puts her in a worse epistemic position than she would be, if she had an unchecked anger-experience, all other things being equal (719).

Here, Siegel makes clear that it does not suffice to simply say that the checkered experiences would provide a defeater for the supposed initial justification. Her intuition holds that Jill would not be able to have such a distinguishing factor between the checkered and unchecked experiences, so it is not as though she could even discover this defeater—she is in an epistemically underprivileged position. By introducing irrational emotion into belief, our doxastic justification is therefore downgraded such that the appearance that P does not lend justification to the belief that P. The irrational pre-supposed beliefs that one might have can influence the phenomenal character of experience, thus causing the beliefs made upon the subsequent experience to be of downgraded epistemic value.

Siegel, as we see, then believes that a defeater-relation explanation is not distinct enough to be used in epistemological discussion of justification vis-à-vis checkered experiences. This reply seems ambiguous with respect to why introducing other things as defeaters might not be clear. In fact, I hold the view to which she is replying and will attempt to show why it is still correct. Nevertheless, my engagement of cognitive penetration will be according to how I have presented here; and I hope that any lack of clarity regarding the principle will be solved as I begin to discuss the phenomenon.



### Ill-Founded Justifications are Justifications

With cognitive penetration, it is important that we begin from the ground up vis-à-vis these schematic frameworks. We can begin with a simple case: hallucinations. If there is a hallucination, this does not mean that we *ipso facto* lack justification. But this is not all that can be said of ‘downgraded’ phenomena. A hallucination entails that one aspect of sense perception is skewed, but we can still have defeaters as to why we would reject the original appearance. Siegel grants that hallucinations can provide justification; nevertheless, it is important to recognize that these ideas are still important in delineating justification.

We must first recognize that perceptual appearances are inseparably comprised of sensation and an act of intellection.<sup>3</sup> Regarding the hallucination above, it is often that the sensation is skewed—but many are willing to grant that these appearances are still justified. What seems to be disputed in the example of cognitive penetration is whether the act of intellection can be irrational.

This act of intellection does not require that there be some inference between the perception and the belief, however; even with this act, the intellection does not remove the immediacy and foundational character of the justification. All that this act is doing is intellectually identifying what appears to be. Huemer (2007, 52, 53) clarifies the direct character of perceptual belief:

One does not, on this view, *infer* the proposition in question *from the premise* that one has a certain sort of intuition; rather, by having an intuition, one is (seemingly) immediately aware of some particular necessary truth, and in virtue of that, one is non-inferentially justified in believing the relevant proposition. ... All of this applies equally well to the case of perceptual experience and belief. ... The direct realist view is *not* that we first notice that we have a perceptual experience with a certain character, and then infer that the external world is a certain way.

Instead, as Huemer would have it, our justified beliefs are founded within the very appearances of the world. This intellectual act is not an inference, but simply an identification. In other words, as Celestine Bittle (1936, 143) claims, “The senses do not merely ‘represent,’ they actually ‘present’ reality, at least in some form; man, therefore, does *not infer* the existence of objects... but *perceives them directly through intuition*.” As such, this identification is a judgement in the order of the second act of the intellect and is open to falsity in a way that simple apprehension is

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<sup>3</sup> Only after writing this section did I discover Thomist philosopher Celestine Bittle’s discussion of consciousness, which “merely ‘registers’ [objects] existence” and “the *intellect* which classifies them by interpreting the data revealed by consciousness.” I believe our views are complementary ways of describing the same phenomenon. See Bittle (1936, 91).

not.<sup>4</sup> The simple apprehension that is the first act of the intellect remains unaffected, even if the judgement of identification which is its second act may be false. The non-inferential character of such judgements in identifications, therefore, may be false, but still do not open our judgements to some lack of justification arising from some skewed appearance. The falsity of judgement based upon a direct intuition does not entail, as will be explored, does not mean that there is no good reason to make such a judgement. Thus, any appearance derived from a misidentification is not unjustified, but rather ill-justified and defeasible.

We can apply this to cognitive penetration. Emotional influence on the phenomenal character of experience is the only thing here in which we have a plausible source of investigation for irrational factors influencing the formation of beliefs. Here, the emotion may influence us to direct our intellectual act toward some separate identification of the experience. This does not, however, entail a lack of justification—doxastic or propositional—for having a belief, as there was still a perception that was still identified by the intellectual act, albeit with irrational direction, to form an appearance. An analysis like the misidentification discussed above applies here as well. Jill does not infer that Jack is mad from the premise that he seems mad or because she fears that he is mad but is justified in believing it simply because he appears to be mad. It is not relevant if the appearance of Jack's anger was influenced by her fear. Jill's fear might have been irrational, but her fear was not the belief from which she inferred that Jack was mad—her act of intellection was simply directed toward identifying him as angry. The basis of her belief was not the fear but the appearance—and this appearance foundationally justifies the belief. It might be objected that the cause *is* the ultimate basis because the fear led to the appearance. Even if the fear leads to the appearance, though, the belief is not inferred due to the fear; instead, the sensation is simply misapprehended, meaning that, although it appeared to Jill that Jack was mad, she misidentified him as being so. It is not as though we must come up with a reason for *why* she misidentified this, however, as the experience is foundationally justified. The justification is non-inferential—and thus, the irrationality of these emotions has no bearing on the immediate justification—because of the direct awareness of the appearance. This process is similar to a recklessly formed justification that is ill-founded because it is easily defeated. Even though someone is reckless in considering an appearance, there is still a justification for believing so because the appearance seems to be true, even if

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<sup>4</sup> The first act of the intellect only grasps essences, while the second act makes judgements about them. See ST I, Q. 85, A. 6; and Jenkins (1991) for a discussion of this and similar passages. This observation was occasioned by a lecture I heard at the Dominican House of Studies by Fr. James Brent, O.P.

it can be defeated.<sup>5</sup> Fear, like recklessness, can be an irrational disposition to misidentify. The disposition to identify and understand these appearances does not need to be rational for a justification if the appearance itself is foundational. If it *seems* to be true, that is a good reason for believing it, and all that is needed to show that it is ill-founded is a defeater.

The fear can still be used as a possible defeater, however, because the absence of the fear can change the identification of the anger, and thus the appearance.<sup>6</sup> Jill has good reason to believe that Jack is mad—it appears that he is. Although the reason why it appears comes from an irrational fear, it does not entail that the belief is automatically unjustified until one recognizes that things would *seem different* if there was not that fear. In this, there is a new appearance that provides a good reason for rejecting the original appearance. Thus, it is not the emotion that acts as a defeater, but the fact that such an emotion could skew the appearance that does so. Fear is not the only irrational disposition that Siegel lists. Wishful thinking or irrational hope can act in the same way (Siegel 2013, 701); yet it is still subject to all that has been said. Just as one who literally wears rose-colored glasses is justified in thinking that things are rose until he notices the glasses on his face, so too is one who metaphorically does so until he notices his irrational hope skewing the appearances. Therefore, any emotion can be used as a defeater if it influenced the perception, but it does not *eo ipso* mean that a belief is unjustified if its past is ‘checkered’. This allows us to continue working within a framework of foundational *defeasible* justification.

Return to the example above of racism and pliers. It becomes clearer that if this racism caused the irrational direction of intellectual identification, there is more to consider; but these considerations ultimately bring us back to holding that etiology is largely irrelevant. A belief that one is holding a gun is still justified if it appears that he is. Like fear, racism is an irrational disposition to misidentify, but it does not provide us with direct awareness of these perceptual beliefs. Dispositions may be irrational, but beliefs are not justified by dispositions. Instead, *appearances* justify them.

Phenomenal conservatism still holds true. This supposed ‘downgrade’ only means that there are ill-formed justifications, not that there is a lack of justification in these appearances. Evidenced by what I have said about Siegel’s examples, justification does not *eo ipso* track truth; justification only provides us with reasons for believing that a true thing is true. While it is certainly helpful and relevant to justification that it reliably does so, it is certainly possible that we are justified in

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<sup>5</sup> That is to say that the possibility of defeasibility is not itself a defeater. See Huemer (2007, 37).

<sup>6</sup> Claims from Siegel notwithstanding.

believing false things, so long as there is no defeater for the justification. Ill-formed justifications are still justifications, and any appearance can certainly be used as evidence for belief even when false. In these cases, the underlying veracity of some belief does not change the fact that there are not good reasons for holding it. Simply put, falsity does not entail a lack of justification, and justification does not entail truth. What we are concerned with here is not immediately perceiving the ultimate truth of things—if anyone could do this, Socrates would pale in comparison. Instead, we are concerned with the process of doing so, the first step of which is finding some evidentiary grounds for belief. These grounds, then, are the justification of our beliefs; and these justifications can either hold up to scrutiny or be defeated, thus falling from their status as a proper justification. This does not mean that we should jump at the first justification to believe something; Christopher Shields (2013, 23) discusses Aristotle's view of phenomenal conservatism, saying, "A good reason for believing that something is so is not, however, also already a decisive reason for forming the judgment that it is, in fact, so." Nevertheless, we would still be justified in holding these beliefs due to these good reasons—at least until we found appearances to the contrary. Cognitive penetration, if it is true, may be a reason for us to suspend our judgements before concluding a belief, but it does not preclude justification on the basis of what appears to be true. I hold, and I believe both Huemer<sup>7</sup> and Aristotle<sup>8</sup> would as well, that in doing science or philosophy we should be careful to search for possible defeaters to these appearances, comparing appearances and beliefs of different sources; but that a failure to do so does not strip a belief of its justification.

In addition to this, cognitive penetration does not answer the self-defeating rejection argument. If, as Huemer holds, rejection of phenomenal conservatism entails that there are no justified beliefs, then its rejection is merely absurd. I do not see any unique way that cognitive penetration escapes this. Cognitive penetration may provide new reasons for defeating certain appearances, but it does not give us reason to reject the fact that appearances provide justification. Thus, any epistemology that considers cognitive penetration to be a rejection of phenomenal conservatism must offer new reasons why this itself is not a belief based on the appearance that some other principle is true.

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<sup>7</sup> Huemer responds to Seigel in a similar way that I have. While I have developed my response independently from Huemer's—i.e. in a more Aristotelian spirit—I believe the two views can be taken together as two sides of the same coin. See Huemer (2013).

<sup>8</sup> See Shields (2013, 20-23) for Aristotle's use of the principle; note, however, that metaphysics is prior to epistemology in Aristotelian thinking.

### The Epistemic Importance of Justification

If justification does not directly track truth, then we are left wondering why it is epistemically significant. Why should we care about something that does not lead us on a straight road to truth? After all, we can have good reasons for believing something that is ultimately false, as we have shown. Justification becomes either a triviality or a new road to falsehood. If this is the case, our foregoing analysis has either been useless at best or dangerous at worst. Even within the Aristotelian tradition, appearances are held to not be the truth. St. Thomas Aquinas, in commenting upon Aristotle, rejects that what appears is not necessarily true, even if the sense or intellective faculties are not deceived regarding their proper objects, as we may judge things farther away to be smaller or of a different color (*Metaphys.* IV, 14, sec. 695). We may have appearances of contradictory positions, but it would be “foolish to say that all judgements are equally true” (sec. 702). He goes so far as to claim that to such a belief collapses one into a sort of idealism, which he proceeds to rule out as impossible (sec. 705-707). As St. Thomas racks up arguments against the position equating truth and appearance, we come to question just how appearances might figure in our epistemic framework if they were to not be something thrown to the wind.

Luckily for phenomenal conservatism, I do not believe that justification according to phenomenal conservatism is useless or false. Justification, even if it is not equivalent to or the cause of truth, provides us with basic building blocks with which we can begin scientific or philosophical discussion. If we had an unjustified belief, there would be no basis whatsoever on which we could hold this belief. Even if this unjustified belief is ultimately true, what certainty does it give us to accept it? We do not yet know that it is true because we have no certainty to do so. Scientific and philosophical research cannot be done on the basis of no evidence, so there seems to be some need for good reasons, i.e. justifications, to enter into our dialectical processes. The strength of evidence may differ even in the absence of defeaters, but this is due to the strength of the appearance or appearances because of the appearance's justification-lending nature. Appearances are not truth, but they are objective evidence—that is to say, they are manifestations of objective reality to our intellects.<sup>9</sup>

What significance does this have for us? Bittle (1936, ch. 16) holds that the motive of our epistemic certainty is objective evidence, thereby qualifying as the criterion of truth. Just as the objective reasons for which we assent to a belief are our motive of certainty, so too are these reasons the ground of truth value in our

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<sup>9</sup> See Bittle (1936, 295) on the direct realism of this approach.

judgements (294). These reasons, Bittle argues, consist in the world as it presents itself to us. Of course, appearances are not truth, but if we are to reach truth, we must encounter appearances which provide us the reasons for holding some belief. There are times where we may be deceived or may judge improperly, but this is not essential to our act of judgement. Recalling our discussion of the first and second acts of the intellect, our second act consisting in judgements are fallible, but not essentially so, as to say so would be to prohibit us from any truth—a self-defeating position. Appearances must be regulated by self-evident principles, but they nevertheless provide us with the world as it is sensible and at first perceived.<sup>10</sup>

Reality is self-evident, just as being is the first principle, giving our epistemology a metaphysical grounding. Justifications and good reasons for holding a belief arise from our appearances, which in turn are the objective evidence that the world presents to us. If appearances are therefore this objective evidence, then appearances, in the absence of defeaters, are the motive of certainty in our epistemic project and provide us our criterion by which we test the truth of our own judgements.

## Conclusion

Any epistemological framework that is to hold water must be in accordance with the principle of phenomenal conservatism. Those who put cognitive penetration forward as a reason to reject the principle either fail to circumvent their own self-refutation or misunderstand the foundational justification given by appearances. Siegel provides us with interesting ways to consider the etiologies of our perceptions, thus giving us new considerations when discussing defeasibility, but it appears that she does not give us good reason to abandon the principle altogether.

Throughout our answer, we have relied upon the notion that appearances rely upon sensation and intellection. We have seen via the principle of phenomenal conservatism that appearances lend justifications; however, our intellectual identification of our sensations forms the conceptual (or propositional, as Siegel would say) content of our beliefs. Though these justifications do not directly correlate to truth, they provide us with evidence by which we judge our knowledge. Appearances can deceive, but they can also show us how the world really is. It is through these extra-sensational aspects of experience—intellectual identification and appearances—that we are provided with our basic framework. We therefore can

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<sup>10</sup> Perhaps it would be better to say that appearances are themselves principles; and that the first principles of metaphysics are shown through them. See Gilson (1986, 182–183) and Shields (2013, 22).

see that any epistemology must have its structure laid upon the groundwork of these concepts.

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