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THE COLLAPSE ARGUMENT RECONSIDERED

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ABSTRACT According to Beall and Restall's logical pluralism, classical logic, relevant logic, and intuitionistic logic are all correct. On this version of logical pluralism, logic is considered to be normative, in the sense that someone who accepts the truth of the premises of a valid argument, is bound to accept the conclusion. So-called collapse arguments are designed to show the incompatibility of the simultaneous acceptance of logical pluralism and the normativity of logic. Caret, however, by proposing logical contextualism, and Blake-Turner and Russell by proposing telic pluralism, have sought to nullify the collapse problem. In the present article, after setting out these two approaches to the collapse problem, we argue that by using the concept of the 'rationality of beliefs' in order to frame the canonical purpose of logic, it can be demonstrated that if logical contextualism and telic pluralism are considered as philosophically significant logical pluralisms, a refined version of the collapse argument is still a threat for both of these kinds of logical pluralism.

KEYWORDS: collapse problem, logical contextualism, logical normativity, logical pluralism, telic pluralism

1. Introduction

Logical pluralism is the view that there is more than one correct logical system. Logical pluralism divides into different kinds.[1] In most types of logical pluralism, logic is considered to be normative, in the sense that by accepting the premises of a valid argument as true, one is constrained to accept the result of that argument. Some philosophers have tried to show that accepting the normativity of logic is incompatible with accepting logical pluralism, because it causes logical pluralism to collapse into logical monism. The so-called collapse problem was introduced by Priest[2] and Read[3] against Beall and Restall's logical pluralism.[4] According to Beall

[1] See, e.g., Gillian Russell, "Logical Pluralism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/ archives/spr2019/ entries/logical-pluralism/.

[2] Graham Priest, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

[3] Stephen Read, "Monism: The One True Logic," in *A Logical Approach to Philosophy: Essays in Memory of Graham Solomon*, eds. David DeVidi and Tim Kenyon (Netherlands: Springer, 2006), 193-209.

and Restall's pluralism, normativity, along with necessity and formality, are core features of the logical consequence relation. In fact, they are the admissibility conditions of a logical system. The settled core of the concept of logical consequence is given by the Generalized Tarski Thesis:

> **(GTT)** An argument is valid if and only if, in every case in which the premises are true, so is the conclusion.[5]

If the collapse problem is correct, then, Beall and Restall's pluralism is untenable.[6] Caret therefore presents logical contextualism,[7] and Blake-Turner and Russell present telic pluralism,[8] in an effort to refute the collapse problem. In the present article, we try to show that if these versions of logical pluralism are considered as philosophically significant logical pluralisms, they remain subject to a version of the collapse problem that appeals to rationality in framing the canonical purpose of logic. The plan of the paper is as follows. Section 2 presents Priest's and Read's versions of the collapse problem. Section 3 explains Caret's and Blake-Turner and Russell's responses to the Priest's collapse argument, and we specify how these answers are supposed to eliminate the collapse problem. In Section 4, we determine the conditions under which logical contextualism and telic pluralism can be regarded as interesting and philosophically significant views. Based on these results, by introducing a new version of the collapse argument in section 5, we show that logical contextualism and telic pluralism face a dilemma: either they are not philosophically interesting, or the collapse problem remains. Section 6 concludes.

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[4] Beall and Restall's pluralism was first introduced in JC Beall and Greg Restall, "Logical Pluralism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 78 (2000): 475–493 and JC Beall and Greg Restall, "Defending logical pluralism," in *Logical Consequence: Rival Approaches Proceedings of the 1999 Conference of the Society of Exact Philosophy*, ed. John Woods and Bryson Brown, (Stanmore: Hermes, 2001), 1–22, and then, with a response to many criticisms, integrated into JC Beall and Greg Restall, *Logical Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[5] Beall and Restall, *Logical Pluralism*, 29.

[6] The collapse problem can also threaten other kinds of logical pluralism; however, in the present paper we restrict ourselves to Beall and Restall's pluralism.

[7] Colin R. Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated," *Erkenntnis* 82, 4 (2016): 739-760.

[8] Christopher Blake-Turner and Gillian Russell, "Logical pluralism without the normativity," *Synthese* (2018): 1-18, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-018-01939-3.

2. The Collapse Problem

The collapse problem is based on an argument that accepting logical normativity violates logical pluralism, reducing it to logical monism.[9] So if the collapse problem is plausible, logical pluralism would seem to be an inherently unstable position. Many philosophers have accepted the threat of collapse arguments.[10] Before we can continue, however, the meaning of 'logical normativity' must be established. As Beall and Restall put it:

> Logical consequence is normative. In an important sense, if an argument is valid, then you somehow go wrong if you accept the premises but reject the conclusion.[11]

Using MacFarlane's label,[12] we take the principle Wo- to express Beall and Restall's assumptions about logical normativity.[13]

> **(Wo-)** if the argument from P to Q is valid, then for all agents Z: Z ought to see to it that she does not both accept P and reject Q.

Now can we present Priest's and Read's versions of the collapse problem.

2.1 Priest's Collapse Argument

In *Doubt Truth to be a Liar*, Priest introduces his version of the collapse problem.[14] Suppose that L1 and L2 are two distinct logical systems that, based on logical pluralism, are both correct. Generally, in assessing the validity of $A \vdash B$ in L1 and L2, there are four possible situations: (i) valid in both, (ii) valid in L1 and invalid in L2, (iii) invalid in L1 and valid in L2, (iv) invalid in both. Assuming the truth of A,

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[9] Some philosophers have used the term 'normativity objection' for the collapse problem (see, e.g., Erik Stei, "Non-Normative Logical Pluralism and the Revenge of the Normativity Objection," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 70, 278 (2020): 162-177, https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqz040. Notice, though, that the collapse problem arises specifically through an argument called the 'collapse argument.'

[10] See, e.g., Priest, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar*, Read, "Monism: The One True Logic," Erik Stei, "Rivalry, normativity, and the collapse of logical pluralism," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* (2017), https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2017.1327370, Stei, "Non-Normative Logical Pluralism and the Revenge of the Normativity Objection," Nathan Kellen, "The Normative Problem for Logical Pluralism," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2018.1548375, and Florian Steinberger, "Logical Pluralism and Logical Normativity," *Philosophers' Imprint* 19, 12 (2019): 1-19.

[11] Beall and Restall, *Logical Pluralism*, 16.

[12] J. MacFarlane, "In What Sense (If Any) is Logic Normative for Thought?" (2004), Unpublished.

[13] See Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated," 747.

[14] Priest, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar,* 203.

there is no problem with (i) and (iv) because in (i) both L1 and L2 engender the same obligations, and in (iv) they engender no obligation. But in (ii) and (iii), only one of the two systems acquires normative force. In the case where the argument is L1-valid and L2-invalid (or vice versa), because of the L1-validity (L2-validity), it follows that just L1 (L2) exerts a normative constraint. The problem is that by applying this argument to Beall and Restall's pluralism, the result will be a kind of monism, according to which classical logic is the only correct logical system. The reason is that every intuitionistically or relevantly valid argument is also classically valid, and according to Beall and Restall's pluralism, all these three logical systems are correct. Now, by using Wo-, in the case where $A \vdash B$ in classical logic, but $A \nvdash B$ in (say) intuitionistic logic, the normative force is that no one should accept A, and reject B. So it is the normative force of accepting *classical logic* that obligates agents to not accept both A and ~B.[15]

Note that, in principle, some arguments can be valid in L1 and invalid in L2, while others are valid in L2 and invalid in L1. The problem that arises in this case is that neither of the systems L1 and L2 is absolutely superior to the other, and so the result of the above argument is not necessarily a kind of monism. However, since the result of this argument is the rejection of logical pluralism, this is sufficient for our purpose in this article, and we need not examine this possibility in detail here.

2.2 Read's Collapse Argument

In a similar argument, Read assumes a condition in which $A \vdash B$ in L1 and $A \vdash \sim B$ in L3 are both valid.[16] As he writes (with some minor changes):

> Classical logic, L1, dominates L2, so does not disagree with it. Suppose it disagrees with L3, in that while B follows L1-ly from A,$\sim B$ follows L3-ly from A, while A is consistent—that is, there is some world, indeed this one, in which A is true. Should we infer that B is true, or that $\sim B$ is true?[17]

It is true that, in classical, relevant, and intuitionistic logic such a situation as described in Read's argument might not occur, but the burden of proof is on the pluralist to argue that accepting Beall and Restall's pluralism will not lead to such a situation. They have not limited their logical pluralism to classical, relevant, and intuitionistic logical systems. For example, Keefe claims that multivalued logic

[15] For a detailed discussion see Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated" and Stei, "Non-Normative Logical Pluralism and the Revenge of the Normativity Objection."

[16] Although Priest also mentions this in a footnote in Priest, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar*, 203.

[17] Read, "Monism: The One True Logic," 197.

provides admissible instances of GTT within Beall and Restall's pluralism.[18] And, in a separate work, Restall counts dual-intuitionistic logic as a correct logical system.[19]

The result of Read's argument is not necessarily the collapse of logical pluralism into logical monism, i.e., the adoption of one logical system: nevertheless, this argument, if it works, shows that the correctness of the two different logical systems cannot be accepted, and therefore logical pluralism is untenable. But although at first glance, it seems that the result of this argument is that one should accept both B and ~B in the situation, the principle Wo- indicates that this is not the case. In this case, Read's argument shows that according to L1 the agent should not both: accept A and reject B, and according to L3 the agent should not both: accept A and reject ~B. So, by accepting logical pluralism, the agent should not accept A, and either reject B or reject ~B. Rejecting each one of B and ~B contradicts Wo-, and leads the agent to reject logical pluralism. Therefore, by accepting A, the only possibility that remains in this case is to suspend B. Suspending B means there is no contradiction. So, it seems that by merely using Wo-, Read's collapse argument does not threaten logical pluralism.[20]

Yet by using another version of logical normativity, Read's argument will indeed turn out to be a threat tological pluralism. Consider the following:[21]

> **(Co+)** If the argument from P to Q is valid, then for all agents Z: if Z accepts P, Z ought to accept Q.

According to Co+, in Read's collapse argument the agent should accept both B and ~B.So the agent should accept the truth of a contradiction. If, as in Beall and Restall's pluralism, we also consider classical logic as a correct logical system, then due to the explosion principle it explodes into triviality.[22] Therefore, by using Co+, Read's argument threatens logical pluralism. But the problem is that Co+ is stronger than what Beall and Restall mean by logical normativity; and, furthermore, Co+, and generally any principle with narrow scope, will be a target

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[18] Rosanna Keefe, "What Logical Pluralism Cannot Be," *Synthese* 191 (2014): 1483, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-013-0333-x.

[19] Greg Restall, "Pluralism and Proofs," *Erkenntnis* 79, 2, Supplement (2014): 279-291.

[20] Stei shows that suspending B leads to a collapse problem in Priest's argument (Stei, "Non-Normative Logical Pluralism and the Revenge of the Normativity Objection," 168); however, he does not consider Read's collapse argument. The above argument shows that it does not lead to a collapse in Read's version of collapse argument.

[21] Here we use the version that is presented in Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated." Note that this principle can be used in Priest's argument too, but the argument does not need such a principle to work.

[22] Stei, "Rivalry, normativity, and the collapse of logical pluralism," 13.

of Harman's skeptical challenges[23] to the normativity of logic.[24] So, using Co+ (and other similar versions) in Read's argument is not acceptable. Consequently, it seems that Read's version of collapse argument does not threaten Beall and Restall's logical pluralism, and we therefore do not examine it further here.

3. Answering the Collapse Problem

The above collapse arguments were used against Beall and Restall's Pluralism, but as Stei has argued,[25] the collapse problem applies to all versions of logical pluralism that assume that (i) there is more than one correct logical system, (ii) logical consequence is global in scope, (iii) there is rivalry between different logical systems (i.e., an argument is valid in one logical system, but is not valid in another), and (iv) that logical consequence is normative. According to Caret's logical contextualism, the logical consequence relation is not global[26] in scope, and thus this position resists the collapse problem by refuting (ii).[27] Meanwhile, Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism denies that logic is normative.[28] So, at least at first glance, it seems that by accepting their logical pluralism the collapse problem no longer arises. Before we examine these claims, let's explain their versions of logical pluralism. We will thus try to show how collapse arguments no longer work once we accept Caret's logical contextualism or Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism.

3.1 Caret's Logical Contextualism

In "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated," Caret states hat the best solution for the collapse problem is to adopt a contextualist gloss.[29] He

[23] Presented in Gilbert Harman, "Logic and Reasoning," *Synthese* 60, 1 (1984): 107–127 and Gilbert Harman, *Change in view: Principles of reasoning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986).

[24] See, e.g., Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated," 747.

[25] Stei, "Rivalry, normativity, and the collapse of logical pluralism."

[26] Note that the term 'global' can mean at least two things in discussions of logic. The first is 'absolute,' meaning invariant between contexts of application. The second is 'topic-neutral,' meaning independent of domain or content. Caret's view is not global in the first sense, although it is global in the second.

[27] Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated."

[28] Blake-Turner and Russell, "Logical pluralism without the normativity."

[29] There are other versions of logical contextualism (see, e.g., Stewart Shapiro, "Varieties of Pluralism and Relativism for Logic," in *A Companion to Relativism*, ed. Steven D. Hales, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011): 526-552, reprinted in Stewart Shapiro, *Varieties of Logic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): §2), but they are not directly applied against the collapse problem. In this article, we refrain from discussing them.

argues that by relativizing the content of validity to contexts of use, we can maintain a normative principle like Wo- without fear that this engenders the collapse problem. He introduces a type of logical contextualism according to which 'validity' in different contexts determines different deductive standards. He writes:

> In simple terms, a deductive standard is an admissible class of cases that function as logically salient alternatives. Each context selects for a deductive standard and, this, in turn, gives content to validity attributions in that context.[30]

In this view, 'valid' is treated as an indexical expression whose content depends on the deductive standard of the context in which 'valid' used. In Shapiro's words, Caret's logical pluralism is a kind of indexical contextualism.[31] According to Caret, the character of the predicate 'valid' is given in the GTT, but every context selects for a separate deductive standard.[32] He writes:

> Any version of logical pluralism that endorses logics L1; ...; Ln can be translated into a contextualism on which deductive standards D1, ..., Dn allow each such logic to be the content of validity attributions in some context.[33]

As Kouri Kissel and Shapiro put it, by accepting Caret's logical contextualism, the normativity of logic is no longer global, because in this case deductive standards depend on the context of the usage of 'valid' within it and logical normativity is not considered as applying to thought as such.[34] For the logical contextualist, each admissible consequence relation is an eligible content of validity. So, in Priest's collapse argument, if L_1 and L_2 provide for a different assessment of the validity of $A \vdash B$, since the logical consequence is not global there is no conflict between the two assessments. Based on contextualism, validity relativizes to the context of use, and, in the case above, different predicates are attributed to the argument in each context. Therefore, Wo-obligates the agent not to accept the premises and reject the result of the valid arguments *in the related context*. In other words, L1 has normative force only in its context but not in the context of L2. So, Priest's collapse argument does not threaten logical contextualism.

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[30] Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated," 752.

[31] Shapiro, *Varieties of Logic*, 10.

[32] Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated," 753.

[33] Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated," 754.

[34] Terresa Kouri Kissel and Stewart Shapiro, "Logical pluralism and normativity," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, (2017), https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2017.1357495.

3.2 Blake-Turner and Russell's Telic Pluralism

Blake-Turner and Russell present a version of logical pluralism—telic pluralism—that, in contrast to Beall and Restall's pluralism, is not based on logical normativity. They claim that logic is not normative, and that the requirements that a valid argument places on us are due to the acceptance of epistemological principles that are not apart of logic. This view is summarized as follows:[35]

> (i) Logical theorems are descriptive (and not normative).
>
> (ii) Logical theorems are not about how we ought to argue.
>
> (iii) The normative consequences of logic stem from widely accepted epistemic background norms which have consequences for what we ought to believe.

According to telic pluralism, when we say that from P and $P \vdash Q$ we ought to believe Q, it is not because the rule, i.e., modus ponens, itself has normative force; rather, our demand for belief in (for example) true propositions is what is normative. In other words, accepting the results of valid arguments is based on the desire for some epistemic goals. Epistemic goals are what belief formation, reasoning, giving testimony, etc., aim at.[36] In deductive reasoning, our goal may only be to preserve truth, but our goal may also be *relevant* truth-preserving or *demonstrable* truth-preserving. Blake-Turner and Russell claim that, based on these various epistemic goals, classical, relevant, and intuitionistic logic are correct, respectively. So, logical pluralism has been proven without using logical normativity.[37]

Although denying the normativity of logic has been prefigured by some philosophers, including Harman,[38] its use to defend logical pluralism is Blake-Turner and Russell's innovation. But simply asserting that some epistemic norms are involved in applying logic does not by itself convey anything, and should not be considered as a novel proposal that resolves the collapse problem. For example, consider Field's logical pluralism that is based on his normative pluralism.[39] Accordingly to normative pluralism, there are different types of epistemic norms in which beliefs are formed to achieve them. By applying this kind of normative pluralism to logic, the result is that there are different possible logics. Relying on these epistemic norms, one can assess which of these logical systems is more

[35] Blake-Turner and Russell, "Logical pluralism without the normativity," 3.
[36] Blake-Turner and Russell, "Logical pluralism without the normativity," 15.
[37] Blake-Turner and Russell, "Logical pluralism without the normativity," 18.
[38] Presented in Harman, "Logic and Reasoning" and Harman, *Change in view: Principles of reasoning*.
[39] Hartry Field, "Pluralism in logic," *The Review of Symbolic Logic* 2, 2, (2009): 342–359.

suitable for achieving the desired epistemic goal, but there is no such thing as the one true logic.[40]

In Field's logical pluralism, logic is still normative. Field differentiates between truth as the main goal of logic and other epistemic norms. This difference stems from the fact that a valid argument is truth-preserving, transferring the feature of truth from the premises to the conclusion, whereas other epistemic norms are *more* than merely truth-preserving.[41] As a result, it can be claimed that the fundamental difference between telic pluralism and Field's logical pluralism is that, contrary to Field'slogical pluralism, telic pluralism is not normative.[42]

Blake-Turner and Russell claim that by accepting telic pluralism, Priest's collapse problem is evaded. Suppose L1 satisfies the epistemic goal N1, and L2 satisfies epistemic goal N2. Now if $A \vdash B$ is valid in L1 but invalid in L2, if the agent's epistemic goal is N1, she should accept the results of the valid argument in L1; but if the epistemic goal is N2, there is no obligation for her to accept the results of the valid argument in L1.[43] So, Priest's version of the collapse argument does not work anymore.

4. What Is a Philosophically Significant Logical Pluralism?

We saw above that Caret and Blake-Turner and Russell both try to prevent the collapse problem. In the next section we argue that there is a refined version of the collapse argument that still threatens both Caret's and Blake-Turner and Russell's view. But first let's take a look at the question of under which conditions a logical

[40] Field, "Pluralism in logic," 355.

[41] Field, "Pluralism in logic," 356.

[42] In Gillian Russell, "Logic Isn't Normative," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* (2017), https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2017.1372305, Russell independently examines the idea of logical normativity. By claiming that logic studies the structures in which truth is preserved, she concludes that the rules of logic are descriptive rules of truth, not the rules of how to argue (Russell, "Logic Isn't Normative," 15). It is not clear for us how accepting this view can be consistent with accepting telic pluralism. If truth is used in the definition of logic, then it can no longer be placed next to other epistemic norms because these norms are separate from logical systems themselves. Apart from this, if by *logic* Blake-Turner and Russell mean a mathematical system that has some properties, e.g., soundness and completeness, then logic will certainly not be normative. In a mere formal system there is no normativity, and there are no rules that require us to accept the logical results of such a system. But the problem is that in this case, logical pluralism is no longer an interesting philosophical viewpoint. We discuss this in §5.

[43] Blake-Turner and Russell, "Logical pluralism without the normativity," 16.

pluralism counts as an interesting philosophical viewpoint and check whether their views satisfy these conditions or not.[44]

In general, pluralism about a specific subject such as truth, logic, ethics, religion, etc., is a viewpoint according to which there are several different accounts of the subject, all of which are equally appropriate or all correct.[45] Admittedly, the acceptance of these accounts must result, at least in some cases, in different outcomes, because otherwise the differences between them will be merely apparent. However, for a version of pluralism to be philosophically significant, the simple existence of these different results is not enough. Now, the question is under which conditions we can take a version of logical pluralism to be an interesting one? Some philosophers have recently addressed this question and we do not want to discuss this in detail here.[46] In our view, to appreciate the philosophical value of any given form of pluralism, we must first take into account the position that one would be committed to by rejecting that kind of pluralism. If the position that we are committed to is trivially wrong, it means that the version of pluralism has nothing much to say, and is not a philosophically significant view. We use this as a necessary condition for any philosophically interesting logical pluralism to identify which kind of pluralism could be considered to be an interesting one. For example, consider mathematical logical pluralism (MLP) according to which there is more than one different formal logical system.[47] By rejecting MLP, one is committed to the view that there is only one formal logical system. But it is obvious that no one has endorsed such a wrong position. So, although MLP logical pluralism is trivially correct, it is not philosophically interesting. It is also noteworthy that, as Eklund has put it, pluralism will be a philosophically significant view only when, according to it, in order to serve a *single purpose*, there are different accounts all of which are equally appropriate or

[44] Notice that there are many ways to be interesting. One could state that the interestingness of Caret's view is just that he takes validity to be an indexical notion. And telic pluralism is also interesting because it suggests a new approach to the question of the normativity of logic. But here by the *interestingness* of these views we mean their philosophical significance as rivals to logical monism.

[45] Shapiro, "Varieties of Pluralism and Relativism for Logic," 529.

[46] See, e.g., Matti Eklund, "Making Sense of Logical Pluralism," *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* (2017), https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2017.1321499, Kellen, "The Normative Problem for Logical Pluralism," Colin R. Caret, "Why Logical Pluralism?" *Synthese*, (2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-019-02132-w, and Steinberger, "Logical Pluralism and Logical Normativity."

[47] Kellen, "The Normative Problem for Logical Pluralism," 3.

correct in the sense that all of them are able to serve *that purpose*.[48] By rejecting such a pluralism, one is committed to the view that there is only one way to serve a specific purpose. It is obvious that if it is important for us to attain that specific purpose, such a view is really significant. For example, as we have seen above, according to Beall and Restall's pluralism the three different logical systems—classical, relevant, and intuitionistic—are all correct, in the sense that they all provide valid arguments that preserve *truth* from premises to conclusion. The rejection of the view is not a trivially wrong position, and it also claims that to serve a specific purpose, i.e., preserving truth, there are different correct logical systems. So, Beall and Restall's pluralism has great philosophical importance.[49]

Now the question is whether Caret's logical contextualism, and Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism, are interesting in the sense mentioned above. For Caret, validity is an indexical concept. As he explicitly states, in any context, the content of 'valid' is generated by instantiating the GTT on the deductive standard of that context.[50] Consequently, because of the fact that there is more than one distinct context, there is also more than one correct logic. But, since a correct logic should evaluate the argument claims, and by doing so it distinguishes between the valid and invalid arguments, the content of 'correct logic' is partially determined by the context in which it is used. So, by accepting Caret's logical contextualism, it follows that different logics are correct *in different meanings*.[51] In this case, the purpose of using a logical system L_1 is to assess the property *valid*$_1$,

[48] Eklund mentions this kind of pluralism as "goodness pluralism." He also agrees that only this kind of pluralism is a potentially interesting pluralism (Eklund, "Making Sense of Logical Pluralism," 5-6).

[49] However, some philosophers claim that it can be seen that Beall and Restall's pluralism implies the acceptance of a kind of logical relativism, and the meaning of validity in each logical system is different from the others (see, e.g., Roy, T. Cook, "Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom: A Tour of Logical Pluralism," *Philosophy Compass* 5, 6 (2010): 492-504, Owen Griffiths, "Problems for Logical Pluralism," *History and Philosophy of Logic* 34, 2 (2013): 170-182, and Ole Thomassen Hjortland, "Logical Pluralism, Meaning-Variance, and Verbal Disputes," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 91, 2 (2013): 355-373. We do not discuss this here.

[50] Caret, "The Collapse of Logical Pluralism has been Greatly Exaggerated," 753.

[51] One might propose that although 'validity' is a kind of indexical concept, a correct logic is a logical system that, in the context in which it is used, makes an acceptable assessment of the arguments in that context. So, the concept of 'correct logic' is not indexical. But we think the concept of 'correct logic' will still be an indexical one in this sense. Consider a logical system L_1that evaluates the arguments acceptably in the context C_1 but not in the context C_2. Now, is L_1 a correct logic or not? It's obvious that it is not both correct and incorrect simultaneously, but in fact L_1 is correct-in-C_1 and not correct-in-C_2. So, the cited concept of a 'correct logic' is still an indexical one.

but the purpose of using L_2 is to assess the property *valid*$_2$. So, there is no specific purpose in using these different logical systems. On the other hand, by rejecting Caret's logical contextualism, one is committed to the view that there is only one logical system that is correct in the same meaning in different contexts. But it is obvious that there cannot be a correct logical system for all *possible* contexts. Such a view is wrong because we can at least consistently define a new (e.g., mathematical) structure with different logical rules. Consequently, if we understand Caret's position in this way, logical contextualism is not a philosophically significant position. For Caret's logical contextualism to be a significant philosophical view, there should be a single purpose for using different logical systems. But what might this purpose be? Before answering this question, let's look at Blake-Turner and Russell's position.

According to telic pluralism, each logical system is essentially specific to a certain epistemic goal. As we have seen above, in this case, when it is stated that classical logic is a correct logical system, the intended meaning is that it is a correct way to preserve truth, while when it is said that relevant logic is correct, the intended meaning is that it is a correct way to preserve relevant truth. And the correctness of intuitionistic logic should be measured by how provable truths can be preserved by that logic. It should be kept in mind that from the mere fact that there exist different logical systems, it does not follow that these systems are correct *in the same sense*—because the correctness of various logical systems arises when their applications are considered in a specific domain.[52] So, by accepting telic pluralism, we face three different meanings of the correctness of a logical system. They are correct for achieving the related purpose and not for serving a *single* purpose. On the other hand, by rejecting such a view, one is committed to the view that for three different epistemic goals, there is just one logical system. But such a view is clearly wrong, since, for example, classical logic is not suitable for preserving relevant truth as an epistemic goal. As a result, if the telic pluralists' claim is that to achieve three distinct goals, there are three correct logical systems that are apt to achieve those goals, their logical pluralism, as described above, will not be an interesting one. Of course, they may reply as follows: It is true that, by accepting telic pluralism, different logical systems are correct for different purposes, but there is something *in common* between all the different purposesin usingthese systems, perhaps something like a specific purpose. But now the question is what this common property might be.

We saw above that for both Caret's logical contextualism and Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism to be a worthwhile philosophical logical pluralism,

[52] Priest, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar*, 195.

there ought to be a specific purpose that is common to all logical systems so that using a logical system can accomplish that goal. Such a common feature among all correct logical systems can be called the 'canonical purpose' of logic.[53] In both the logical pluralisms mentioned above, there thus ought to be a canonical purpose that different logical systems aim at in different contexts, or with different epistemic goals. As a suggestion, we propose that the canonical purpose for using logical systems is to acquire rational beliefs. By a *rational belief*, we mean a belief based on good evidences that make it more likely to be true.[54] Logic is concerned with truth-preservation, and using a correct logical system increases the likelihood of the results being true, based on the assumption that the premises are true. So, by using logically valid arguments, one thus tries to acquire rational beliefs. In other words, our suggestion is that the canonical purpose for using a logical system is to increase the rationality of our beliefs. One way to obtain rational beliefs is to use valid inferences, no matter in which logical system it might be. If we accept this, it will be reasonable to accept the results of valid arguments (when there is no counter-argument against the results). Note that we could not treat gaining rational belief as being on a par with other epistemic goals and then design a logical system to achieve it. The rationality of beliefs is more general than all other epistemic goals, and by achieving each of these epistemic goals, i.e., preserving truth, relevant truth, and provable truth, the rationality of belief has also been realized. But the problem now is that although this renders Caret's logical contextualism and Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism philosophically significant, accepting such a suggestion will cause the collapse argument to arise again.

5. The Collapse Problem Again

As we have seen, Caret and Blake-Turner and Russell claim that their versions of logical pluralism do not face the collapse problem. In this section, we try to show that if we accept gaining rational belief to be the canonical purpose of logic, a refined version of the collapse argument will still threaten both Caret's logical contextualism, and Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism. Our argument is based on the idea that using logic is an acceptable way to achieve rational beliefs.

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[53] See, e.g., Eklund, "Making Sense of Logical Pluralism," 5.

[54] One might consider a strict standard for the rationality of beliefs and the way she define the concept of a good evidence. In the present article, we refrain from further exploring this issue. However, it seems that apart from how to define the concept, logically valid arguments are good evidences for beliefs. Notice that acquiring rational beliefs is more general than any other purpose for using logical systems, and so any explanation of it can be used in the argument in §5.

We state the refined argument as follows: Caret's logical contextualism and Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism face a dilemma: either they are not philosophically interesting, or they face the collapse problem again. Consider that by accepting the above suggestion in §4, for Caret's logical contextualism, although there are different deductive standards in every separate context, in all contexts the general purpose of using logic is to gain rational beliefs. Also, by accepting telic pluralism, although there are different logical systems for different epistemic goals, using each one of the logical systems aims at gaining rational beliefs. In our view, acquiring rational beliefs really has a normative force.[55] Notice that we do not mean that merely having a good reason that increases the possibility of a proposition being true forces us to accept that proposition. This is clearly wrong, since perhaps the agent will have no attitude toward the proposition and in this situation she could reasonably suspend belief in it. However, if we are in a position to decide between accepting and not accepting (i.e., withholding or rejecting) a proposition, we should accept the proposition we have good reasons for.[56] So, we use the following principle:

> **RATIONALITY:** if the agent S knows that there is a good reason in favor of P, and there is no argument in favor of ~P, then between accepting and not-accepting (withholding or rejecting) P, S ought to accept that P.

Now, using the structure of Priest's collapse argument and the principle RATIONALITY, it can be argued that, in the case where $A \vdash B$ is valid in L1 but $A \nvdash B$ in L2, regardless of the agent's epistemic goal or the context of the argument, if she is aware of these arguments and wants to decide to whether or not to accept B, she should accept B. The reason for this is that the canonical purpose for using logical systems is, as suggested above, gaining rational beliefs, and validity in L1 increases the likelihood that B will be true. So, in this situation accepting B satisfies the canonical purpose for using logical systems. Hence, if $A \vdash B$ is valid in

[55] In this article, we take it for granted that rationality is normative in the sense expressed in RATIONALITY; but there is an extensive literature on the normativity of rationality. Some philosophers (e.g., Kolodny (in Niko Kolodny, "Why Be Rational?" *Mind* 114, 455 (2005): 509-63, https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzi509) and Broome (in John Broome, "Is Rationality Normative?" *Disputatio* 2, 24 (2008): 153-170) have claimed that rationality is not normative. Others (e.g., Southwood (in Nicholas Southwood, "Vindicating the Normativity of Rationality," *Ethics* 119, 1 (2008): 9-30), Kiesewetter (in Benjamin Kiesewetter, *The Normativity of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)), and Bondy (in Patrick Bondy, *Epistemic Rationality and Epistemic Normativity*, (New York: Routledge, 2018)) disagree and try to show how we can truly claim that rationality is normative. We do not discuss this here.

[56] For simplicity we do not consider the situation in which we have good reasons both for and against a proposition. However, such a situation will not occur in Beall and Restall's Pluralism.

classical logic and invalid in relevant or intuitionistic logic, regardless of the agent's epistemic goal or the context of the argument, if the agent is faced with a choice between accepting or not accepting B, she should accept B. In this situation, the likelihood of achieving the truth by accepting B is more than that of not accepting B. So, again the collapse problem arises.

Consequently, by using the structure of Priest's collapse arguments, along with the suggestion that the canonical purpose of logic is to obtain rational beliefs, there is a new version of the collapse argument that, due to the normativity of rationality, refutes logical pluralism. So it seems that if we count Caret's logical contextualism, and Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism, as philosophically significant views in the sense mentioned above, we face the collapse problem again.

6. Conclusion

Caret's logical contextualism and Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism aimed to evade the threat of collapse arguments. In this paper we sought to evaluate their success. If our arguments hold, by setting out the conditions under which logical pluralism would be philosophically interesting, we concluded that there had to be something in common between all correct logical systems, since otherwise logical pluralism would not be a philosophically significant view. Using the concept of the rationality of belief as the canonical purpose of logic, by presenting a version of Priest's argument, we tried to show that both Caret's logical contextualism and Blake-Turner and Russell's telic pluralism face a dilemma: either they are not philosophically significant, or a refined version of collapse argument still threatens both of these logical pluralisms.[57]

[57] The authors would like to thank Seyed Ali Kalantari and Amir Ehsan Karbasizadeh for useful discussions and insightful comments on an earlier version of the manuscript. We are also grateful to Ben Young for his help in improving the final draft.

INFERENTIAL INTERNALISM AND THE CAUSAL STATUS EFFECT

Nicholas DANNE

ABSTRACT: To justify inductive inference and vanquish classical skepticisms about human memory, external world realism, etc., Richard Fumerton proposes his "inferential internalism," an epistemology whereby humans 'see' by Russellian acquaintance Keynesian probable relations (PRs) between propositions. PRs are *a priori* necessary relations of logical probability, akin to but not reducible to logical entailments, such that perceiving a PR between one's evidence *E* and proposition *P* of unknown truth value justifies rational belief in *P* to an objective degree. A recent critic of inferential internalism is Alan Rhoda, who questions its psychological plausibility. Rhoda argues that in order to see *necessary* relations between propositions *E* and *P*, one would need acquaintance with too many propositions at once, since our evidence *E* is often complex. In this paper, I criticize Rhoda's implausibility objection as too quick. Referencing the causal status effect (CSE) from psychology, I argue that some of the complex features of evidence *E* contribute to our type-categorizing it as *E*-type, and thus we do not need to 'see' all of the complex features when we see the PR between *E* and *P*. My argument leaves unchanged Fumerton's justificatory role for the PR, but enhances its psychological plausibility.

KEYWORDS: epistemic justification, logical probability, memory, acquaintance, Richard Fumerton, internalism

1. Introduction

In performing inductive inferences from given evidence, such as when attempting to win a card game, diagnosing an automobile malfunction, or justifying human memory, can some conclusions be only "probably" true? Or is that locution bad philosophical grammar? Supporting the 'bad grammar' response is Richard Fumerton,[1] who by his theory of "inferential internalism" proposes that we can 'see' by intuitive insight probable relations (PRs) between propositions of binary

[1] Richard Fumerton, *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995); "Epistemic Probability," *Philosophical Issues* 14 (*Epistemology*) (2004): 149-164, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-6077.2004.00025.x; *Knowledge, Thought, and the Case for Dualism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); "The Challenge of Refuting Skepticism," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, 2nd Edition, eds. Matthias Steup, John Turri, and Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2014): 120-132.

truth value. If I draw an ace-five unsuited at a small poker table, for example, it is either true or false that I will win the hand, but I may be able to *see* in a non-inferential direct sense that my ace-five *makes probable* that the proposition expressing my victory is a true proposition. It is never "probably true" that I will win, but my awareness that the ace-five and my victory (construed as propositions) stand in an *a priori* and necessary probable relation may be more or less acute, intense, or salient.

This concept of probable relations (PRs) hails from John Maynard Keynes, who calls them "a new logical relation" of non-frequentist logical probability, the latter being a set of relations about "knowledge, ignorance, and rational belief" irreducible to the more philosophically familiar logic of entailment, truth, and falsity.[2] Keynes considers it rational to believe, for example, a proposition *P* that may be false, because our antecedent knowledge sets up an objective PR relation to *P*, and humans subjectively 'see' such PRs by Russellian acquaintance (see section 2).[3] Whereas some PR values are numerical, like 0.75, a Keynesian agent might at times only recognize that one PR value is greater or less than another.[4] Nevertheless, Fumerton finds PR acquaintance to justify the conclusions *P* of inductive inferences, because PRs are necessary *a priori*, and because acquaintance with them is infallible (section 2).

My goal in this paper is to deflect a recent criticism of inferential internalism by Alan Rhoda.[5] Rhoda finds inferential internalism psychologically implausible, because he thinks that it requires simultaneous acquaintance with more propositions than a human agent can 'see' at once. At my poker table, for example, I may need to 'see' more than that I am holding an ace-five and that I am trying to win, to be justified in believing that my hand stands in any probable relation to victory. To gain the PR insight in question, I may additionally need to 'see' that aces rank higher than kings, that I am betting first, that I am the chip

[2] John Maynard Keynes, *A Treatise on Probability* (USA: Rough Draft Printers, 2008/1921): §I.I.8, p. 8. Why Keynes endorses logical over frequentist probability *in probability theory* falls outside the scope of this paper, but see Charles R. McCann, Jr., "On the Nature of Keynesian Probability," in *The Philosophy of Keynes' Economics: Probability, Uncertainty and Convention*, eds. Jochen Runde and Sohei Mizuhara (New York: Routledge, 2003): 37-45, for an accessible introduction.

[3] Keynes, *Treatise*, §I.IV.12, pp. 52-53; §I.II.6, p. 12.

[4] Keynes, *Treatise*, §I.IX.4, p. 112; McCann, "Nature of Keynesian Probability," 43-44.

[5] Alan R. Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle of Inferential Justification, Skepticism, and the Nature of Inference," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 33 (2008): 215-234, https://doi.org/10.5840/jpr_2008_2.

leader, etc., and as I infer my pending victory from these variables, the allegedly non-inferential justificatory power of the PR insight is lost.

Against Rhoda, I maintain that the PR can be an epistemically justifying relation perceived by acquaintance, because some of the complex features that make the ace-five competitive *in this poker hand* (features like my betting position, the card rankings, etc.) are cognized automatically and unconsciously by the mind in type-specifying the ace-five as a keeper or as worthless. Specifically, I appeal to the "causal status effect" (CSE) from psychology[6] to argue that such type-categorization on complex evidence transpires subconsciously (section 3). The CSE indicates that humans classify the objects of their awareness more quickly or readily[7] by those objects' causal features than by their effectual features. In a scenario simpler than card-playing, for example, humans are less likely to categorize an animal as a goat if the human knows that the animal lacks goat genes, than if it merely fails to produce milk;[8] genes are a causal feature of goats, whereas their milk production is an effectual feature.[9] The point, for my purposes, is that because the proposition "there's a goat in the yard" may in some (unusual) instances be cognized only *after* such complex conditioning on genes and milk, the perception of a PR between "there's a goat in the yard" and "some laundry is chewed up" remains plausible and uncluttered, despite the many background beliefs that I would supposedly need in order to see the *a priori necessary* PR between those propositions. Rhoda thinks that most of our inductive inferences

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[6] The seminal paper on CSE is Woo-kyoung Ahn, "Why are Different Features Central for Natural Kinds and Artifacts?: The Role of Causal Status in Determining Feature Centrality," *Cognition* 69 (1998): 135-178, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-0277(98)00063-8. CSE continues to be discussed by, e.g., Woo-kyoung Ahn, Nancy S. Kim, Mary E. Lassaline, and Martin J. Dennis, "Causal Status as a Determinant of Feature Centrality," *Cognitive Psychology* 41 (2000): 361-416, https://doi.org/10.1006/cogp.2000.0741; Bob Rehder and Reid Hastie, "Causal Knowledge and Categories: The Effects of Causal Beliefs on Categorization, Induction, and Similarity," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 130, no. 3 (2001): 323-360, https://doi.org/10.1037/0096-3445.130.3.323; Tania Lombrozo, "Explanation and Categorization: How 'Why?' informs 'What?'," *Cognition* 110 (2009): 248-253, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2008.10.007; Lance J. Rips, *Lines of Thought: Central Concepts in Cognitive Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Danks, *Unifying the Mind*: *Cognitive Representations as Graphical Models* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014); Bob Rehder, "Concepts as Causal Models: Categorization," in *The Oxford Handbook of Causal Reasoning*, ed. Michael Waldmann (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017): 347-376.

[7] I say "or readily" because the manifestation of CSE is not restricted to categorizations performed under time pressure (cf. Ahn et al., "Causal Status as a Determinant").

[8] Ahn, "Why are Different Features Central," 143, 145.

[9] Ahn, "Why are Different Features Central," 142.

follow from contingent relations too complex to see by acquaintance, but I contend that the causal status effect incorporates many of the background beliefs that Rhoda thinks the inferential internalist unjustifiably takes for granted (section 4). In the sections that follow, I elaborate all of these claims, not just to ward off Rhoda,[10] but to render inferential internalism more plausible than even Fumerton and his other critics have rendered it.

2. The Elements of Inferential Internalism, and Rhoda's Critique

As we have seen, and helping ourselves to a bit of casual language (bad grammar), inferential internalism is a justificatory scheme for the agent who infers from evidence *E* that her belief *P* is probably true.[11,12] At my poker table, I infer that the ace-five I drew (*E*) can probably win me the pot (*P*). Fumerton supports such inferences[13] with his "principle of inferential justification" (PIJ): to justifiably infer proposition *P* from evidentiary proposition *E*, "one must be (1) justified in believing *E* and (2) justified in believing that *E* makes probable *P*."[14] By "evidentiary propositions," I mean propositions whose referents are ordinary experiences like entertaining some thought, remembering some event, seeing colors, etc. For as mentioned in the previous section, Fumerton supposes a Russellian-Keynesian intuition of "acquaintance" to supply justifications (1) and (2) of the PIJ.

The genesis of Fumertonian acquaintance is Bertrand Russell's account, which calls acquaintance a non-judgmental "relation" of "aware[ness]"[15] between

[10] Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle," sections II and IV-VI, criticizes inferential internalism for problems besides the contingency/necessity of PRs, but to answer all of his arguments would take me too far afield. The possible role of the causal status effect within inductive inference seems sufficiently important to address exclusively in this paper.

[11] Fumerton, "The Challenge," 124. Note that Keynes, *Treatise*, §I.I.2, p. 3, insists that propositions are either true or false, but that I follow Fumerton in sometimes casually referring to 'probably true' propositions.

[12] For readability, I make variable *E* refer interchangeably to the proposition *E* and to the object of acquaintance that proposition *E* describes; I trust that context makes this switch obvious. Likewise for *P*, *B*, and any mention of a PR. I discuss acquaintance later in this section.

[13] In response to criticism from Michael Huemer, "Fumerton's Principle of Inferential Justification," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 27 (2002): 329–40, https://doi.org/10.5840/jpr_2002_4, Fumerton delimits inferential internalist justification to "*non-enthymematic* and non-deductive reasoning" ("Epistemic Probability," 160). Whether my card-playing example meets such criteria I ignore for the sake of argument. Rhoda argues from an example different from card-playing, which I take up shortly.

[14] Fumerton, *Metaepistemology*, 36.

[15] Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," *Proceedings*

an agent and her sense data, such as a color, noise, or other person's testimony.[16] To this list of acquaintance referents, Keynes adds one's own thoughts, and "facts or characteristics or relations of sense-data or meanings..."[17] Fumerton capitalizes on the notion of "fact" as "a nonlinguistic complex that consists in an entity or entities exemplifying properties," and he characterizes acquaintance as "a *sui generis relation*... between a self and... a fact."[18]

Thus epistemic justification via clause (1) of the PIJ proceeds straightforwardly. I am justified in believing that I hold the ace-five because I see with my eyes those characters printed on the cards. By my acquaintance with this fact of my experience, I secure justification for believing proposition *E*: "I am holding an ace-five."[19] The more controversial and unusual function of Fumertonian acquaintance is its role in disclosing the alleged fact (PIJ clause 2) that '*E* makes probable *P*.' In the justification of human memory, for example, acquaintance with the probable relation (PR) between *E* and *P* blocks a vicious regress; for one cannot non-circularly believe proposition *P*—e.g., "Event *x* happened," or "My memory works"—on the putative evidence *E* that "I *remember* my memory working in the past." Inferential internalists escape this circularity by their acquaintance with the PR that proposition *E* ("I am remembering event *x*") makes probable the claim *P* ("Event *x* happened").[20] Hence the PR is necessary *a priori*, on pain of justificatory regress;[21] the PR cannot itself be inferred to obtain, or obtain only "probably" in the bad-grammar sense in question.[22]

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of the Aristotelian Society, New Series, Vol. 11 (1910-1911): 110, http://www.jstor.com/stable/4543805.

[16] Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance," 109, 115.

[17] Keynes, *Treatise*, §I.II.6, p. 12.

[18] Fumerton, *Metaepistemology*, 74.

[19] More precisely, but digressing from my thesis, Fumerton claims that noninferential justification for believing *E* amounts to the quaternary condition of (i) "ha[ving] the thought that" *E*, (ii) being "acquainted with the fact that" *E*, (iii) being acquainted with "the thought that" *E*, and (iv) being acquainted with "the relation of correspondence holding between the thought that [*E*] and the fact that [*E*]" (*Metaepistemology*, 75).

[20] For simplicity, I make no distinction between "remembering" and "seeming to remember," although other authors might. For independent criticism of Fumerton's concessions to the memory skeptic, see Josep E. Corbi, "The Principle of Inferential Justification, Scepticism, and Causal Beliefs," *Philosophical Issues* 10 (2000): 377-385, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-2237.2000.tb00032.x.

[21] Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle," 219, 221; Fumerton, *Metaepistemology*, 199.

[22] Keynes, *Treatise*, §III.XXII.11-12, pp. 259-261, assumes a "limitation of independent variety" of causes and laws in the universe to undergird the *a priori* necessity (of logical probability) between propositions, but I doubt that the inferential internalist needs to follow Keynes in this

According to Rhoda, however, neither can PR acquaintance be an *insight* into all the dependencies "typically" obtaining in our inductive inferences;[23] for those dependencies are contingent, and thus too complex to plausibly see at a glance. In Rhoda's thought experiment about a car mechanic, the mechanic hears engine sound *E* to 'see' by PR acquaintance that *E* makes probable *P*, *P* being "that a piston rod needs replacing."[24] Rhoda understands the object of PR insight in this case to be a contingent relation, because "the sound [could] be caused by something else."[25] Granted, Rhoda admits that a necessary relation may well obtain between *E* and the "complex body of background beliefs" held by the mechanic, and *P*, but the mechanic cannot plausibly see *that* relation at a glance.[26] Such background beliefs "B"[27] include those "about the internal structure of car engines, beliefs about what healthy engines sound like versus what different types of unhealthy engines sound like, etc.,"[28] and the necessary relation putatively representing the PR becomes '$(E \& B) \rightarrow P$,'[29] a relation too complex to intuit by acquaintance. Hence Rhoda recommends a weakening of the PIJ, taking it to describe the simple and contingent relations that we 'see' against a backdrop of beliefs that we already hold,[30] rather than the necessary relation '$(E \& B) \rightarrow P$.' He furthermore denies that background beliefs *B*, or classical skeptical problems like the reliability of human memory, are or need be justified by the PIJ.[31]

To recapitulate, I enter this debate to bolster on empirical and theoretical grounds the plausibility of the claim that PRs referenced by the PIJ are *a priori*

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assumption.

[23] Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle," 221.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle," 222.

[28] Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle," 221.

[29] Rhoda does not use this conjunctive AND (&) formula; he uses "(E + B) → P" ("Fumerton's Principe," 222-223), parsing the "+" symbol as "*plus*..." ("Fumerton's Principle," 221). By this nomenclature he implies that the "background beliefs, presumably, define a possibility space in which the conditional probability of the piston rod hypothesis, given the evidence, is significantly higher than that of any other available hypothesis at the same level of generality" (*ibid.*). I eschew the "+" notation to avoid misrepresenting it as a logical OR operator, which it is not. Neither Rhoda's nor my argument suffers by my pretending the "+" relation to be a simple AND. My purpose in so transcribing Rhoda's inference is to situate B in a toy PR relation easy to analyze, *viz.* simpler than a Bayesian analysis. My psychological and epistemological arguments are not, I assume, implicated by this simplification.

[30] Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle," 222.

[31] Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle," section V.

necessary relations. My central argument is that the causal status effect (CSE)[32] strips the *B* term from Rhoda's problematic '(*E* & *B*) → *P*' relation, by shunting *B*-beliefs into the agent's very acquaintance with her evidentiary evidence *E*. That is, I think that being acquainted with complex evidence *E* sometimes requires background beliefs *B* that bear necessarily on our inferences; but if those background beliefs (*B*) operate beneath consciousness to bring the agent to acquaintance with *E*, then the agent's insight to the PR between *E* and *P* not only remains simple and uncluttered (*pace* Rhoda), but the *a priori* necessity of the PR remains plausible, and acquaintance with it remains justificatory per the PIJ.

Simply stated, I think that Rhoda makes too-heavy weather over the fact that the engine rattle *E* could be the sound of something besides the bad piston rod *P*. Of course it could! That possibility is why PRs often have values less than 1 (certainty). The mechanic is infallible that the sound *E* necessarily makes probable a piston replacement *P*,[33] but mechanics of varying backgrounds perceive the value of that PR as higher or lower than the next mechanic does. My answer to Rhoda's worry is that what makes acquaintance with complex evidence *E* actually *about E*, can sometimes be previous acquaintance with background beliefs *B*. In particular, I think that the CSE employs *B*-beliefs to classify evidence *E* as *E*-type (see section 3).

Nor do I fall into circularity or justificatory regress by making acquaintance with *E* depend on prior acquaintance with *B*. The justifiability of human memory is its own problem that the inferential internalist solves if she perceives that her memory experiences (*E*) make probable that the events they depict really happened (*P*); such is the "dialectically impregnable" advantage accruing to inferential internalists about fundamental skeptical problems like memory.[34] Thus I face no special *justificatory* problem in claiming that acquaintance with a complex *E* sometimes depends causally on subconscious memory of *B*.[35] By the "causal dependence" of my acquaintance with *E* on my (subconscious) belief that *B*, I mean that *E* is a complex "fact" in the Fumertonian sense, an entity with properties (see five paragraphs ago); and perhaps I had to learn what "entities" or certain

[32] Or the machinery of the mind that makes this effect happen. If CSE reduces to cognitive processes, so be it; I intend to beg no questions about the (im)materiality of mind.

[33] Indeed, the mechanic is infallible that the engine sound *E* necessarily makes probable that the moon is made of cheese (*P*); there is some probable relation between those propositions, but its value must be astronomically low, since no one reports perceiving it, and since anyone who compares the two propositions sees their relation as practically nonexistent.

[34] Fumerton, *Metaepistemology*, 218.

[35] For acquaintance is justificatory bedrock. My memory of *B* does not justify my acquaintance with *E*; my acquaintance with the fact that *E* is its own justification.

"properties" even are, before I could be acquainted with facts about them: a doctor becomes immediately acquainted with a patient's neurosis, for example, while the patient's kin, or even a medical student, might not. Nor need I endorse any particular *philosophical* account of how this "causality" between background beliefs and acquaintance works;[36] the question is whether PR insights are phenomenologically plausible, and the overarching epistemic rule in that analysis is that acquaintance with PRs must be doing the justificatory work in the PIJ. My thesis does not, to my mind, transgress that epistemic rule.[37]

Hence the remaining, relevant, twofold problem is (i) providing empirical and theoretical grounds for my thesis that acquaintance with a complex *E* depends causally on subconscious prior knowledge *B*, and (ii) assuring my philosophical reader that shunting *B* from '$(E \,\&\, B) \rightarrow P$' into a causal factor for acquaintance with *E* renders the PR between *E* and *P* necessary *a priori*. I introduce cognitive psychological support for (i) in section 3, and address philosophical problem (ii) in section 4.

3. On Seeing Relations Between Propositions

Before examining how the CSE might relate *B*-beliefs to *E*-acquaintance, it pays to consider what Fumerton thinks the phenomenon of PR perception would be like.[38] The PR is "an *internal* relation holding between propositions," he explains, and internal relations are those which "hold[] necessarily" if their "relata... obtain."[39]

One might argue, for example, that 'being darker than' is an internal relation that holds between the colors black and white. It is a necessary truth that if black and white both exist, then black is darker than white. The relation 'darker than' holds between black and white solely by virtue of the intrinsic character of the respective colors. 'Being a lower note than' is arguably an internal relation that holds between middle *C* and middle *E* on the piano.[40]

Fumerton elaborates:

> If there are internal relations and we can be directly acquainted with the intrinsic

[36] Although I outline what I think is an empirical correlation between *B*-beliefs and *E*-acquaintance by appealing to the CSE throughout sections 3 and 4.

[37] I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to answer the contentions in this paragraph.

[38] Fumerton notoriously but consistently doubts that he has ever perceived a PR (Richard Fumerton, *Metaphysical and Epistemological Problems of Perception* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985): 185; *Metaepistemology*, 204, 218; "The Challenge,"128). As embarrassing as this point might appear, it does not undermine my thesis.

[39] Fumerton, *Metaepistemology*, 198.

[40] Fumerton, *Metaepistemology*, 198.

> character of the relata of such relations, we might also be directly acquainted with the fact that the relation obtains. If propositions are the sorts of things we can *hold directly before our minds*, and if making probable is an internal relation holding between propositions, it might not be that hard, dialectically, to claim that one can *hold directly before one's mind* the kind of fact that makes propositions of the form '*E* makes probable *P*' true.[41]

The metaphor of "holding before the mind" just is Fumerton's metaphor for experiencing the acquaintance relation, and this metaphor facilitates Rhoda's objection[42] that to 'see' the background beliefs *B* that *make it perspicuous that* '*E* makes probable *P*' is to simultaneously "hold before the mind" an implausibly large number of beliefs. Recall from section 2, however, my counter-objection to Rhoda, that one need not make a PR concomitantly perspicuous with the *B*-beliefs, if the *B*-beliefs instead subconsciously ensure that complex evidence *E* is *about E*, in a person's awareness.

Such "ensuring" amounts to *B*-beliefs playing a role in the agent's conceptualization of *E* evidence as *E*-type: that a hospital patient's off-topic remarks are apprehended not just as "some sounds" or "some words," but as "neurosis." It is this role of *B*-beliefs in the conceptualization of *E*-concepts that I find preliminarily indicated by the "causal status effect" (CSE) of psychology.[43]

Roughly stated, the CSE is the tendency of humans to classify a given object under a type-concept, according to the causal features rather than the effect (or otherwise inert) features of that concept. A helpful summary of CSE is Bob Rehder's review of Woo-kyoung Ahn, Nancy S. Kim, Mary E. Lassaline, and Martin J. Dennis:[44]

> Ahn et al. tested novel categories with features related in a causal chain (X → Y → Z). For instance, undergraduates were instructed on a type of bird called roobans that typically eat fruit (X), have sticky feet (Y), and climb trees (Z) and that X → Y ("Eating fruit tends to cause roobans to have sticky feet because sugar in fruits is secreted through pores under their feet.") and Y → Z and ("Sticky feet tend to allow roobans to build nests on trees because they can climb up the trees easily with sticky feet."). Feature importance was assessed by the missing feature method in which participants rated on a 0-100 scale the category membership of test items missing one feature (one missing only X, one missing only Y, one missing only Z). The results... revealed that the item missing X was rated lower than one missing Y, which in turn was lower than the one missing Z, suggesting

[41] *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

[42] Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle," 220-221.

[43] And not *uniquely* so; there may be other measured effects or cognitive theories that support my objection to Rhoda better than CSE does.

[44] Ahn et al., "Causal Status as a Determinant."

> that X is more important than Y, which is more important than Z.[45]

The causal status effect, then, is the tendency to rate an object's membership in a given category as less likely when a causal feature (X) of the object is missing, than when its effect features (Z) are missing. Woo-kyoung Ahn demonstrates the effect not only in the assignment of novel categories like roobans, but in the classification of artifacts and natural kinds.[46]

Thus my objection to Rhoda is that what he calls background beliefs *B* sometimes refer to the causal and effectual features by which the evidence *E* with which we are acquainted is type-categorized by our cognitive system.[47] I hypothesize that Rhoda's mechanic, for example, employs *B* to "bring to mind" *that kind* of engine noise *E*, such that he may intuitively 'see' that '*E* makes probable *P*'. That is, the particular rattle *E* is either metallic or pneumatic (versus plastic or wooden, etc.), metallicity and pneumatic-ness being causal or effectual features of the rattle, features about which the mechanic possesses background beliefs *B*. By the CSE, causal and effectual features present in or missing from the perceived rattle *E* impel the mechanic to categorize *E* as a certain type, and this type of evidence (like all type-categorized evidence in propositional form) stands in an *a priori* necessary PR to inferential conclusion *P*. This PR can be plausibly 'seen' by acquaintance, therefore, because the *B* term in '$(E\&B) \rightarrow P$' has been shunted out: the *B* term is employed via CSE *to bring* evidence *E* before the mind, and so *contra* Rhoda, the mechanic need not hold *B*&*E* simultaneously before the mind to 'see' that *P* is probable.

I supported this "shunting" maneuver philosophically in section 2. There and here I retain the justificatory structure of the PIJ (as Fumerton construes it), but only elaborate from cognitive psychology what it means to be acquainted with complex evidence *E*, or to "hold *E* before the mind" when making inferences. Still, some readers may want additional reason to believe that my interpretation of CSE has anything to do with cognitive theory about our knowledge structures; the CSE may at this point appear too disconnected from *epistemology*. To meet this objection, I attempt in the next section to support my tacit assumptions (1) *that* we type-conceptualize[48] the evidence with which we are acquainted, and (2) that such conceptualization proceeds by way of CSE or something like it.[49]

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[45] Rehder, "Concepts as Causal Models," 361.

[46] Ahn, "Why are Different Features Central."

[47] By "cognitive system" I mean mind, body, brain, or whatever unobjectionable machinery undergirds human knowledge and consciousness.

[48] I treat "type-conceptualize" and "type-categorize" as equivalent terms.

[49] Most of my data supporting (1) and (2) comes from psychological studies of memory about the

4. Type-categorizations in Human Psychology

My task in this section is to redeem claim (1) of the previous paragraph, that when we wrack our memories to ascertain whether we performed an *x*-type action, we first retrieve a *concept* of *x*-type actions as a template to guide our search. To recall without looking at my cards whether I drew a suited ace-five of clubs, for example, I have to first conceptualize the generic act of 'drawing an ace-five,' an act which can be executed 16 different ways. If it can be shown that we type-conceptualize the objects of our acquaintance, then claim (2) of the previous paragraph can also be profitably investigated: that the CSE modulates conceptualization by something like Rhoda's background beliefs *B*. Perhaps the reader will object that the action of drawing a hand of cards differs from the passive apprehension of the fact that I am holding that hand, or from passively hearing an engine noise in the example of Rhoda's mechanic. My cognitive psychology data focuses on actions, so I ignore this discrepancy (see footnote 49).[50]

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actions we undertake, and perhaps my conflating knowledge with memory is objectionable (Akira R. O'Connor, Chris J. A. Moulin, and Gillian Cohen, "Memory and Consciousness," in *Memory in the Real World*, 3rd edition, eds. Gillian Cohen and Martin A. Conway (New York: Psychology Press, 2008): 344 ff.). For present purposes I downplay this concern, because theorists routinely structure conceptual knowledge and memory in a relation of correspondence: "[R]ecognizing an event as an instance of a category consists of matching it to a schema stored in memory" (Jeffrey M. Zacks and Barbara Tversky, "Event Structure in Perception and Conception," *Psychological Bulletin* 127, no. 1 (2001): 13, https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.1.3). See also Johannes Engelkamp, *Memory for Actions* (East Sussex: Psychology Press Ltd., 1998): "free recall starts in the conceptual system" (136). Cf. Koen Lamberts, "Process Models of Categorization," in *Knowledge, Concepts, and Categories*, eds. Koen Lamberts and David Shanks (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997): 371-373 ff. On the philosophical side, Fumerton applies the PIJ to overcome memory skepticism (*Metaepistemology*, 34-36 ff.; "Epistemic Probability," 160), so my appeal to psychological data on memory seems apropos.

[50] One frustration I will be unable to shake in this paper is that while my cognitive psychological data focuses on actions, several key studies of the CSE do not (Ahn, "Why are Different Features Central"; Ahn et al., "Causal Status as a Determinant"; Rehder and Hastie, "Causal Knowledge"; Christian C. Luhmann, Woo-kyoungAhn, and Thomas J. Palmeri, "Theory-Based Categorization under Speeded Conditions," *Memory and Cognition* 34, no. 5 (2006): 1102-1111, https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03193256). Hence I attempt in this section to show that the CSE plausibly pertains to the categorization of human actions, with the overarching goal of suggesting that we type-conceptualize *many kinds* of propositions with which we are acquainted, by something like the CSE.

4.1 The Type-categorization of Action: Galambos and Rips

Within the cognitive psychology literature, James A. Galambos and Lance J. Rips analyze action categorization by measuring subjective rankings of sequence and centrality for the episodes ("Take off hubcap," "Unscrew the lugs," "Put away jack") comprising a routine ("Changing a flat").[51] They find that the subjective rankings of sequence and centrality are "not strongly correlated,"[52] and that the time needed for subjects to categorize a given episode into a familiar routine is a statistically significant function of centrality, but not of "sequence nor the interaction of sequence and centrality..."[53] Thus an important question for my paper is how "centrality" relates to the background beliefs *B* that Rhoda finds to condition our perception of PRs. For if centrality is a background belief *B* employed in inferences, such as, '*that pitch* of the engine noise is *central* to classifying it as type-*E* evidence,' then I would have in the data of Galambos and Rips an example of *B*-beliefs transpiring *before* and independently of Rhoda's alleged '(*E*&*B*) → *P*' inference (see section 2). Recall that according to my thesis, cognizing *B* before '(*E*&*B*) → *P*' allows the PR between *E* and *P* alone to stand perspicuous to Fumertonian acquaintance. I hypothesize, then, that Galambos and Rips's conclusion about the action-categorizing feature of centrality anticipates the more general findings of contemporary CSE research: that *causal* features categorize objects of awareness.

Fortuitously for me, Galambos and Rips take up just such a hypothesis. They investigate, for example, whether the statistically significant "centrality" more strongly connotes either the sufficiency or the necessity of an episode's membership in a routine. Because the relations of sufficiency and necessity feature prominently in both commonsensical and philosophical notions of causality,[54] my assumption of the previous paragraph that centrality could stand-in for causality appears on-target.

Galambos and Rips's results, however, are mixed. In a subjective ranking test, they measure necessity but not sufficiency to correlate to centrality,[55] but in timed categorization trials, they report that "[t]aken together," sufficiency and

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[51] James A. Galambos and Lance J. Rips, "Memory for Routines," *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 21 (1982): 265, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-5371(82)90604-1. Each routine employed in the study contains twelve episodes.

[52] Galambos and Rips, "Memory for Routines," 266.

[53] Galambos and Rips, "Memory for Routines," 268.

[54] Ned Hall, "Philosophy of Causation: Blind Alleys Exposed; Promising Directions Highlighted," *Philosophy Compass* 1, no. 1 (2006): 86-94, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2006.00002.x.

[55] Galambos and Rips, "Memory for Routines," 269-270.

necessity "account for 65% of the variance in reaction times..."[56] Thus Galambos and Rips conclude that sufficiency and necessity are "not... the whole story behind centrality..."[57] For my purposes, however, 65% seems to be enough. All I need to argue is that actions are categorized by type, and that this categorization proceeds by something like causal features, to assume that the CSE modulates action categorization.[58] To argue, in turn, that Rhoda's background beliefs *B* include these type-categorizing causal features is the philosopher's job. That hurdle is, however, a small one, since Rhoda gives no rigorous account of which beliefs are background, other than that they conditionalize the belief of which an agent happens to be conscious.

I propose that one way to condition the belief of which I am conscious (of which I have acquaintance) is to *impel* my consciousness of it. Galambos and Rips report, for example, that cognizing the most central (i.e. causal) routines of "Changing a flat," such as "Raise the car," brings to human consciousness the 'Change-a-flat' action concept faster than does cognizing less central routines like "Put away jack."[59] Thus against Rhoda's charge that I must "hold before awareness" too many beliefs to see necessary connections between propositions, I can deny that when I am acquainted with the 'Change-a-flat' action type, I am simultaneously acquainted with the fact that the car is raised.[60] The latter belief instead sometimes causes my acquaintance with a 'Change-a-flat' action in progress,[61] and from this complex evidence *E* ("someone is changing a flat"), I might see a PR to the conclusion that "someone is sweating." Thus as I interpret Galambos and Rips, something like the CSE obtains in action categorization. In section 4.2, I relate these type-categorizations to knowledge structures, to strengthen the applicability of my cognitive psychological findings to epistemology.

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[56] Galambos and Rips, "Memory for Routines," 270.

[57] *Ibid*.

[58] Of course, only an empirical test would show that we categorize actions by the CSE.

[59] Galambos and Rips, "Memory for Routines," 265, 268.

[60] As Fumerton warns, disputing with another the veracity of their reports about the objects of their acquaintance is a fool's errand (*Metaepistemology*, 76).

[61] Just as a certain pitch (*B*) of engine rattle may bring Rhoda's mechanic to acquaintance with the kind of *E* that makes probable *P*.

4.2 Remembering Cause-categorized Types of Actions and Events

Although I lack data for the causal status effect with respect to categorizing *actions* like changing a tire,[62] some researchers appear to suggest that our mental protocols are primed to exhibit such an effect in memory. To analyze this research, I must first sophisticate the vocabulary I have been using for human actions. I follow Brian J. Reiser, John B. Black, and Robert P. Abelson in distinguishing activities (e.g. *Eating in Restaurants*) from more generic actions (e.g. *pay the bill*),[63] actions being routines that we execute within various kinds of activities. Reiser, Black, and Abelson construct this taxonomy by measuring the time required for test subjects to recall an autobiographical memory described by activity and action cue words. Subjects recall memories faster when presented with activity cues, than with activity and action cues, both types of presentation yielding faster recall than that yielded by action cues alone.[64] Presenting activity cues before action cues also results in faster retrieval than the *vice versa* presentation.[65]

Of interest to my thesis is Reiser, Black, and Abelson's identification of "knowledge structure[s]" of the human mind, in which activity concepts reside:

> [T]he memory structure, *Eating in Restaurants* contains generalizations necessary for determining what actions to perform in restaurants... Accessing this knowledge structure while actually visiting restaurants results in the memory representations of particular restaurant experiences becoming associated with that structure in memory... *Thus individual experiences become linked to knowledge structures containing generalizations used in... comprehension.*[66]

Helpful from this passage is the "link" between one's "comprehension" of *x*-type activities as *x*-type, and a knowledge structure representing that *x*-type concept (*Eating in Restaurants*). This link supports claim (1) from section 3, that humans do cognize type-level action and activity concepts like 'drawing an ace-five' or 'replacing a piston rod.' And given this additional support that we conceptualize the objects of our conscious awareness (and acquaintance) by type, we may consider whether these type-concepts are retrieved according to their causal features (background beliefs *B*).

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[62] I mean the CSE proper, not Galambos and Rips's intimations of it.

[63] Brian J. Reiser, John B. Black, and Robert P. Abelson, "Knowledge Structures in the Organization and Retrieval of Autobiographical Memories," *Cognitive Psychology* 17 (1985): 98, https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(85)90005-2.

[64] Reiser, Black, and Abelson, "Knowledge Structures," 118.

[65] Reiser, Black, and Abelson, "Knowledge Structures," 107.

[66] Reiser, Black, and Abelson, "Knowledge Structures," 92; the emphasis on the final sentence is mine.

Interestingly, Reiser, Black, and Abelson endorse just such a theory. They claim that an agent's endeavor *to locate* the knowledge structure serving as the activity concept of a sought-after memory "is guided by reasoning mechanisms that utilize social knowledge about the *causes*... of behavior in order to predict circumstances likely to result in the target event."[67] For example, in the attempt to recall an *Eating at Restaurants* event that featured the outcome "*didn't get what you wanted*," a test subject denied remembering any such event, but in the process verbalized his search among what Reiser, Black, and Abelson call his "'hectic' restaurant experiences, presumably because this type of situation might result in not getting what was wanted."[68] Reiser, Black, and Abelson's point is that the "reformulation" of the activity concept directing the subject's search (from '*Eating...*' to '*Hectic dining*') "relies on *causal knowledge* represented in *Eating in Restaurants*..."[69] They conclude that activities, in contrast to generic actions, are what contain the "causal rules" employed "in comprehension and in directing [the] autobiographical retrieval" of individual actions and activities.[70] This modulation of action conceptualization by causal knowledge appears to support my thesis (2) of section 3.

Thus some psychological research suggests that we cognize the *E* and *P* of inferential internalism in terms of type-concepts, and that such conceptualization is directed (*viz*. modulated) by some of the *causal* beliefs that Rhoda calls *B* in his '$(E\&B) \rightarrow P$' necessary inference. If the function of *B*-beliefs terminates *before* acquaintance with a PR is had, then Keynesian-Fumertonian acquaintance with necessary probable relations between *E* and *P* remains plausible (*contra* Rhoda). In my view, Reiser, Black, and Abelson support my thesis that an agent need not perceive whatever *B*-belief makes a restaurant memory "hectic," *while being acquainted* with the "hectic dining" activity concept. The *B*-belief instead guides the agent to acquaintance with a sought concept (*hectic dining*) from which she may perceive PRs to "probable" conclusions like "stood a long time in the lobby." Reiser, Black, and Abelson anticipate the CSE or something like it in the organization of human memory, and this organization enhances the plausibility of inferential internalism by my arguments already rehearsed.

4.3 Objections

[67] Reiser, Black, and Abelson, "Knowledge Structures," 93-94, emphasis mine.

[68] Reiser, Black, and Abelson, "Knowledge Structures," 94.

[69] Reiser, Black, and Abelson, "Knowledge Structures," 94. The emphasis on "causal knowledge" in this quote is mine.

[70] Reiser, Black, and Abelson, "Knowledge Structures," 126.

From a cognitive psychological perspective, someone might object that my evidence is not ironclad. M. A. Conway and D. A. Bekerian, for example, report an inability to replicate the findings of Reiser, Black, and Abelson with respect to action and activity cues,[71] although as Conway and Bekerian admit, the cue presentation times differed considerably between their experiment and Reiser, Black, and Abelson's.[72] Conway and Bekerian instead find a "highly significant effect" of priming the human test subjects in recall measurements with "personal cues," particularly "lifetime periods" (e.g. *sixth grade*) [73] solicited from test subjects prior to the experiment.[74] Conway and Bekerian surmise that Reiser, Black, and Abelson's subjects could have been surreptitiously categorizing recalled activities from lifetime periods, when those subjects demonstrated faster recall times for activities than for actions.[75]

Another objection to my thesis is that the CSE is not settled science. Rehder reports that "the causal status effect can be overturned when an effect is generated by multiple causes,"[76] and can even disappear when "'tends to'" language in the stipulated causal relation experiments (X tends to Y) is replaced by "'always'" language (X always Ys).[77] Open questions also remain about the existence of the effect in children.[78]

For my epistemological purposes, however, I do not need perfectly confirmed laws of cognitive psychology to undermine Rhoda's skepticism about the plausibility of perceiving necessary relations (PRs) between propositions. I did not even need to appeal to the CSE and its apparent predecessors as I did. I could have appealed instead to the "semantic congruity effect," whereby humans judge, for example, the differential largeness of large animals ("elephant versus hippopotamus") faster than they judge the differential largeness of small animals ("hamster versus gerbil…").[79] Differential largeness just is the larger-than internal relation, a member of the class of relations (including PRs) that Fumerton finds

[71] M. A. Conway and D. A. Bekerian, "Organization in Autobiographical Memory," *Memory & Cognition* 15, 2 (1987): 124, https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03197023.
[72] Conway and Bekerian, "Organization," 127.
[73] Conway and Bekerian, "Organization," 125.
[74] Conway and Bekerian, "Organization," 123.
[75] Conway and Bekerian, "Organization," 127.
[76] Rehder, "Concepts," 363.
[77] Rehder, "Concepts," 364.
[78] Rehder, "Concepts," 366. See also Brett K. Hayes and Bob Rehder, "The Development of Causal Categorization," *Cognitive Science* 36 (2012): 1102–1128.
[79] Linda B. Smith and Larissa K. Samuelson, "Perceiving and Remembering: Category Stability, Variability, and Development," in *Knowledge, Concepts, and Categories*, 179.

humanly perceptible in principle (section 3). Why do humans subconsciously exhibit the semantic congruity effect? *Pace* Rhoda, ostensibly *not* because humans hold more beliefs consciously "before their minds" when they see hamsters than when they see elephants. Perhaps instead, background beliefs *B1* facilitate acquaintance with the concept of a "large elephant," and different beliefs *B2* direct the search for the comparatively rarer concept, "large hamster." The point is that Rhoda rejects inferential internalism, partly because he thinks that the PRs obtaining between complex evidence *E* and conclusion *P* are "contingent, and therefore not internal. Instead, they are external relations grounded in background beliefs by virtue of the *content* of those beliefs."[80] This paper challenges Rhoda's claim by arguing that the CSE (or something like it) allows the PR between *E* and *P* to be internal and necessary *a priori*. The CSE subconsciously shunts the "content" of background beliefs *B* into the very formation and retrieval of the *E*-concept with which the inferential internalist is acquainted.

5. Conclusion

My objective in this paper was to undermine Rhoda's skepticism about the plausibility of perceiving Keynesian-Fumertonian probable relations (PRs) between propositions. Such relations can be necessary, and yet perceptible in a single intuition (of acquaintance), I argue, because the background beliefs *B* which make salient the PR insight—that *E* makes probable *P*—themselves factor non-consciously in bringing complex fact *E* (or *P*) "before the mind." That *B*-beliefs play such a nonconscious role in acquaintance with complex facts, I support by appeal to the causal status effect (CSE), the empirical tendency of human agents to categorize the entities of which they are conscious by those entities' causal and effectual features. Rhoda provides no reason to doubt that *B*-beliefs could be such causal and effectual features. I additionally cited cognitive psychology literature to support my hypothesis that something like the CSE facilitates our memory recall and action recognition, enhancing the plausibility that inferential internalism justifies beliefs in those domains.[81]

[80] Rhoda, "Fumerton's Principle," 232, n. 28.

[81] The author thanks Brett Sherman and Michael Stoeltzner for feedback on previous drafts.

THE PROBLEM WITH TRUSTING UNFAMILIAR FACULTIES: ACCESSIBILISM DEFENDED

Jonathan EGELAND

ABSTRACT: According to accessibilism, there is an accessibility condition on justification. More specifically, accessibilism claims that facts about justification are *a priori* accessible—where *a priori* is used in the *traditional* sense that a condition is *a priori* just in case it doesn't depend on any of the sense modalities. The most prominent argument for accessibilism draws on BonJour and Lehrer's unfamiliar faculty scenarios. Recently, however, several objections have been raised against it. In this article, I defend the argument against three prominent objections from the recent literature.

KEYWORDS: epistemic internalism, accessibilism, clairvoyance, justification, Bergmann's dilemma

1. Accessibilism

Epistemic internalists claim that facts about justification in some special sense depend upon one's internal states. Traditionally, there are two different ways in which this idea has been developed. On the one hand, some internalists support mentalism; i.e., the view that facts about justification supervene upon one's non-factive mental states.[1] On the other hand, others support accessibilism or access internalism; i.e., the view that facts about justification always are *a priori* accessible (henceforth, I'll just use the term 'accessible')—where *a priori* is used in the traditional sense that a condition is *a priori* just in case it doesn't depend on any of

[1] Proponents of mentalism include John Pollock & Joseph Cruz, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, "Internalism Defended," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38, 1 (2001): 95-119; Ralph Wedgwood, "Internalism Explained," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65, 2 (2002): 349-369; Declan Smithies, "Mentalism and Epistemic Transparency," *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, 90, 4 (2012): 723-741; Kevin McCain, *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification* (Routledge, 2016); and Jonathan Egeland, "The Demon That Makes Us Go Mental: Mentalism Defended," *Philosophical Studies* 176, 12 (2019), 1-19.

the sense modalities.[2,3] This paper focuses on the latter of the two internalisms, namely accessibilism.

Accessibilism is often thought to receive support from intuitions about cases involving unfamiliar faculties, like clairvoyance. The general idea is that beliefs produced by unfamiliar faculties aren't justified, and that the best explanation for why that is so is that it must be possible for one to tell—at least in principle—what one's beliefs rationally have going for them, if they are justified. Recently, however, this kind of argument has come under heavy fire by proponents of epistemic externalism; i.e., the view that internalism is false. This paper will defend the argument above by responding to three different objections developed in the literature: one of which criticizes the internalist intuitions, and two that criticize the abductive inference that the argument employs. Doing this, the purpose of the paper is to demonstrate that the argument withstands recent externalist objections, and, consequently, that accessibilism remains as plausible as ever.

This is how the paper is structured. In section 2, I identify and answer core questions about what commitments the accessibilist should make, while also pointing to prominent, but implausible, versions of accessibilism in the literature. In section 3, I present a couple of well-known scenarios—Laurence Bonjour's clairvoyance case and Keith Lehrer's Truetemp case—and argue that the intuitions they elicit strongly support the accessibilist view endorsed in the previous section. In sections 4 to 6, I defend this argument against three objections recently developed in the literature. The first objection bites the bullet and says that the beliefs of the subjects in BonJour and Lehrer's scenarios actually are justified; the second says that there are alternative, externalist explanations of the intuitions elicited by the aforementioned scenarios that are more plausible than the one offered by the accessibilist; and the third is Michael Bergmann's dilemma, which is

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[2] Thus, the modes of *a priori* accessibility include not only reflection and reasoning, but also introspection and other cognitive mechanisms with an experiential aspect. For more on the distinction between narrow and broad notions of the *a priori*, see Albert Casullo, *A Priori Justification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[3] Proponents of accessibilism or access internalism include Laurence BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge* (Prentice-Hall Inc., 1989); Richard Fumerton, *Metaepistemology and Skepticism* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1995); Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Matthias Steup, "A Defense of Internalism," in *The Theory of Knowledge, Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Louis Pojman (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1999), 373-384; and Declan Smithies, "Moore's Paradox and the Accessibility of Justification," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85, 2 (2012): 273-300.

a *reductio* against accessibilism. Having responded to these objections, I summarize and conclude in section 7.

2. What Kind of Accessibilist Should You Be?

Before I present and defend the main argument, I want to spend a few pages on what commitments the accessibilist should make. This is important, not just because many internalists have defended implausible versions of the view, but also because many of the objections levelled against it only undermine those implausible versions of it. Let's therefore begin by taking a closer look at what commitments the accessibilist should make. My discussion will revolve around three core questions, the first of which is:

2.1 What Kind of Justification Is Accessible?

It is common to draw a distinction between two kinds of justification.[4] First, you can have justification to believe a certain proposition, regardless of whether or not you actually believe it. For example, after listening to a history lecture you can have justification to believe that the Viking Leif Erikson was the first European to discover North America, but without actually believing it. Second, you can also have justifiably held beliefs (or other doxastic attitudes). For example, if you come to believe the proposition above in a way that is properly based on that which gives you justification to believe it, then your belief is justifiably held. Following Roderick Firth,[5] we can say that the first kind of justification is justification in the *propositional* sense, whereas the second kind of justification is justification in the *doxastic* sense.[6] Given the above characterization of the distinction, it is clear that propositional justification is necessary, but not sufficient, for doxastic justification.

Now, which of these kinds of justification is accessible? Although I don't know of any internalist who thinks that one always has a special sort of access to facts about doxastic justification, it's not hard to see how such a view would go.

[4] Some even operate with three kinds of justification. See, e.g., Clayton Littlejohn, *Justification and the Truth-Connection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

[5] Roderick Firth, "Are Epistemic Concepts Reducible to Ethical Concepts?" in *Values and Morals*, eds. Alvin Goldman and Jaegwon Kim (Dordrecht: Kluwer), 215-229.

[6] Other epistemologists use different terminology to draw the same distinction. See, e.g., Alvin Goldman, "What Is Justified Belief," in *Justification and Knowledge*, ed. George Pappas (Boston: D. Reidel, 1979), 1-25; Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, "Evidentialism," *Philosophical Studies* 48, 1 (1985): 15-34; James Pryor, "There Is Immediate Justification," in *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, eds. Matthias Steup, John Turri, and Ernest Sosa (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 202-222; and Declan Smithies, *The Epistemic Role of Consciousness*,(Oxford University Press, 2019).

The internalist who advocates this kind of view thinks that facts about which beliefs one now justifiably holds somehow are within the subject's cognitive grasp. The problem, however, is that, according to the analysis above, doxastic justification is propositional justification plus proper basing,[7] and it is highly doubtful that one always has access to whether one satisfies the basing requirement. In other words, one has a justifiably held belief just in case (i) one has justification for holding that belief, and (ii) one holds it by properly basing it on that which gives one justification to hold it; but it is implausible that whether one satisfies the second condition is something that is accessibleto one.

In order to illustrate why the basing requirement, which converts propositional justification into doxastic justification if satisfied, isn't accessible, consider Jonathan Schaffer's[8] debasing demon. A debasing demon can make the beliefs one holds unjustified in the doxastic sense by undetectably changing the basis on which they are held, while still having it seem to the victim as if his beliefs are held on their proper justificatory basis: "[The debasing demon] throws her victims into the belief state on an improper basis, while leaving them with the impression *as if* they had proceeded properly."[9] The debasing demon is conjured by acceptance of the following claims:

1. Knowledge [and doxastic justification] requires the production of belief, properly based on the evidence.
2. Any belief can be produced on an improper basis.
3. It is always possible, when a belief is produced on an improper basis, for it to seem later as if one had produced a belief properly based on the evidence.[10]

Moreover, as Schaffer points out, there are strong reasons for accepting each of the claims. The first is accepted by almost all contemporary epistemologists; the second is motivated by the idea that any belief can be held in an evidentially insensitive manner on the basis of, say, wishful thinking, blind guesses, or random hunches; and the third is supported by the idea that our awareness of one's past mental processes is fallible. Taken together, it follows from these claims that the basing

[7] John Turri, "On the Relationship between Propositional and Doxastic Justification," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 80, 2 (2010): 312-326, provides counterexamples to the analysis. Declan Smithies, "Ideal Rationality and Logical Omniscience," *Synthese* 192, 9 (2015), 2769-2793, responds that we simply can define proper basing as whatever turns propositional justification into doxastic justification. Thus, "immunity from counterexample may be gained at the cost of reduction." (*Ibid.*, footnote 19.)

[8] Jonathan Schaffer, "The Debasing Demon," *Analysis* 70, 2 (2010): 228-237.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.,* 232.

relation isn't accessible: it is possible that there is a demon that debases one's beliefs, but while still having it seem as if they are properly based on one's evidence.[11,12] Hence, accessibilism should be formulated as a thesis about propositional justification, rather than doxastic justification.[13]

2.2 What Does Having Access to Facts About Justification More Specifically Require?

Let's define the *justification facts* as the facts about which doxastic attitudes one now has propositional justification (to a certain degree) to hold. Plausibly, one has access to the justification facts only if one has access to (facts about) one's *justifiers*[14]; i.e., to whatever confers justification upon the doxastic attitudes one now has justification to hold. Indeed, it is (at least in part) in virtue of one's access

[11] According to Patrick Bondy and Adam Carter, "The Basing Relation and the Impossibility of the Debasing Demon," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 55, 3 (forthcoming): 203-216, Schaffer's argument fails since the debasing scenario isn't possible. Beginning from the assumption that it is possible, they try to establish their conclusion by *reductio*. They do this by showing how the scenario is inconsistent with the most prominent analyses of the basing relation in the literature. However, a problem with their objection is that Schaffer's argument isn't committed to any of those analyses. Indeed, since all of them are subject to counterexamples (as Bondy and Carter rightfully point out), there are good reasons for why he shouldn't be committed to any of them. Instead, insofar as we have a good *intuitive* grasp of the basing relation, Schaffer can theorize about it without being committed to any particular analysis of the notion.

[12] Another worry about Schaffer's argument is that it doesn't apply to doxastic theories of the basing relation, according to which having a meta-belief B2 to the effect that that one has a reason *r* supporting one's belief B1 is sufficient for B1 to be based on *r* (see, e.g., Adam Leite, "Believing One's Reasons Are Good," *Synthese* 161*,* 3 (2008): 419-441). However, I do not think that this kind of doxastic theory about the basing relation is successful. For example, it appears to be possible to have the relevant meta-belief B2, but without the belief B1 satisfying the basing requirement. For a counterexample along these lines, see Keith Korcz, "The Epistemic Basing Relation", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta (2015): https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/basing-epistemic/ [Downloaded: 12.01.2019.].

[13] Henceforth, I will therefore only focus on propositional justification (as does the argument that is presented in the next section). However, I suspect that it won't always be possible to clearly differentiate talk about the various types of justification without additional commentary.

[14] Whether accessibilism should be analyzed in terms of one's access to one's justifiers or in terms of one's access to true propositions/facts about one's justifiers (e.g., facts to the effect that one now is/isn't in possession of a certain justifier J) is an issue that I won't go further into here. So even though many of the formulations in this article appear to favor the first alternative, this is simply for the sake of convenience and shouldn't be seen as committal with respect to the issue at hand.

to one's justifiers that the justification facts are accessible. This has led many epistemologists, internalists and externalists alike, to formulate accessibilism (or internalism more generally) as a thesis about one's access to one's justifiers. Here are a few examples:

> The basic thrust of internalism in epistemology, therefore, is that the properties that confer warrant upon a belief are properties to which the believer has some special sort of epistemic access.[15]
>
> What we shall call "accessibilism" holds that the epistemic justification of a person's belief is determined by things to which the person has some special sort of access.[16]
>
> What all forms of internalism have in common is that they require, for a belief's justification, that the person holding the belief be aware (or at least potentially aware) of something contributing to its justification. . . I shall take the following to be the canonical formulation of this requirement: *The Awareness Requirement*: S's belief B is justified only if (i) there is something, X, that contributes to the justification of B—e.g., evidence for B or a truth-indicator for B or the satisfaction of some necessary condition of B's justification—and (ii) S is aware (or potentially aware) of X.[17]

However, a problem with these formulations is that having access to one's justifiers is only a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for having access to the justification facts. They therefore fail to capture the sort of accessibility that internalism requires. By way of illustration, consider someone—let's call him Johnny—who has justification for believing that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland. The reason Johnny has justification for believing that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland is that he has a memory belief to the effect that a trustworthy geography teacher told him so (this is his justifier). Moreover, let's say that Johnny has access to his memory belief, but not to the fact that it supports believing the proposition above. From Johnny's first person perspective, his memory belief that a trustworthy geography teacher told him that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland has no bearing whatsoever on the belief that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland. Now, it is clear that Johnny's access to his memory belief isn't sufficient for the kind of accessibility that internalism demands; i.e., access to the justification facts.[18] The reason is simply that, from his subjective perspective, there's nothing supporting

[15] Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6.
[16] Conee & Feldman, *Internalism Defended*, 2.
[17] Michael Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.
[18] Consequently, according to internalism, Johnny's doesn't have justification for believing that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland.

the proposition that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland (not even his memory belief does). Indeed, the weaker access requirement satisfied by Johnny and suggested in the formulations above is captured by William Alston's externalist position—which he calls *internalist externalism*—according to which one's justifiers are accessible, but the facts in virtue of which they confer justification (which Alston takes to be facts about reliability, understood in terms of objective probability) are not.[19]

In order to remedy this problem, we should instead say that the justification facts are accessible if and only if *both* one's justifiers *and* the facts about which doxastic attitudes they support (and the degree to which they support them) are accessible. This will rule out that someone like Johnny can have justification for holding a certain belief, but without being in a position to tell what that belief rationally has going for it. Thus, accessibilism can be formulated as the thesis that the justification facts are accessible, or, alternatively, as the thesis that one's justifiers and the facts about justificatory support (i.e., which doxastic attitudes one's justifiers support, and to what degree) are accessible.

2.3 How Are the Justification Facts Accessible?

Lastly, let's consider what kind of access we have to the justification facts. Generally speaking, there are two ways in which the accessibility in question has been understood. First, some internalists argue that the justification facts, in some special sense, are *psychologically* accessible. For example, according to BonJour[20], one has justification to believe that *p* only if one has a (justified) higher-order belief to the effect that one has justification to believe that *p*. As he says in his argument against foundationalism, a belief B is justified only if there is an argument of the following form:

> (1) B has feature Φ.
>
> (2) Beliefs having feature Φ are highly likely to be true.
>
> (3) Therefore, B is highly likely to be true.
>
> [And] in order for B to be justified for a particular person A (at a particular time), it is necessary, not merely that a justification along the above lines exist in the abstract, but also that A himself be in cognitive possession of that justification, that is, that he believe the appropriate premises of forms (1) and (2) and that these

[19] William Alston, *Epistemic Justification* (Cornell University Press, 1989). Kathrin Glüer and Åsa Wikforss, "Reasons for Belief and Normativity," in *Oxford Handbook on Reasons and Normativity,* ed. Daniel Star (Oxford University Press, 2018), also endorse this view.

[20] BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge.*

> beliefs be justified for him.[21]

Similarly, according to Roderick Chisholm,[22] one has justification to believe that *p* only if one is *able* to know, in virtue of reflection alone, that one has justification to believe that *p*. This is how he puts the point.

> The internalist assumes that, merely by reflecting upon his own conscious state, he can formulate a set of epistemic principles that will enable him to find out, with respect to any possible belief he has, whether he is *justified* in having that belief.[23]

However, proponents of the psychological accessibility of justification face a couple of problems. First, they face a regress problem insofar as one has justification for a first-order belief only if one has (the ability to form) a second-order belief to the effect that one has justification for one's first-order belief, and one has justification for this second-order belief only if one has (the ability to form) a third-order belief to the effect that one has justification for one's second order belief, and so on *ad infinitum*. But since no human is able to have such and infinite stock of higher-order beliefs of ever-increasing complexity, it follows that no human has justification for their first-order beliefs, and this is clearly absurd.[24]

Second, they also face an over-intellectualization problem insofar as there are unreflective creatures (e.g., children, non-human animals, or the mentally disabled) who seem to have justification to hold certain beliefs, even though they don't have the reflective or conceptual abilities to form higher-order beliefs about which lower-order beliefs they have justification to hold. Thus, the view that the justification facts are psychologically accessible again has counterintuitive consequences.[25]

For these reasons, I think we should explore the other way in which the notion of "access" has been understood.[26] On this view, the accessibility in question

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[21] *Ibid.*, 31.

[22] Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*.

[23] *Ibid.*, 76.

[24] Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, ch.8; Fumerton, *Metaepistemology and Skepticism*, ch. 3. Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness*, ch. 1; and Hilary Kornblith, *On Reflection* (Oxford University Press, 2012), ch.1, to mention just a few, argue that internalism faces regress problems.

[25] The over-intellectualization problem is raised by Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Alston, *Epistemic Justification*; and Richard Feldman, "Respecting the Evidence," *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005): 95-119.

[26] There are, of course, other internalists who define the relevant kind of accessibility in psychological terms, but who do so in a much weaker sense that avoids the problems above (see, e.g., Fumerton, "Respecting the Evidence"). However, a problem with views of this kind is that

is understood in *epistemic* terms, but in a way that doesn't presuppose anything about one's psychological abilities or states. For example, according to Declan Smithies,[27] one has justification to believe that *p* only if one has justification to believe that one has justification to believe that *p.* This idea is captured by the following iteration principle:

> The JJ Principle: Jp → JJp.[28]

Similarly, Maria Lasonen-Aarnio[29] claims that internalism (which she opposes) should be understood as the view that a necessary condition for having (first-order) justification to hold a certain doxastic attitude is that one has higher-order justification to believe that one does.

A natural way of putting more meat on these bones is as follows. Whenever you have (first-order) justification to hold a certain doxastic attitude—let's just say a belief—toward proposition *p*, you also have (higher-order) justification to believe that you do. This higher-order justification is provided by one's faculty of introspection and one's faculty of reflection. You thus have higher-order introspective and reflective justification to believe that you have the lower-order justification that you in fact do have. By way of example, let's say that you have a piece of evidence (e.g., a certain visual experience) *e* that gives you justification to believe that there is a chessboard in front of you. Now, according to the proposal at hand, a necessary condition for having any evidence is that you have introspective justification to believe that you do have that evidence: $e \rightarrow Je$. Moreover, another necessary condition on *e* is that you have reflective justification to believe that it supports the proposition(s) *p* it in fact does support: $e_{sup}p \rightarrow Je_{sup}p$. Also, having introspective justification to believe that you have evidence *e* and reflective justification to believe that *e* supports *p* is sufficient for having (higher-order)

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they aren't really supported by the considerations that motivate accessibilism in first place. For a larger discussion of this issue, see Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness*, ch. 2.

[27] Smithies, "Moore's Paradox and the Accessibility of Justification".

[28] Smithies calls it *The Positive Self-Intimation Thesis*. Moreover, he actually supports principles that are a lot stronger than this. More specifically, he thinks propositional justification has the following structure:

> **"The Accessibility Thesis:**
> **Positive:** one has justification to believe that *p* iff one has justification to believe that one has justification to believe that *p* ($Jp \leftrightarrow JJp$).
> **Negative:** one lacks justification to believe that *p* iff one has justification to believe that one lacks justification to believe that *p* ($\sim Jp \leftrightarrow J\sim Jp$)." (Smithies, "Moore's Paradox and the Accessibility of Justification", 273.)

[29] Maria Lasonen-Aarnio, "Higher-Order Evidence and the Limits of Defeat," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 88, 2 (2014): 314-345.

justification to believe that you have (first-order) justification to believe that *p*: (J*e* ∧ J$e_{sup}p$) → JJ*p*. Thus, if you have (first-order) justification to believe that there is a chessboard in front of you, then you have (higher-order) introspective and reflective justification to believe that you do.[30, 31]

Now, notice how this kind of view doesn't tell us anything about our psychology. For example, in order to have justification to believe a certain proposition, it doesn't require that we actually believe (or have any other attitude or mental state toward the fact) that we do. Thus, the vicious regress problem[32] and the over-intellectualization problem are avoided. This way, proponents of the epistemic accessibility of justification have a way of conceptualizing the relevant kind of accessibility, but without falling prey to common externalist objections. Moreover, I do not doubt that there are other plausible ways for the proponent of this kind of position to understand the accessibility in question. However, for present purposes, when it comes to how the justification facts are accessible, I will take the accessibilist to be committed to something like the JJ principle.

In sum, these are the core commitments that the accessibilist should make. First, he should claim that facts about propositional, and not doxastic, justification

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[30] There are of course other ways of fleshing out the JJ principle, but I think this is a plausible first proposal. A similar suggestion is hinted at (but not endorsed) by Nico Silins, "The Evil Demon Inside," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (forthcoming), and developed and argued for in great detail by Smithies, *The Epistemic Role of Consciousness*.

[31] Having discussed the JJ principle with colleagues, I have found that some of them feel that it somehow is too weak to capture the kind of accessibility that the internalist is (or should be) interested in. In response to this kind of worry, I simply want to point out that there isn't any general agreement among internalists about what the relevant kind of access involves. Rather, the idea is that reflection on certain kinds of cases (what I'm in this paper calling unfamiliar faculty cases) supports the idea that facts about justification are *a priori* accessible in some sense or other, and that the internalist should figure out how to spell out this access condition. That being said, the JJ principle seems like a perfectly fine proposal.

[32] It still generates an infinite regress insofar as having first-order justification to hold a certain doxastic attitude ultimately requires an infinite regress of higher-order justifications to believe that one has the lower-order justifications. However, as Smithies, "Moore's Paradox and the Accessibility of Justification," 277, points out, since this is a regress *propositional* justifications—in order to have first-order justification for a doxastic attitude it is not required that one actually believe any of these higher-order propositions—it is benign. Indeed, having such a stock of infinite (higher-order) justifications doesn't seem any more problematic than it is for someone who has justification to believe that *p* to also have justification to believe that $p \vee q$, justification to believe that $p \vee r$, and so on. Moreover, neither case of infinite justifications seems to require that the agent must be *able* to form the relevant beliefs. After all, the disjunctive propositions just mentioned may be too many or too large for any finite mind with finite computational capacity to believe.

are accessible. Second, he should claim that the justification facts are accessible just in case both one's justifiers *and* the facts about justificatory support are accessible. Third, he should claim that the justification facts are epistemically, and not psychologically, accessible. Taken together, this enables us to formulate the following plausible position, which avoids many of the traditional problems that have plagued the internalist:

> *Accessibilism*: necessarily, one always has propositional justification to believe the justification facts (or, alternatively, what one's justifiers are and how they support the doxastic attitudes they do).

3. The Argument from Unfamiliar Faculties

According to simple process reliabilism, like that of the early Alvin Goldman,[33] the justification facts are a function of the reliability of one's doxastic dispositions. However, by now, many counterexamples to this analysis are on the table. The counterexamples usually either demonstrate that reliability isn't necessary for justification or that it isn't sufficient for justification.[34] One of the most famous counterexamples to the sufficiency claim is provided by BonJour and goes as follows:

> *Clairvoyance*
>
> Norman, under certain conditions which usually obtain, is a completely reliable clairvoyant with respect to certain kinds of subject matter. He possesses no evidence or reasons of any kind for or against the general possibility of such a cognitive power or for or against the thesis that he possesses it. One day Norman comes to believe that the President is in New York City, though he has no evidence either for or against this belief. In fact the belief is true and results from his clairvoyant power under circumstances in which it is completely reliable.[35]

Now, according to simple process reliabilism, since Norman's belief about the President's whereabouts is reliably produced (and there are no undefeated defeaters), it is justified. However, intuitively, the reliabilist verdict is clearly wrong; Norman's belief doesn't seem any more justified than a random hunch. Hence, simple process reliabilism is wrong.

Consider now another counterexample provided by Lehrer:

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[33] Alvin Goldman, "What is Justified Belief," In *Justification and Knowledge,* ed. George Pappas (Boston: D. Reidel, 1979), 1-25.

[34] The most famous counterexample to the necessity claim is provided by Keith Lehrer and Stewart Cohen, "Justification, Truth, and Coherence," *Synthese* 55, 2 (1983): 191-207.

[35] BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, 41; Cf. Laurence BonJour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, 1 (1980): 53-73.

> *Truetemp*
>
> Suppose a person, whom we shall call Mr. Truetemp, undergoes brain surgery by an experimental surgeon who invents a small device which is both a very accurate thermometer and a computational device capable of generating thoughts. The device, call it tempucomp, is implanted in Truetemp's head... and acts as a sensor to transmit information about the temperature to the computational system in his brain... Assume that the tempucomp is very reliable, and so his thoughts are correct temperature thoughts... Now imagine, finally, that he... accepts [these thoughts] unreflectively, another effect of the tempucomp. Thus, he thinks and accepts that the temperature is 104 degrees. It is.[36]

Once again, simple process reliabilism tells us that Truetemp's belief about the temperature is justified, since it is reliably produced (and there are no undefeated defeaters). However, just as with Norman, this seems to be the wrong verdict: intuitively, Truetemp's belief is clearly not justified. Hence, simple process reliabilism is wrong.

Moreover, when diagnosing where exactly simple process reliabilism goes wrong, BonJour and Lehrer provide the resources necessary for formulating an argument, based on the intuitions elicited by the scenarios above, for accessibilism. The argument makes use of the fact that the beliefs of the subjects in the scenarios above are produced by what we may call an *unfamiliar faculty*;[37] i.e., a faculty for belief production which a subject has, but without any awareness of the fact that he has it or of why beliefs produced by that faculty should be true. Consider the following passage, where BonJour offers his diagnosis:

> One reason why externalism may seem initially plausible is that if the external relation in question genuinely obtains [i.e., the reliable relation between one's belief and the truth], then Norman will in fact not go wrong in accepting the belief, and it is, *in a sense*, not an accident that this is so: it would not be an accident from the standpoint of our hypothetical observer who knows all the relevant facts and laws. But how is this supposed to justify Norman's belief? From his subjective perspective it is an accident that the belief is true. And the suggestion here is that the rationality of justifiability of Norman's belief should be judged from Norman's own perspective rather than from one which is unavailable to him.[38]

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[36] Keith Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge* (Routledge, 1990), 163-164.

[37] The term is borrowed from Andrew Moon, "How to Use Cognitive Faculties You Never Knew You Had," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 99, 1 (2018): 251-275.

[38] BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, 43-44; Cf. Laurence BonJour and Ernest Sosa, *Epistemic Justification: Internalism vs. Externalism, Foundations vs. Virtues* (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 32: '[Norman is] being epistemically irrational and irresponsible in accepting beliefs whose provenance can only be a total mystery to [him], whose status is as far as [he] can

Similarly, Lehrer writes:

> Though he [i.e., Truetemp] records the information because of the operations of the tempucomp, he is ignorant of the facts about the tempucomp and about his temperature telling reliability. Yet, the sort of causal, nomological, statistical, or counterfactual relationships required by externalism may all be present. Does he know [or have justification to believe] that the temperature is 104 degrees when the thought occurs to him while strolling in Pima Canyon? He has no idea why the thought occurred to him or that such thoughts are almost always correct. He does not, consequently, know [or have justification to believe] that the temperature is 104 degrees when that thought occurs to him.[39]

What BonJour and Lehrer here tell us is that simple process reliabilism (and other forms of externalism) cannot be correct since it counts reliably produced beliefs that are wholly arbitrary or unsupported from the subject's first person perspective as justified. However, as the Clairvoyance and Truetemp scenarios above indicate, a subject can only have justification for a certain belief if it *isn't* an accident from his perspective why that belief should be true. In other words, beliefs produced by unfamiliar faculties cannot be justified since the truth of those beliefs would be completely accidental to the subject who has them. Indeed, according to the internalist, the most plausible explanation for the intuitions elicited by the cases above—namely, that Norman and Truetemp's beliefs are unjustified—is that one must always have a special sort of access to the justificatory status of one's doxastic attitudes, if they are justified.[40] By abductive reasoning, we can therefore conclude from these intuitions that accessibilism is true.

Recently, the argument from unfamiliar faculties for accessibilism has been heavily criticized. In the next three sections, I will respond to three different ways in which the argument above has been challenged. Doing this, the goal is to demonstrate that the argument withstands recent externalist objections, and that its conclusion remains as plausible as ever.

4. The Bullet-Biting Response

Some externalists have responded to the argument above by arguing that the intuitions elicited by cases involving unfamiliar faculties actually support externalism. For example, Sven Bernecker claims that the argument from

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tell no different from that of a stray hunch or arbitrary conviction.'

[39] Lehrer, *Theory of Knowledge*, 164.

[40] Internalists take it to be the best explanation because it is the explanation that is most virtuous. For example, it is very *simple*, and it provides a *unified* explanation that accounts for both BonJour and Lehrer's scenarios, but with the *power* to generalize to other similar cases as well.

unfamiliar faculties somehow is biased against reliabilism by assuming that those kinds of faculties aren't really reliable, and that if we properly acknowledge the fact that they are (in the relevant scenarios), then we will also realize that the beliefs they produce are justified. Focusing on BonJour's clairvoyance case, this is how he puts it:

> I think it is questionable whether the clairvoyance example poses a threat to externalist reliabilism. The intuitive plausibility of the thought experiment hinges on the presumption that clairvoyance is *not* reliable. Yet if a clairvoyant faculty actually existed, then either it would prove itself reliable or not. If it proved itself reliable, then intuitively there would be no reason to deny clairvoyants justification and knowledge. BonJour's internalist interpretation of the thought experiment presupposes a bias against clairvoyance.[41]

Here, Bernecker is making the point that (presumably) there aren't any reliable clairvoyants in the actual world, and that if there are reliable clairvoyants in the possible world that Norman finds himself in and he happens to be one of them, then we should have intuitions to the effect that his belief about the President's whereabouts is justified.[42] Moreover, if I understand Bernecker correctly, the reason most of us don't have those intuitions is that we let certain facts about our world (that there aren't any reliable clairvoyants or temperature-tellers) skew our judgments about certain facts (the justificatory status of Norman or Truetemp's beliefs) in other possible worlds.

However, in response, I will make two points against Bernecker. First, claiming that if clairvoyance (or the tempucomp) really is reliable, then "there would be no reason to deny clairvoyants justification and knowledge" is simply wrong. The majority of philosophers appear to be swayed by internalist intuitions when it comes to cases involving unfamiliar faculties (at least judging by the current state of the literature), and that does provide us with good reason to deny that beliefs produced by unfamiliar faculties are justified.[43] Moreover, the internalist also has a good—indeed, I've argued, the best—explanation for why so many who reflect on the clairvoyance and Truetemp scenarios deny that the

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[41] Sven Bernecker, "Agent Reliabilism and the Problem of Clairvoyance," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, 1 (2008): 166.

[42] Jack Lyons, *Perception and Basic Beliefs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 119, seems to make an analogous point with his Nyrmoon case.

[43] Here I'm not making the claim that most philosophers have internalist *opinions*, but that they have internalist *intuitions* about unfamiliar faculty cases. When looking at the literature that has developed around these kinds of cases, it seems that externalists generally tend to share the internalist intuitions, but rather give more weight to other theoretical considerations that speak against them.

subjects in those cases have justification: namely, one must always have a special sort of access to the justificatory status of one's doxastic attitudes, if they are justified.

Second, Bernecker's alternative explanation of internalist intuitions about the clairvoyance case—namely, that they are biased or skewed due to the fact that the faculty in question (i.e., clairvoyance) doesn't really exist—is problematic. To see why that is so, we must ask ourselves whether it is only the intuitions elicited by the clairvoyance case that are biased in the way Bernecker suggests? If so, then the Truetemp case still supports accessibilism and Bernecker's response fails. If, however, it isn't only the intuitions elicited by the clairvoyance case that are biased, then he needs to say something about which kinds of cases are likely to give rise to biased intuitions. If he thinks this is the case when it comes to *all* scenarios involving unfamiliar faculties (which I suspect he does), then, unless he is able to provide some principled motivation for this view, it is clearly *ad hoc*. After all, why should intuitions about reliable clairvoyants or temperature-tellers be less trustworthy than intuitions about, say, Gettier-cases, brains-in-vats, demon's victims, epistemic akrasia or belief in Moorean conjunctions? A possible response hinted at in the passage quoted above is that our intuitions are trustworthy only insofar as they are about cases involving phenomena that exist in the actual world—which reliable clairvoyants and temperature tellers don't.

However, there are a couple of problems with this view. First, it is committed to denying the commonly accepted position that modal or counterfactual intuitions can teach us about things that are merely possible.[44] For example, it seems that modal intuitions about, say, Sherlock Holmes and his extraordinary abilities can teach us that such a man possibly *could have existed*, but, according to the view at hand, they cannot. Second, it is hard to see what kind of considerations could motivate the view, especially since Bernecker doesn't provide any. It does of course save the reliabilist from having to give counterintuitive judgments about various cases, but that is of course a completely *ad hoc* reason for the view when the plausibility of reliabilism itself is in question. For these reasons I think that Bernecker's response ultimately fails.

5. The Alternative Explanations Response

On balance, most philosophers appear to agree that Norman and Truetemp don't have justification for their beliefs. According to accessibilism, the best explanation

[44] See, e.g., George Bealer, "Modal Epistemology and the Rationalist Renaissance," in *Conceivability and Possibility*, eds. Tamar Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford University Press, 2002); and Colin McGinn, *Mindsight* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Pres, 2004).

for this intuitive datum is that the justification facts always are epistemically accessible. However, this is not the only plausible explanation. Indeed, many externalists have offered their own explanations for the intuitive datum that Norman and Truetemp don't have justification for their beliefs. For example, Bergmann[45] and Graham[46] claim that the reason they don't have justification is that their beliefs aren't produced by properly functioning cognitive faculties; Breyer and Greco[47] claim that the faculties responsible for their beliefs aren't properly integrated with their cognitive character; Lyons[48] claims that their beliefs lack the appropriate etiology; and Comesaña[49] claims that they aren't supported by reliabilist evidence. In a recent paper, however, Harmen Ghijsen[50] has plausibly argued that all of these alternative explanations ultimately fail.[51] Moreover, in order to remedy their shortcomings, Ghijsen offers his own externalist explanation of why neither Norman nor Truetemp has justification for their belief. In this section, I will take a closer look at Ghijsen's explanation and argue that it too ultimately fails.

According to Ghijsen,[52] we (as cognitively sophisticated agents) have certain largely unconscious *monitoring mechanisms* that detect and respond to the origins of the information we receive and its coherence with other information we possess. If, for example, these monitoring mechanisms detect information that comes from an unreliable source or information that doesn't cohere with certain other beliefs or experiences, then they reject it. Drawing on the work of Alvin Plantinga[53] and Peter Graham,[54] Ghijsen claims that, taken together, these monitoring mechanisms make up one's *defeater system*; i.e., a system whose proper

[45] Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness.*

[46] Peter Graham, "Functions, Warrant, History," in *Naturalizing Epistemic Virtue,* eds. Abrol Fairweather and Owen Flanagan (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 15-35; Peter Graham, "Against Inferential Reliabilism: Making Origins Matter More," *Philosophical Analysis: The Journal for the Korean Society for Analytic Philosophy* 15 (2014): 87-122.

[47] Benjamin Breyer and John Greco, "Cognitive Integration and the Ownership of Belief: Response to Bernecker," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Review* 76, 1 (2008): 173-184.

[48] Lyons, *Perception and Basic Beliefs*.

[49] Juan Comesaña, "Evidentialist Reliabilism," *Nous* 44, 4 (2010): 571-600.

[50] Harmen Ghijsen, "Noman and Truetemp Revisited Reliabilistically: a Proper Functionalist Account of Clairvoyance," *Episteme* 13, 1 (2016): 15-34.

[51] Although I don't have the space to go deeper into the issue here, let me just note that I think Ghijsen's criticisms are successful. Moreover, I'm not alone in doing so: see, e.g., Moon, "How To Use Cognitive Faculties You Never Knew You Had."

[52] *Ibid.*, 102.

[53] Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[54] Graham, "Functions, Warrant, History."

function is the reliable prevention of forming or maintaining false beliefs. This is why he says that there is a "Proper Functionalist Defeat (PFD)" condition on justification, which he formulates as follows:

> **PFD** *S*s belief in *p* at *t* is justified only if *S* does not have a defeater system *D* such that, had *D* been working properly, it would have resulted in *S*s not believing *p* at *t*.[55]

Moreover, according Ghijsen, PFD plausibly explains why Norman and Truetemp's beliefs are unjustified. Since their defeater systems would have rejected their beliefs if they had been functioning properly, they cannot be justified:

> [T]he information presented by their special senses is not corroborated by any of their other senses, nor does the information stem from a recognizable trustworthy source. This should give their monitoring mechanisms sufficient cause to prevent the information from rising to the status of belief.[56]

Now we have two plausible, but competing, explanations of the Clairvoyance and Truetemp scenarios. On the one hand, the accessibilist says that the reason Norman and Truetemp's beliefs are unjustified is that they have been produced by unfamiliar faculties and, as a result, their truth is completely arbitrary or accidental from their subjective point of view. On the other hand, Ghijsen says that the reason their beliefs are unjustified is that their defeater systems aren't functioning properly, since they would have prevented the formation of those beliefs if they had. How are we to decide between these explanations? In light of the scenarios presented above in section 3, this is rather difficult since both of them respect the intuition that Norman and Truetemp's beliefs are unjustified. In order to decide between them, we therefore need another scenario where they yield different verdicts. Continuing, I will present a scenario offered by Ghijsen himself (in response to Graham) and develop a slightly modified version of it where accessibilism and PFD disagree about how it should be interpreted.

Consider the following variation on BonJour's original clairvoyance case:

> *Norbert*
>
> Norbert is the son of a mother and father who both have reliable clairvoyant abilities and have been able to reproduce because of the benefit these clairvoyant abilities have provided for them. However, there are not (yet) many people who have these clairvoyant abilities, and their existence is kept secret. The abilities are due to specialized internal organs that pick up on special energy waves in the environment, and then output brief visual images which represent that such-and-

[55] Ghijsen, "Noman and Truetemp Revisited Reliabilistically," 106.
[56] *Ibid.*, 108.

> so is currently the case at some distant place. Furthermore, the abilities usually become active quite suddenly some time after puberty. Norbert's parents have decided not to tell him about the existence of his clairvoyant abilities, and Norbert has no evidence for or against their existence in general or his own having them. Some time after puberty, Norbert suddenly experiences a brief visual image of the President being in New York City and on that basis believes that the president is in New York City.[57]

Ghijsen tells us that, intuitively, Norbert's belief is unjustified despite being reliably formed—and with this the accessibilist agrees. The explanations that Ghijsen and the accessibilist offer are of course different, but the intuition elicited by the example is called into question by neither.[58] However, the case can easily be modified—or perhaps I should say expanded upon – so that it yields another result. Consider the following case, which I call Norbert Jr.

> *Norbert Jr.*
>
> Hundreds of years after Norbert developed his clairvoyant abilities, clairvoyance has become a widespread phenomenon with the majority of people now developing clairvoyant abilities, but *without* any associated visual imagery, shortly after puberty. The reason is that clairvoyants have an enormous evolutionary advantage; their chances of surviving and reproducing are far greater than those of people without clairvoyant abilities. Moreover, clairvoyance has now become such an integrated part of most people's cognitive lives that the people who have that ability also have defeater systems whose proper function no longer is to prevent the formation or maintenance of clairvoyant beliefs.[59] Norbert Jr. is one of Norbert's descendants. The community in which he lives (including his friends and family) has decided not to tell him about the

[57] *Ibid.*, 98.

[58] This is somewhat of a simplification. Personally I have conflicting intuitions about the case due to the fact that Norbert's clairvoyant faculty is stipulated to output visual images that are (presumably) internally accessible. For this reason, the clairvoyant faculty might appear to function more or less as a quasi-visuoperceptual faculty, differing mainly insofar as it is able to provide the subject with visual representations of things that are happening at a far greater distance than regular perception. Thus, Norbert's clairvoyant belief might appear to be justified in more or less the same way and to more or less the same degree as regular visual beliefs. For this reason, I will stipulate in the scenario below that the subject (Norbert Jr.) doesn't have the kind of clairvoyance induced visual experiences that Norbert does. Doing this, the case is presented in such a way that Ghijsen and the accessibilist will offer different verdicts, but without relying on unnecessary elements (visual imagery) that only serves to complicate the scenario and our intuitions about it.

[59] The clairvoyant beliefs might thus perhaps be a bit like spontaneous beliefs about the dangerousness of snakes for us. For more on snake-beliefs and proper function, see Moon, "How To Use Cognitive Faculties You Never Knew You Had."

> clairvoyant abilities of his species, and Norbert Jr. has no evidence for or against their existence in general or his own having them. Some time after puberty, Norbert spontaneously forms the clairvoyant belief that the President is in New York City.

Intuitively, Norbert Jr.'s belief is unjustified. After all, his epistemic position appears to be no better than that of Norbert. And according to the accessibilist, that is correct. Indeed, accessibilism tells us that the best explanation for why Norbert Jr.'s belief is unjustified is that it has been produced by an unfamiliar faculty and, as a result, its truth is completely arbitrary or accidental from his first person perspective. However, according to Ghijsen this cannot be correct. Since Norbert Jr.'s defeater system is functioning properly, his belief about the President's whereabouts should be justified. But this just does not seem plausible. Of course, Ghijsen can always insist that Norbert Jr.'s belief is unjustified, but that the right explanation for why that is so should be sought somewhere else; after all, PFD is only a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for justification. However, this would be a very problematic move: not only does it undermine the motivation for PFD (i.e., its ability to plausibly explain the intuitions elicited by clairvoyance-style cases), but it also puts Ghijsen in a position where he has to come up with another explanation for the Norbert Jr. case—and why not accessibilism? Hence, in light of the Norbert Jr. case, Ghijsen's PFD either gives what clearly appears to be the wrong verdict, or it loses its motivation.

6. Bergmann's Dilemma

The third objection I want to consider is offered by Bergmann. According to Bergmann, accessibilism is motivated by its ability to avoid what he calls 'The Subject's Perspective Objection (SPO):'

> *The Subject's Perspective Objection*:[60] If the subject holding a belief isn't aware of what that belief has going for it, then she isn't aware of how its status is any different from a stray hunch or an arbitrary conviction. From that we may conclude that from her perspective it is an accident that her belief is true. And that implies that it isn't a justified belief.[61]

[60] The SPO encapsulates why beliefs produced by unfamiliar faculties intuitively cannot be justified; the reason is that their truth is completely accidental or unsupported from one's subjective perspective.

[61] Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness*, 12.

However, as he sees it, accessibilism faces a dilemma, thus making it unfit to explain the intuitions elicited by unfamiliar faculty cases. The dilemma he presents is as follows:[62]

A Dilemma for Internalism

1) An essential feature of internalism is that it makes a subject's actual or potential awareness of some justification-contributor a necessary condition for the justification of any belief held by that subject.

2) The awareness required by internalism is either strong or weak awareness.

3) If the awareness required by internalism is strong awareness, then internalism has vicious regress problems leading to radical skepticism.

4) If the awareness required by internalism is weak awareness, then internalism is vulnerable to the SPO, in which case internalism loses its main motivation for imposing the awareness requirement.

5) If internalism either leads to radical skepticism or loses its main motivation for imposing the awareness requirement (i.e., avoiding the SPO), then we should not endorse internalism.

6) Therefore, we should not endorse internalism.[63]

In order to get a better grip on how the dilemma actually goes, we need to say a little bit about what Bergmann means by "weak" and "strong" accessibility/ awareness. Strong awareness, more specifically, involves "*conceiving of* the justifier that is the object of awareness as being in some way relevant to the justification or truth of the belief" it supports;[64] i.e., it requires that one somehow conceptualizes the justifier as supporting the belief in question. Weak awareness, on the other hand, doesn't require this sort of conceptualization. So Bergmann's dilemma tells us that proponents of accessibilism either support weak or strong accessibilism. If they support strong accessibilism, then they face vicious regress problems that lead to radical skepticism. But if they support weak accessibilism, then they become vulnerable to the SPO. In either case, accessibilism fails.

In the literature, both premise 3 and premise 4 have been challenged. For example, Thomas Crisp[65] and Rogers and Matheson[66] argue that premise 3 is false

[62] An early and somewhat underdeveloped version of the dilemma was first presented by Fumerton, *Metaepistemology and Skepticism*, 63-65.

[63] Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness*, 13-14.

[64] *Ibid.*, 13.

[65] Thomas Crisp, "A Dilemma for Internalism," *Synthese* 174 (2009): 355-366.

[66] Jason Rogers and Jonathan Matheson, "Bergmann's Dilemma: Exit Strategies for Internalists," *Philosophical Studies* 152 (2011): 60-61.

by presenting a version of strong accessibilism that doesn't face vicious regress problems. However, since I have some reservations about their argument, I will focus on premise 4 instead.

When it comes to premise 4, Bergmann tells us that weak accessibility/awareness of a justifier isn't sufficient to make the truth of the doxastic attitude it supports non-accidental from the subject's perspective and therefore not sufficient to justify said attitude (i.e., it is vulnerable to the SPO). This is the case, according to Bergmann, for both *conceptual* and *nonconceptual* versions of weak accessibilism. According to nonconceptual versions of weak accessibilism, there is a weak accessibility condition on justification that doesn't require the subject to conceive of the justifier in any way. However, as Bergmann sees it, such conceptualization is necessary in order to avoid the SPO:

> [S]ince the awareness required is nonconceptual, a person can have the required awareness of [the justifier] without conceiving of [it] in any way—without categorizing it according to any classificatory scheme. But then [a subject] can be nonconceptually aware of [the justifier] without conceiving of [it] as relevant at all to the appropriateness of his belief. According to the SPO, if [the subject] does not conceive of [the justifier] as something relevant to the appropriateness of his belief, it is an accident from [his] perspective that his belief is true. Clearly this supposed problem is not solved by requiring [the subject] to be *non*conceptually aware of [the justifier].[67]

Similarly, according to Bergmann, conceptual versions of weak accessibilism also face the SPO. According to conceptual versions of weak accessibilism, there is a weak accessibility condition on justification that *does* require the subject to conceive of the justifier, but *not* in any way that makes it relevant to the appropriateness of the belief (or other doxastic attitude) it supports. However, once again, conceiving of the justifier *as supporting the belief it in fact does support* is necessary in order to avoid the SPO:

> Would it help if we added instead the requirement that [a subject] has a *conceptual* weak awareness of [the justifier]? Here again the answer is 'no'. For [the subject] could satisfy this sort of requirement simply by being aware of [the justifier] and applying some concept or other to it. . . And that means that [the subject] can have a conceptual weak awareness of [the justifier] without conceiving of [it] as relevant in any way to the appropriateness of his belief B. But then, according to the SPO, even if this added requirement were satisfied, it would still be an accident from [the subject's] perspective that B is true. For although [the subject] applies a concept to [the justifier], he doesn't apply the *right sort* of concept to it. He doesn't apply a concept that involves his conceiving

[67] Bergmann, *Justification without Awareness*, 20.

> of [the justifier] as contributing in some way to B's justification (or as indicating that B is likely to be true or some such thing). The only way to guarantee that he *does* apply such a concept to [the justifier] is to have B satisfy a strong awareness requirement. Thus, we are forced to concede that by imposing only a conceptual weak awareness requirement, the internalist is vulnerable to the SPO.[68]

Thus, the upshot for Bergmann is that weak accessibilism—whether it is of a conceptual or non-conceptual version—becomes unmotivated since it is vulnerable to the SPO.

In response, Rogers and Matheson[69] have argued that versions of weak accessibilism that appeal to "seemings" as justifiers—including Michael Huemer's *phenomenal conservatism*[70]—provide counterexamples to premise 4. As they see it, seemings, defined as inclinations to form certain beliefs,[71] can satisfy the weak accessibility/ awareness condition:

> [T]he seeming may result for the subject as a result of merely *weak* awareness of some object of first-order awareness. This being the case, an individual can be in a state wherein he hosts the seeming that some proposition is true while remaining in a state of weak—or even nonconceptual—awareness of that seeming, or while having no higher-order *awareness* of the seeming at all, and all while remaining in a state of weak awareness concerning the object of first-order awareness that gives rise to that seeming.[72]

Moreover, not only can such justifying seemings satisfy weak awareness, they also escape the SPO. Absent any relevant defeaters, if it seems to one that *p*, then *p*'s truth *isn't* accidental from one's subjective perspective. This appears to be correct. If a certain proposition—for example that I'm currently reading a philosophy paper, or that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland—seems true, then the truth of that proposition isn't accidental or surprising from one's first-person perspective. Referring back to BonJour's Clairvoyance scenario, Rogers and Matheson put the point as follows:

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[68] *Ibid.*, 20-21.

[69] Rogers & Matheson, "Bergmann's Dilemma."

[70] See Michael Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Ignorance* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Michael Huemer, "Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74 (2007): 30-55.

[71] Cf. Richard Swinburne, *Epistemic Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 141-142; and Earl Conee, "First Things First," in *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology*, eds. Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15, who also claim that seemings are inclinations to believe. However, not everyone agrees. Huemer, "Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism," for example, argues rather plausibly that seemings and inclinations to believe are conceptually distinct and therefore can come apart.

[72] Rogers & Matheson, "Bergmann's Dilemma," 60-61.

> There is a clear subjective difference, for example, between the belief that inexplicably (from his own perspective) pops into Norman the clairvoyant's head as a result of the operation of his clairvoyant powers, on the one hand, and a subject's belief in some proposition as a result of the proposition's actually *seeming true* to him upon his understandingly considering it and being weakly aware of some object of awareness (e.g., conceptual inclusion relationships), on the other. After all, in the latter case, the proposition *seems true* to the subject—to use the language of Plantinga, the subject feels 'pushed' or 'impelled' toward believing it.[73]

Moreover, even though I think the authors mentioned above are correct insofar as versions of weak accessibilism that appeal to seemings as justifiers do provide genuine counterexamples to Bergmann's fourth premise,[74] I want to argue that the version of accessibilism that has been the focus of this paper—something

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[73] *Ibid.*, 61.

[74] Michael Bergmann, "Phenomenal Conservatism and the Dilemma for Internalism," in *Seemings and Justification: New Essays on Dogmatism and Phenomenal Conservatism*, ed. Chris Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 170-171, objects by presenting a couple of scenarios with the purpose of making it intuitive that it is possible to have a conscious seeming that *p* (that satisfies the weak accessibility condition), but that it is an accident from one's perspective that *p* is true. The scenarios he presents have the same structure: there is an epistemic agent who has the relevant kind of seeming and who holds the corresponding belief, but who is *incapable* (due to severe cognitive failings or malfunctions) to conceive of the seeming as relevant to the truth of the corresponding belief. Instead, the agent simply holds the belief for silly or irrational motives, and not because of the seeming itself. As a result, according to Bergmann, it is intuitive that the truth of the agent's belief is completely accidental from his first person perspective; in which case Rogers and Matheson's proposal falls prey to the SPO.
However, Luca Moretti and Tommaso Piazza, "Phenomenal Conservatism and Bergmann's Dilemma," *Erkenntnis* 80 (2015): 1271-1290, have plausibly responded by arguing that Bergmann's scenarios fail to show that beliefs properly based on, or justified by, seemings fall prey to the SPO, since the agents in the scenarios hold the relevant beliefs in an irrational manner that *isn't* properly based on the seemings. This is how they put it: "It [i.e., Bergmann's example] only teaches us that if a subject *S* is just weakly aware of a seeming that *P*, believes that *P but bases her belief that P on neither her seeming that P nor on any other source of epistemic justification*, then it is an accident from *S*'s perspective that her belief that *P* is true (if the belief is true at all). Thus Bergmann's example gives us no reason for claiming that *S*'s weak awareness of her seeming that *P* cannot prevent *S*'s belief that *P* from being accidentally true from *S*'s own perspective *when S's belief that P is based on her seeming that P*." (*Ibid.*, 1279.)
Moreover, another problem with Bergmann's scenarios is that since the agents suffer from severe cognitive failings or malfunctions that make them unable to conceive of the seemings as relevant to the truth of the beliefs they hold, they might not actually have any genuine seemings after all. If it "seems" to one that *p*, but one doesn't have the cognitive capacity to recognize it as in any way relevant to the truth the belief that *p*, then the "seeming" might not be a proper seeming after all.

akin to the JJ principle of section 2.3—also provides a counterexample to it. Consider again the JJ principle. It says that one has justification to believe (or, alternatively, withhold/disbelieve) that *p*, only if one has higher-order justification to believe that one has justification to believe (or, alternatively, withhold/disbelieve) that *p*. By way of example, the principle says that if you have justification to believe, say, that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland, then you have (higher-order) justification to believe that you have justification to believe that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland. Now, there are two things to notice here. First, the JJ principle satisfies the weak awareness condition. It tells us that the justification facts are accessible in the sense that they are accompanied by higher-order justifications that enable the subject to believe with doxastic justification what those facts are, *if* he can take advantage of his epistemic position.[75] So, in other words, the subject need not be *psychologically* capable of believing the justification facts or even to have conceptualized the justifier as in any way relevant to the belief in question.

Second, the JJ principle isn't vulnerable to the SPO. If one has higher-order justification to believe that one has justification to believe that *p* whenever one does have justification to believe that *p*, then *p* isn't accidental or unsupportedfrom one's first person perspective; after all, by taking advantage of one's epistemic position and believing in accordance with one's higher-order justification, the subject will know what the justification facts are. Sure, the subject may not *consciously* recognize what the belief in question has going for it, but it doesn't follow from this that its truth would be accidental from his perspective. Consider the proposition about the capital of Iceland above. Let's say that you have justification to believe that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland and higher-order introspective and reflective justification to believe that you do. Let's also stipulate that you aren't *consciously* aware of your justification for belief in the proposition about the capital of Iceland above. It may, for example, be that your justifier is a memory belief to the effect that a trustworthy person told you that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland and that you're either unable to recall that memory at this

[75] Another way of cashing out this point is by using Declan Smithies', "Why Justification Matters," in *Epistemic Evaluation: Purposeful Epistemology*, eds. David Henderson and John Greco (Oxford University Press, 2015), 224-244, notion of an *ideally rational counterpart*. An ideally rational counterpart is someone who is identical to you in every relevant way (e.g., you have the same (relevant) justifiers/reasons/evidence), but who always takes advantage of their epistemic position by believing what they have justification to believe—at least as long as they hold any doxastic attitude about the matter. We can then say that the justification facts are accessible in the sense that your ideally rational counterpart always believes them with doxastic justification (as long as they hold any attitude toward them).

particular moment or that you haven't even bothered trying. Still, it doesn't seem that the truth of the proposition that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland is accidental from your subjective perspective. After all, you have introspective justification to believe that you have the aforementioned memory belief, and you have reflective justification to believe that it supports the proposition that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland. And since you're already in *possession* of justifiers that enable to you *consciously* recognize and know that you have justification to believe that Reykjavik is the capital of Iceland, provided that you can exercise your introspective and reflective faculties in a sufficiently virtuous manner, there is indeed something that strongly speaks in favor of holding that belief from your subjective perspective. Hence, the JJ principle avoids the second of horn of Bergmann's dilemma and *can* figure as a plausible explanation of our intuitions about unfamiliar faculty cases.

7. Conclusion

According to accessibilism, justification is in some special sense accessible to the subject who has it. Accessibilism is mainly motivated by intuitions elicited by unfamiliar faculty cases. Recently, however, the view has come under heavy fire from a variety of positions. In light of this, the purpose of this paper has been twofold. First, I have clarified what commitments the accessibilist should make. Doing this, I have shown why the most prominent versions of accessibilism are vulnerable to objections that the version endorsed in this paper avoids. Second, I have defended the main argument (from unfamiliar faculty cases) for accessibilism against three prominent objections levelled against it. The upshot of my discussion is that accessibilism, as understood in this paper, remains the best explanation for our intuitive judgments about unfamiliar faculty cases: one must always have a special sort of access to the justificatory status of one's doxastic attitudes, if they are justified.

DISCUSSION NOTES/DEBATE

A NON-PUZZLE ABOUT ASSERTION AND TRUTH

John TURRI

ABSTRACT: It was recently argued that non-factive accounts of assertoric norms gain an advantage from "a puzzle about assertion and truth." In this paper, I show that this is a puzzle in name only. The puzzle is based on allegedly inconsistent linguistic data that are not actually inconsistent. The demonstration's key points are that something can be (a) improper yet permissible, and (b) reproachable yet un-reproached. Assertion still has a factive norm.

KEYWORDS: truth, assertion, norms, language

Recently, Neri Marsili presented what he calls "a puzzle about assertion and truth."[1] Following earlier work on the topic, Marsili assumes that the goal of research in this area is to identify the unique, exceptionless rule that normatively individuates assertion by specifying the unique characteristic C of propositions such that, "One must: assert p only if p has C."[2]

Marsili's discussion is intended to adjudicate between factive and non-factive proposals in this area. A proposal is *factive* if its candidate C requires p to be true, in which case speakers must assert only facts. A proposal is *non-factive* if its candidate C does not require p to be true, in which case speakers needn't always assert only facts.

The data of the puzzle consist of two pairs of claims:[3]

Improper Falsity:

- Intuition: false assertions are improper in virtue of their being false.
- Behavior: false assertions are reproachable in virtue of their being false.

Permissible Falsity:

- Intuition: inadvertently false ('unlucky') assertions are permissible.
- Behavior: we do not reproach unlucky assertors.

[1] Neri Marsili, "Truth and Assertion: Rules and Aims," *Analysis* 78, 4 (2018): 638-48, https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/any008.
[2] Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 241.
[3] Marsili, "Truth and Assertion," 640.

Marsili claims that factive accounts seem well suited to explain Improper Falsity, whereas non-factive accounts seem well suited to explain Permissible Falsity. He then states the puzzle as follows:

> These two sets of linguistic data… seem incompatible: according to the former, false assertions are always improper; according to the latter, they are permissible under some circumstances.[4]

Marsili then offers a new argument in favor of non-factive accounts. The basic idea is that "the best available" solution to the puzzle involves a non-factive rule.[5] In particular, Marsili proposes that false assertions seem improper because truth is the *aim* of assertion, which explains the negative evaluation of false assertions, whereas unlucky assertions are permissible because the *rule* of assertion is not factive, which explains the non-reproachful response to unlucky assertions.

In response, this is a "puzzle" in name only. The two sets of data are not, and do not seem, incompatible.

With respect to the two "intuitions," from the fact that a behavior is improper, it does not follow that it is impermissible. Some permissible behavior is nevertheless improper. For example, as a professional, it is permissible but improper for a college instructor to teach class in flip-flops, jogging pants, and a ragged t-shirt. Morally speaking, it is permissible but improper to demand that one's dinner guests leave one's house before being served dinner. In such cases, agents are within their rights to behave that way, but they still shouldn't. Otherwise put, the conduct is allowed but discouraged, perhaps even strongly so, within the same domain of evaluation (e.g. a professional code of conduct, or morality).

With respect to the two "behaviors," from the fact that something is reproachable, it doesn't follow that we reproach it, or even that we tend to reproach it. Social life involves many compromises. We often extend charity, good will, forgiveness, and tolerance when deciding how to respond to others' behavior. We don't jump at every opportunity to call out transgressions. Patient forbearance can be especially tempting if it seems like the transgressor's "heart is in the right place" and the transgression is unintended.

In light of these observations, there is no puzzle to resolve. There is no incompatibility between impropriety and permissibility. And there is no incompatibility between something's being both reproachable and un-reproached.

[4] Marsili, 641.

[5] Marsili, 646.

Accordingly, nothing in Marsili's discussion speaks against a factive account that hypothesizes (i) assertions should express truth, according to the rules of the practice, and (ii) we refrain from criticizing unlucky assertions because we forgive them or don't think they deserve criticism. Such a factive account can explain all the phenomena discussed above.

It also has at least two advantages. On one hand, unlike Marsili's account, it doesn't require us to accept ancillary hypotheses about the aim of assertion, nor does it involve treating assertion as though its rules could be detected by analogical reasoning from institutional practices with official rule books, such as board games or organized sports. Of course, it is not illegitimate to appeal to a distinction between rules and aims, or to draw analogies. Instead the point is that every ancillary hypothesis or assumption with probability less than 1 automatically decreases the probability that one's view as a whole is correct. Accordingly, avoiding ancillary hypotheses is preferable.

On another hand, and more importantly, the proposed account coheres with a wide and increasing range of additional evidence supporting factive accounts that has been discovered in recent years.[6] By contrast, Marsili's discussion proceeds by

[6] Matthew A. Benton, "Two More for the Knowledge Account of Assertion," *Analysis* 71, 4 (2011): 684–87, http://doi.org/10.1093/analys/anr085; John Turri, "The Test of Truth: An Experimental Investigation of the Norm of Assertion,"*Cognition* 129, 2 (2013): 279–91,http://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2013.06.012; John Turri, "Selfless Assertions: Some Empirical Evidence," *Synthese* 192, 4 (2015): 1221-33, http://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-014-0621-0; Matthew A. Benton, "Gricean Quality," *Nous* 50, 4 (2016): 689–703, http://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-114-2-227; John Turri, *Knowledge and the Norm of Assertion: an Essay in Philosophical Science* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), http://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/397/knowledge-and-the-norm-of-assertion--an-essay-in-philosophical-science; John Turri, "Knowledge and Assertion in 'Gettier' cases," *Philosophical Psychology* 29, 5 (2016): 759–75, http://doi.org/10.1080/09515089. 2016.1154140; John Turri, "Knowledge, Certainty, and Assertion," *Philosophical Psychology* 29, 2 (2016): 293–99, http://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2015.1065314; John Turri, "Vision, Knowledge, and Assertion," *Consciousness and Cognition* 41 (2016): 41–49, http://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2016.01.004; John Turri, "Experimental Work on the Norms of Assertion," *Philosophical Compass* 12, 7 (2017): 1-12, e12425, https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12425; John Turri, "The Distinctive 'Should' of Assertability," *Philosophical Psychology* 30, 4 (2017): 481–89, http://doi.org/10.1080/09515089. 2017.1285013; John Turri, "Revisiting Norms of Assertion," *Cognition* 177 (2018): 8–11, http://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2018.03.023; John Turri and Yeoun Jun D. Park, "Knowledge and Assertion in Korean," *Cognitive Science* 42, 6 (2018): 2060–80, https://doi.org/10.1111/cogs.12621; Ben Holguín, "Lying and Knowing," *Synthese* (2019): 1–21, http://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-019-02407-2; John Turri, "Truth, Fallibility, and Justification: New

setting aside all of the other evidence,[7] which his proposed non-factive account does not cohere with.

Marsili justifies setting aside all such evidence by claiming he is "concerned with data that supports factive accounts as a whole, as opposed to specific accounts (KR, TR, etc)," where "KR" refers to a knowledge rule and "TR" refers to a less demanding truth rule. But evidence supporting *any* factive view supports the conclusion that assertion has a factive norm, which is inconsistent with any view, including Marsili's, claiming that assertion does not have a factive norm. Whether the evidence supports "factive views as a whole, as opposed to specific [factive] accounts" is irrelevant to whether it can profitably inform theorizing about the new considerations Marsili puts forward. More generally, when aiming to advance understanding of a research topic, the bar should be set very high to set aside most evidence relevant to that topic.

Responding to my argument, one might revise the data of the problem. Focusing on the "intuition" components, one might argue that this pair is incompatible:

- Impermissibility intuition: false assertions are impermissible.
- Permissibility intuition: some false assertions are permissible.

In reply, not even this pair is incompatible. We can consistently accept both intuitions if we reject the assumption that a rule must impose an exceptionless requirement, or a perfect duty, that applies to each and every assertion. That assumption is entirely optional.[8] Instead, a factive rule might tolerate exceptions by imposing a more-or-less stringent imperfect demand. Thus the intuition, "false assertions are impermissible," could be interpreted as describing a central tendency. Of course, factive accounts positing an exceptionless requirement cannot avail themselves of this possibility, so Marsili's discussion might still pose a challenge to them. But social rules commonly tolerate exceptions, and no evidence has ever been offered that norms of assertion impose perfect duties, so it's unclear what motivation there is to retain the assumption.

Responding again in turn, one might revise the data of the problem even further by upgrading the impermissibility intuition to say, "All false assertions are impermissible." This would finally render the two claims genuinely inconsistent.

Studies in the Norms of Assertion," *Synthese* (2020): 1–12, http://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02558-7.

[7] Marsili, "Truth and Assertion," 639n2.

[8] Turri, "Knowledge and Suberogatory Assertion;" Turri, *Knowledge and the Norm of Assertion*; and Turri, "Revisiting Norms of Assertion."

In reply, this over-interprets the ordinary linguistic data that theories in this area are accountable to. In the present context, it is common ground that we intuitively evaluate false assertions negatively. But which specific form, if any, that negative evaluation tends to take is an open question. It is not simply given to us pre-theoretically that the evaluation pertains to impermissibility. Factive accounts needn't be limited to rules pertaining to impermissibility. Reflecting this flexibility, some factive accounts leave it open whether impermissibility is the relevant normative status.[9] Similar remarks apply to the "permissibility intuition." It is not a pre-theoretical observation that the intuition pertains specifically to permissibility. Instead, it might pertain to some other redeeming normative status.

One final suggestion, then, is to recast the competing intuitions in more theoretically neutral terms, such as these:

- Negative reaction: we react negatively to some aspect(s) of false assertions.
- Positive reaction: we react positively to some aspect(s) of some false assertions.

We're entitled to no more than this, I submit, as an uncontroversial starting point from the armchair. Some mix of introspection and social observation can persuade us that there is something potentially interesting to be explained here. But nothing in this pre-theoretical data sustains a claim of inconsistency — to the contrary, it is utterly commonplace for an overall evaluation to include some pros and some cons.

I furthermore submit that this, or any similar, pair of claims is inadequate to sustain detailed theorizing about assertion and its norms. Progress will require accessing more data than this. Happily, recent research has supplied this in abundance.[10]

[9] See Turri, "Knowledge and Suberogatory Assertion;" Turri, *Knowledge and the Norm of Assertion*; and Turri, "Revisiting Norms of Assertion."

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BOOK SYMPOSIUM: Nuno Venturinha, *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (Springer, 2018)

CONTEXT-SENSITIVE OBJECTIVISM: GOING DEEPER INTO *DESCRIPTION OF SITUATIONS*

Nuno VENTURINHA

ABSTRACT: This paper outlines the major topics addressed in my book *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (Springer, 2018), anticipates some possible misunderstandings and discusses issues that warrant further investigation.

KEYWORDS: context-sensitivity, knowledge, objectivism, realism, scepticism

Philosophers all too easily forget that we live in a physical world. They are prone to stress the importance of man and his rationality, but the fact is that human existence on earth is a fairly recent phenomenon in the history of our universe. If contemporary cosmologists are right in dating the beginning of the universe to about 13.8 billion years ago then, on Carl Sagan's famous cosmic calendar scale, humanity would not come prior to 31st December—and already late for New Year's Eve dinner. This should make us wonder whether an anthropocentric form of looking at reality is the right way to capture it. It may be argued that there is no alternative, that we are bound to our mind-dependent perspective and that any purported mind-independent, realist claims are, after all, impregnated with subjectivity. That is the reason why for anti-realists what is at stake are "assertibility-conditions," which, as Timothy Williamson remarks, "are not truth-

conditions even on Dummett's anti-realist conception of truth."[1] The philosopher of science Stathis Psillos offers a useful characterization of the kind of realism repudiated by the Dummettian approach. He says that any realist must subscribe to the view "(a) that assertions have truth-makers and (b) that, ultimately, what these truth-makers are hinges on what the world is like independent of our theorising and not on the criteria of epistemic appraisal we may use."[2] Anti-realists cannot tolerate these requirements—they look too essentialist, too Platonist. The developments in the understanding of language as a social phenomenon, they maintain, imply taking everything as a cultural construction, be it philosophy, religion or science. But Psillos draws an insightful consequence from the anti-realist, "epistemically constrained" view:

> It follows that what is true of the world could not possibly be different from the description of the world that gets licensed by the relevant set of criteria of epistemic appraisal: it *would* be what gets so licensed. The way the world is could not, therefore, be independent of a set of descriptions which meets the relevant set of criteria of epistemic appraisal.[3]

Whereas anti-realists cannot conceive of a mind-independent reality because it is excessively constraining, they fully endorse a description-dependence that is self-constraining. As Paul K. Moser puts it, something "is description-dependent if and only if it depends for its existence on its being described."[4] That is to say, fearing an imposition from the world, the anti-realist stance imposes a set of "assertibility-conditions" on this same world that are inherently relative to our epistemic situation. Thus Dummett can write:

> Although facts indeed impose themselves upon us, however, we cannot infer from this that they were there waiting to be discovered before we discovered them, still less that they would have been there even if we had not discovered them. The correct image, on a justificationist view, is that of blind explorers encountering objects that spring into existence only as they feel around for them.[5]

Luckily enough, we are not "blind explorers." If I find a beer bottle while digging a planting hole in my garden, I shall not assume that it just appeared out of the blue but that it was probably left by the house-builders some time ago and had

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[1] Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 111, note 5.

[2] Stathis Psillos, *Scientific Realism: How Science Tracks Truth* (London: Routledge, 1999), 223.

[3] *Ibid.*, 223–224. See also xix.

[4] Paul K. Moser, *Philosophy After Objectivity: Making Sense in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 215.

[5] Michael Dummett, *Thought and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 92.

remained there all this time even if I was unaware of it. Laboratory analyses could actually be instructive about how long the bottle had been buried, when was it produced, etc. The truth of these facts—and of all the other facts I do not know about what is buried in my garden—belongs to the world, which is not, as Dummett believes, "formed from our exploration of it."[6] Part of this truth can arguably be recognized by us but there is much that will inevitably remain unknown.

The main idea explored in *Description of Situations*[7] is that, within an all-embracing epistemology, the world must be conceived as constant in spite of the multiple perspectives that subjects can adopt in various different contexts about it. I will call this view *context-sensitive objectivism* (CSO) and, as I have suggested elsewhere, it can be defined in the following way: "*S knows x iff x = a*."[8] CSO therefore implies that what is known by a certain subject (*S*) in a particular manner (*x*) must be presupposed as *knowledge*-independent (*a*). This, however, should not be seen as a relegation of the subject's epistemic role in the constitution of experience to a secondary position. The subject has an undeniably pivotal role in the contextualization of reality and that is why, in this epistemological account, a contextualist approach is needed. Apparently there would be a caveat: the fact that contextualism is closely related to relativism and subjectivism in epistemology. But the quest for objectivity cannot be made at the expense of our own access to the world, which is not epistemologically negotiable. In *Description of Situations* the subjective side is not disregarded in so far as the instancing of any *a* in a given *x* must be made by a putative subject. *Knowledge* is of course the result of a human activity. What is buried in my garden right now, unnoticed by anybody, bears no epistemic relation to reality whatsoever. Yet, it does have some relation—an *alethic* relation.

The typical solution to this problem found throughout the philosophical tradition was the correspondence theory of truth. Authors such as Aquinas, Kant and the early Wittgenstein have argued on different grounds that there must be a correspondence or agreement between our judgments and the things in the world, and that truth lies precisely in this match between thought and reality. Knowledge would then consist of true judgments whereas error would come out as the result of false judgments. The problem with this view is that the standard for knowing

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Nuno Venturinha, *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

[8] Nuno Venturinha, "Précis of *Description of Situations*," *Philosophia* 48 (2020): 1683–1690, here 1683.

something is fixed by our own cognitive achievements yielding an anthropocentrism about truth. In this way, the quasi-realism[9] pursued by Thomistic onto-theology, Kantian transcendentalism and Tractarian isomorphism simply pave the way for the anti-realist, pragmatic conception that is overtly anthropocentric. But what lies outside the scope of human apprehension cannot be seen as ontologically insignificant if a comprehensive alethic-epistemic relation is envisaged. So one of the immediate consequences of this relation is that what can be known by some subject becomes relevant to the truth of the world in the sense that a possibility is made actual. Nevertheless, this correspondence is just one of many possible correspondences that the world itself allows. It should thus come as no surprise that three important influences on the book have repudiated the correspondence thesis: Bolzano, Frege and Lewis.[10] The articulation between "propositions in themselves" and "truths in themselves" promoted by Bolzano is particularly apt to grasp what is beyond our reach. Peter Simons nicely summarizes Bolzano's view as follows:

> Bolzano ascribes truth and falsity in the primary sense to objective propositions, which are abstract entities expressed by linguistic sentences and entertained or thought in judgements. (…) Bolzano embraces these abstract propositions because he considers them the only way to guarantee the objectivity of knowledge. A proposition is true or false irrespective of whether anyone ever entertains, judges or believes it, and irrespective of whether it is ever put into words.[11]

Full-blooded epistemic contextualists like Stewart Cohen and Keith DeRose would completely reject that a proposition could be considered without being asserted by someone. For them, the word "knowledge" is used according to the standards established by specific epistemic communities, which can be lower or higher. For that reason, there cannot be anything like "the objectivity of knowledge." Quite the contrary, "knowledge" is, on the contextualist account, essentially a relative concept akin to gradable predicates like "'flat,' 'bald,' 'rich,'

[9] I am using the term literally, that is, as apparently but not really a realism, and not in the way popularized by Simon Blackburn after his *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), where a "quasi-realist" is regarded as "someone who 'starting from an anti-realist position finds himself progressively able to mimic the thoughts and practices supposedly definitive of realism'" (4).

[10] I deal specifically with Bolzano in Chapter 3, "The Correspondence Theory of Truth," Frege in Chapters 4 and 5, "Reality in Itself" and "Unthought Thoughts," and Lewis in Chapter 6, "Determinism and Possible Worlds."

[11] Peter Simons, "Austrian Philosophers on Truth," in *The Austrian Contribution to Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Mark Textor (London: Routledge, 2006), 159–183, here 160.

'happy,' 'sad'."[12] I find the idea of "the knowledge predicate" unsound.[13] There is surely no absolute sense for those adjectives, each use of them depending on a variety of factors. Without appealing to the context, their meaning would be totally indeterminate. But if my wife asks me whether I know where our copy of Shakespeare's works is and I answer "Yes, I know, it's in the living room bookcase," I am stating an entirely determinate fact. To be more precise, I am stating a plurality of undisputable facts.

Let us take stock. It seems uncontroversial that this everyday answer presupposes that I know much more than what is uttered in my sentence.[14] I know who Shakespeare is and this entails that I know what a human being is, in its difference from other living beings and inanimate objects. I know Shakespeare was an Englishman and hence I know what the concepts of citizenship, state, territory, etc. mean. I know he wrote in English and so I know what a language involves in terms of alphabet and grammar, and that there are many languages. I know Shakespeare was a playwright and poet, this presupposing that I know what playwrights and poets do, what comedies, histories, tragedies and poems look like, and so on and so forth. I know what a book is and what it means to own a copy of an author's works, thus knowing not only the activities of writing, printing and binding but also those of selling and buying, to mention only a few. I know that a living room forms part of a house, which has various rooms. I know what a bookcase is supposed to be, that it has shelves to hold books. And I know very well that my wife will put the book down somewhere and be unable to find it again. As Lewis said, "we know a lot."[15]

I imagine that some readers will shake their heads at this point and disagree that I *know* all these things. They will certainly grant that I know there was a man named William Shakespeare and that I know he was neither a horse or a sword, but they may cast doubt on whether I *know* what a human being truly is. Indeed, could I for instance explain the multifarious biological processes of the human

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[12] Stewart Cohen, "Contextualism, Skepticism, and the Structure of Reasons," *Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (1999): 57–89, here 60, and "Contextualism and Skepticism," *Philosophical Issues* 10 (2000): 94–107, here 97. In the same vein, see Keith DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," *The Philosophical Review* 104 (1995): 1–52, repr. in *The Appearance of Ignorance: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Context, Volume 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–38, esp. 6.

[13] Cohen uses this expression on pages 61 and 98 of the aforementioned articles.

[14] The epistemic nature of presuppositions is the topic of Chapter 1 of my book, "Language and Reasoning."

[15] David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1996): 549–567, repr. in *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 418–445, *passim*.

body? They will surely concede that I can ordinarily use concepts like citizenship, state or territory, but they may require demonstration that I *know* them as an expert in law or political science does. Even though they will naturally assume that I master a language and am acquainted with other languages, they will be cautious to say that I *know* about phonetics and syntax when compared to a linguist. I could go on to dissect the examples I gave but I think I have made my point clear. What these readers will contend against my ordinary use of "I know" is that it lacks epistemic justification and that this can only be given by a limited number of people called specialists in the relevant fields. Possibly, based on their own experience, they will not dispute my final inductive claim. I shall call these readers *justificationists* although not necessarily in the Dummettian sense.

There are however other readers who will shake their heads for different reasons. For some, this strong use of "I know" will be reminiscent of Plato's famous definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* as "true opinion plus a *logos*" in 201c, which was rejected by Plato himself and much later by Gettier as "justified true belief."[16] Plato's problem with this definition was basically one of incompleteness in regard to that *logos*—the "account" or "explanation." For instance, even if all leading scientists were to agree that they *justifiably* know (J-know, for short) the human biological processes, their claim, like any other scientific claim, could be incomplete and should consequently be taken as revisable. In the end, what is now J-known can turn out to be merely believed, including *falsely* believed in scenarios of radical paradigm shift. Supposed cases of J-knowing something would, in a revisionist picture, represent no more than higher levels of believing it, with knowledge as such appearing as unattainable.[17] This kind of reader will thus bring into question not only that I *know* what I am convinced I know but also that I shall ever be in a position to J-know it. I would not like to call them sceptics because their point is not wholly negative. I suggest calling them *finitists* about knowledge.

But there are obviously readers—fewer, I believe—who will claim that I can be completely under the illusion of knowing what I claim to know. They will not limit themselves to putting my epistemic position in question but they will forcefully deny that things really are what they look like. These are the proper *sceptics* and they have powerful arguments, which are essentially of two different

[16] Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121–123.

[17] I would venture to say that the paradox that results from Plato's definition of knowledge as "justified true belief" will have deeper consequences for epistemology than Gettier's paradoxes, which are eminently logical, although arguing for it would take me beyond the scope of the present discussion.

types. The first type of sceptical argument possesses, so to speak, a localized range and is not particularly problematic. For example, what unshakable guarantees do I have that Shakespeare was English and that he is the author of the works attributed to him? Even if I am pretty much persuaded that historians must be right in reporting that Shakespeare's baptism took place in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, a town that formed part of the kingdom of Queen Elizabeth I, no epistemological earthquake would happen if new evidence demonstrated that Shakespeare was after all born in Leith and thus a subject of Mary, Queen of Scots. This information would simply be added to the basket of our historical knowledge replacing the previous one. Similarly, as occasionally claimed even by non-philosophical sceptics, Shakespeare's works could have been written by somebody else, including a female author.[18] In the face of substantial evidence, we would simply reconsider our views about this oeuvre and scholars could set out to develop new compelling theories. Again, epistemologically speaking, things would remain exactly as they are.

It is worth noting that historical knowledge does not just comprise the kind of knowledge that arises from a strictly historical study but also what was communicated to us by family and friends or incorporated by us while watching a film or the news.[19] Mediate or testimonial knowledge is inherently fallible and indeed much more so than scientific knowledge. Yet, this fallibility is something we have learned to live with.

Things get more complicated when immediate knowledge is challenged. If I were asked how I can be sure that the volume of the alleged works of Shakespeare stands in my living room bookcase, I could say that I saw it downstairs minutes ago. Still, I would be relying first on the accuracy of both my initial perception and my recollection, and second on the fact that nothing else had happened—like my daughter taking the book to her room, which would fit into an amenable fallibilism. The radical sceptic will say that I am relying too much on experience. Here we are not talking about local sceptical scenarios, with their inherent fallibility, but of a mistrust with global proportions. What radical scepticism causes is a modal breakdown of our assent to the truth of the world, which has always been at hand. It is possible, though utterly unlikely, that my visual perception had deceived me, that my memory is disordered or, to be more pedantic, that the book

[18] See the delightful piece "Was Shakespeare a Woman?" written by Elizabeth Winkler for *The Atlantic*, June 2019, available at https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/06/who-is-shakespeare-emilia-bassano/588076/.

[19] This issue is discussed in Chapter 2 of my book, "What the World Is Made of."

was replaced with a fake one, as in home decor stores, when I turned my back on the shelves. For the radical sceptic, whatever is conceivable can happen.[20]

Contextualists have an important point to make about all this. They claim that their understanding of the concept of knowledge as a gradable predicate allows us to explain the various epistemic demands associated to its different uses. A contextualist would be perfectly comfortable with my use of "I know" when applied to who Shakespeare was, to what a human being is, to Shakespeare being English and author of the works published under his name, to my having a volume of those works in the bookcase downstairs, etc. The contextualist's fine-sounding argument is that each of these contexts determines a particular epistemic demand and therefore there is no contradiction, for example, between my saying that "I know" what a human being is and a biologist saying it. We will simply be employing an expression that obeys the various standards prompted by the situation. The trouble seems to come from our multidimensional use of "I know," which can be applied to the most mundane things as well as to highly specialized ones like Einstein's field equations. It is patently different to say that I know Einstein had a moustache and to say that I know what "$R_{ab} - \frac{1}{2}Rg_{ab} = T_{ab}$" means, but we can do no more than add qualifications in order to be more exact—e.g. to know *normally* and to know *in a specialized way*.

Epistemic contextualism however goes beyond the mere emphasis on the multidimensionality of "I know." This position encompasses a sophisticated reply to scepticism. In the case of localized sceptical doubts, the answer seems straightforward: the sceptic may well be right even though we need to adopt a pragmatic attitude which is irreconcilable with checking out every bit of our knowledge. Thus Cohen has no qualms about admitting a fallibilism governed by "criteria of relevance."[21] According to this view, it would make no sense to be suspicious about the real nature of the books in my bookcase but it could make sense to do so if I were at a home decor store. When it comes to global scenarios, the fallibilist conclusion is that radical scepticism should be seen as highly improbable though it cannot be entirely ruled out. Yet this is not the only contextualist version available in the market. A completely different response to the sceptic was articulated by Lewis. In a famous passage, we read that he "propose[s] to take the infallibility of knowledge as [his] starting point."[22] Does this mean that Lewis believed we can make no mistakes? Surely not. What it means is

[20] I explore these themes in Chapter 8, "Radical Scepticism," Chapter 9, "Transcendentalism," and Chapter 10, "Bracketing Modality," in connection with Descartes, Kant and Husserl, respectively.
[21] Stewart Cohen, "How to be a Fallibilist," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988): 91–123, *passim*.
[22] Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," 422.

that it "just *sounds* contradictory" to say that we know such and such but can be mistaken, and that is why he does not see us as "caught between the rock of fallibilism and the whirlpool of scepticism."[23] Lewis' infallibilism is therefore targeted at those instances that the radical sceptic would be happy to debunk and that the fallibilist, even against her evidence, would be forced to put in question. Since the suspicion is only theoretical, not practical, things would go on exactly in the same way and the point made by Lewis is precisely that if it is so, neither fallibilism nor scepticism make any real change in our lives. The corollary is that, apart from cases of obvious fallibility, we are infallibilists about knowledge through and through. In fact, what Lewis acutely points out is that someone settled in their present situation—as we always are—cannot admit that the operative knowledge they possess is fallible. They definitely do not "hold contradictory opinions" about it. Either they are a non-sceptical infallibilist or they can try to be a sceptical infallibilist.[24]

This said, I do not think that Lewis gives the strongest arguments in favour of infallibilism. I am convinced that Wittgenstein's last writings on certainty offer a much broader picture of this landscape with his idea of "hinges" playing a key role in it.[25] But my interest in this matter is not limited to the efficacy of what Duncan Pritchard aptly dubbed "arational hinge commitments" as a weapon against radical scepticism.[26] I actually look at hinge epistemology as an essential tool for my realist framework capable of demonstrating that an objectivity lies behind the context-sensitivity of our knowledge ascriptions. I shall try to explain why.

The canonical distinction between early and later Wittgenstein, as intimately connected with the replacement of a realist view with an anti-realist one, seems to block my strategy. Is not the post-Tractarian philosophy aimed exactly at demonstrating that realism is an illusion and that everything amounts to a language game as a corollary of the autonomy of grammar? Take this passage from Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker as an example:

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[23] *Ibid.*, 419. As he writes elsewhere: "To hold contradictory opinions may or may not be risky, but it is in any case irrational." ("Why Conditionalize?", in *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology*, 405)

[24] I naturally favour the first option. See Nuno Venturinha, "Non-sceptical Infallibilism," *Analysis* 80 (2020): 186–195.

[25] In my book, I devote part of Chapter 7, "Seeking Evidence," and Chapter 11, "Social Dependency," to this central theme from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* and discuss in what way he can be called a contextualist.

[26] See Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemic Angst: Radical Skepticism and the Groundlessness of Our Believing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 69, 89, 102–103 and 174–175.

> (…) grammar owes no homage to reality. It is, in this sense, autonomous. It does not reflect objective necessities. On the contrary, it determines what we conceive of as necessary.[27]

Although this holds true for Wittgenstein's so-called "middle period" and the *Philosophical Investigations*, I take the remarks collected in *On Certainty* as exhibiting a new trajectory of thought. I have long resisted the idea of a "third Wittgenstein" and remain convinced that much of what he wrote in the last years of his life was still meant for the *Investigations*,[28] which would have been a very different book than the one posthumously published had Wittgenstein lived longer.[29] But there are clearly innovative insights in *On Certainty* and what he says about "hinges" is particularly striking.[30] If we follow Pritchard and distinguish between "über hinge commitments," which are expressed in "über hinge propositions," and "personal hinge commitments," which in turn are expressed in "personal hinge propositions," these being by definition "non-über," then we have to admit that the "personal," i.e. cultural or epochal, anti-realist commitments/propositions necessarily revolve around the "über" realist commitments/propositions.[31] Some scholars have looked at Pritchard's claims suspiciously casting doubts on the way he maintains "the propositionality of hinges while making them the content of a peculiar attitude, different from belief, called 'commitment'"[32] or, in other words, on his "non-belief propositional attitude towards hinge commitments."[33] These worries can be warranted only if they are about what Pritchard calls *über hinges* for the *non-über hinges* are by definition

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[27] G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity—Essays and Exegesis of §§ 185–242. Volume 2 of an Analytical Commentary on the* Philosophical Investigations, Second, extensively revised edition by P.M.S. Hacker (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 220. See also 46, 333 and 336, where in the same vein it is stated that "[g]rammar is not answerable to reality in the currency of truth."

[28] See Nuno Venturinha, "A Re-Evaluation of the *Philosophical Investigations*," in *Wittgenstein After His* Nachlass, ed. Nuno Venturinha (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 143–156.

[29] On the development of that book, see Nuno Venturinha (ed.), *The Textual Genesis of Wittgenstein's* Philosophical Investigations (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[30] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, Revised edition by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), especially §§ 341, 343 and 655.

[31] See Pritchard, *Epistemic Angst*, especially 95–96, as well as his "Wittgenstein and the Groundlessness of Our Believing," *Synthese* 189 (2012): 267–268.

[32] Annalisa Coliva, "Strange Bedfellows: On Pritchard's Disjunctivist Hinge Epistemology," *Synthese* (2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-018-02046-z.

[33] Jonathan Nebel, "Doubting Pritchard's Account of Hinge Propositions," *Synthese* (2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-019-02392-6.

believed. Even in those cases where we seem to be absolutely certain about something, like "the earth is round," what happens is that we "believe" this proposition as the result of an intricate worldview, which may not be the last word on the subject.[34] Our attitude towards the über hinges is different as long as they do not involve any belief susceptible to revision. Wittgenstein states for instance that a sentence of the form "I have a body" has no use in our language since any sentences we articulate inevitably presuppose it.[35] Phrases like "I know I have a body" or "I am sure I have a body" are indeed so tautological that, akin to the "propositions of logic" in the *Tractatus*, they "say nothing" amounting to "analytical propositions."[36] That is why it makes all sense to conceive of the hinge "I have a body" as a "commitment" rather than a "belief," which could be true or false. This hinge is obviously capable of propositional expression but it does not come with an alternative. True, I cannot suspend my "über hinge commitment" that expresses itself in this "über hinge proposition" and keep on doing what I used to do. Coliva recognizes that hinges "are not suited to be the content of a propositional attitude like belief," even though this "is, according to most, necessary for knowledge."[37] But the important lesson to be drawn from Pritchard's account is precisely that über hinges are not an object of knowledge (or ignorance) holding an epistemic status that is not comparable to that of the personal hinges—even if the latter belong to a class that also regulates in a decisive way our knowledge claims. As Pritchard himself puts it, "while our hinge commitments are not known, there is also a sense in which they are not unknown either."[38] For someone like Michael Williams, if we do not want to give in to the sceptic, then we must admit that "[f]ar from being arational commitments, 'hinge' propositions are known to be true."[39] However, to place the über hinges at an arational, non-epistemic level is, to my mind, the most effective defence against scepticism from a theoretical point of view. This way of understanding the matter avoids the

[34] See Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §§ 291 and 299.

[35] *Ibid.*, § 258.

[36] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by C.K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), 6.11.

[37] Coliva, "Strange Bedfellows."

[38] Duncan Pritchard, "Venturinha and Epistemic Vertigo," *Philosophia* 48 (2020): 1699–1704, here 1700. This is a commentary on my *Description of Situations* where Pritchard discusses some differences between our views. See additionally Nuno Venturinha, "Replies to Commentators," *Philosophia* 48 (2020): 1713–1724.

[39] Michael Williams, "The Indispensability of Knowledge," *Philosophia* 48 (2020): 1691–1697, here 1693. This is also a commentary on my *Description of Situations*, to which I respond in my "Replies to Commentators."

circularity of a Moorean response to the sceptic as well as the fragilities of standard contextualist perspectives. While himself a proponent of contextualism in epistemology, Williams suggests, and I absolutely agree, that "Wittgenstein is gesturing towards an 'infallibilist' conception of knowledge."[40] But Williams' infallibilism (which is in many ways reminiscent of the work of Lewis) appeals to an objectivity of certainty which, depending on each context, manoeuvres within the space of what for Pritchard would be mere personal hinges—with their inherent revisability. What is crucial in order to beat the radical sceptic is the overarching system formed by the über hinges as long as they are arationally, non-epistemically immune to doubt.

Good epistemological solutions usually come with a metaphysical price. In this case, the price is realism and I am happy to pay it. This brings us back to a humble position in the world, which is not enchanted by the amazingly powerful models that the human intelligence was able to construe establishing all our personal hinges. What Wittgenstein calls our attention to is that what falls within the scope of the über hinges, what is "beyond being justified or unjustified," is "something animal."[41] If the very basis of our knowledge is shared with other animals, as seems patently clear, this only shows how they are exceedingly wiser than radical sceptics. My cat can be deceived by the sound of a tin which she imagines is her favourite salmon mousse. But she will not doubt that she has legs as she runs to the kitchen. Bodily self-awareness and exposure to the external world are two basic characteristics of the animal kingdom, to which man belongs. It is of little surprise that in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein also speaks abundantly about the acquisition of knowledge by children emphasizing how their fundamental certainties were apprehended quite early on, not after having learned a language but in the practice of language—*naturally*. This remark is illustrative:

> When a child learns language it learns at the same time what is to be investigated and what not. When it learns that there is a cupboard in the room, it isn't taught to doubt whether what it sees later on is still a cupboard or only a kind of stage set.[42]

And a bit further on he brings once again to the fore our animality endorsing a kind of zero logic:

> I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us.

[40] Williams, "The Indispensability of Knowledge," 1694.
[41] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 359.
[42] *Ibid*., § 472.

> Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.[43]

I think it is now clearer the route I travelled in *Description of Situations* and what CSO, the combination of context-sensitivity and objectivism, truly means. When Baker and Hacker affirm that "grammar owes no homage to reality," that "[i]t does not reflect objective necessities" or that "[g]rammar is not answerable to reality in the currency of truth," they are only half right. There is evidently no such thing in the "objective" world as books by Shakespeare lying on shelves, our grammar being indeed a sophisticated mode of organizing experience. But this structure is not random. Grammatically speaking, it is as correct to say that my copy of Shakespeare's works lies in my living room bookcase as it is to say that it does not. Both sentences would make perfect sense. Yet it makes a big difference to the world what the case is and what it is not. The anti-realist conceives of truth as simply the meeting of certain conditions set by certain communities of speakers. As we have seen, the "truth" of who Shakespeare was, of his authorship, etc. is in fact determined by what we establish as the standards for truth. Nevertheless, at the very bottom of everything that can be articulated about Shakespeare lies what in the last analysis makes our claims oscillate between what we call true and false—the way things are or were in reality. Of course the anti-realist can argue that we shall never know how things really are or were and that *the way things are or were in reality* is just another way of their appearing to us. I reject this story. Notwithstanding the systems of communication that human beings can create, there was someone who wrote the works of Shakespeare, under such and such circumstances, and so on and so forth. And there is something we call a book which is now occupying a place in space in what we call a bookcase. This object has its own chemical composition and is in a specific relation to other objects. Irrespective of the possible inaccuracy of our current chemistry and the concurrent descriptions provided by contemporary geometry and physics, the object has an existence of its own. Its intrinsic properties and extrinsic relations are reflected in the convergent but very different behaviours of mankind and other perceptive beings. Context-sensitivity is epistemically relevant for us, humans, as our form of correspondence with the world. But this is only one of many correspondences that, far from being arbitrary (as anti-realism is prone to emphasize) or privileged (as in anthropomorphic realism), are sanctioned by the objective world itself.

Before I conclude, let me say that there is a domain in which *Description of Situations* recognizes that CSO does not work: that of morality.[44] Javier González

[43] *Ibid.*, § 475.

[44] I concentrate on this theme in the final chapter of the book, "Moral Matters."

de Prado calls my view "moral subjectivism"[45] and it really amounts to a "context-sensitive subjectivism" in virtue of the asymmetries between the theoretical and practical domains, which have different temporal dimensions—past and present, on the one hand, and future, on the other. Whether there can be *moral über hinges*, capable of grounding our actions, remains to be investigated.[46]

[45] Javier González de Prado, "Akrasia and the Desire to Become Someone Else: Venturinha on Moral Matters," *Philosophia* 48 (2020): 1705–1711, here 1706. See also my "Replies to Commentators."

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ORIGINAL FACTICITY AND THE INCOMPLETENESS OF KNOWLEDGE

Modesto GÓMEZ-ALONSO

ABSTRACT: This article critically explores Nuno Venturinha's project of capturing how we are situated in reality, a project grounded in the conviction that the closure of knowledge and the openness of experience are compatible. To this end, I will explore how an approach complementary to Venturinha's method—one which regards the passive and the active in knowledge as rooted in a single, underlying original form of consciousness—would deal with the issue of justifying contingency without falling into either scepticism or empiricism.

KEYWORDS: constitutive awareness, Ernest Sosa, hinge commitments, objectivity, rational faith

1

In *Description of Situations*, Nuno Venturinha develops the thought of how our epistemic practices and knowledge attributions take place within social and cultural contexts that make them intelligible. However, this book is not just another contribution to the vast literature about the social dependency of cognitive claims. Far from it, at its core lies the conviction that *ontological dependency* is more fundamental than social dependency,[1] a conviction that motivates the book's main projects of capturing *how we are situated in reality* and of regaining an *objectivist perspective* that framework theories seem to challenge. It is the *feeling of reality* which, according to Fernando Gil, reflection is not able to invalidate[2] that permeates Venturinha's research. Curiously, it is this same passionate feeling, as well as philosophical sensitivity to its fragility within the context of epistemology, that explains Venturinha's attitude to radical scepticism—one of existential seriousness.

[1] Nuno Venturinha, *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 85.
[2] *Ibid.*, 54.

The feeling of reality is, I dare claim, the feeling of *friction*, *constraint*, *encounter*, *openness*, and *finitude*; one that introduces *contingency* and *facticity* at the very heart of self-consciousness. However, to accomplish the task of *securing reality for conceptual consciousness* it seems necessary to preserve absolute, *apodictic* knowledge; knowledge that, demanding closure, is opposed to the contingency and variety of experience. As realists, we thus feel the pull towards opposite, maybe incompatible directions. Without necessity, the world dissolves into the complete absence of order, and so, into subjective phantasmagoria. Without difference, the world becomes immutable, static and grounded in Leibnizian identities—not to say that it becomes a metaphysical hypostatization of the necessities of thought, and thus dependent on consciousness. Venturinha is fully aware both of the relation between Kantian modalities and sceptical worries, and of the danger that lies in what he calls "the totalitarianism of the 'Divine Intellect'."[3] His project of a "natural ontology"[4] is thus rooted in the conviction that *the closure of knowledge and the openness of experience are compatible*. It would not be too unreasonable to claim that for Venturinha difference is not the opposite of identity—it is the condition for its possibility.

As my choice of words suggests, I see Venturinha's approach as being inspired by a *non-dualistic reading* of Kant. However, there are at least two ways of developing Kantian, non-dualistic approaches to knowledge. There are those who regard the contingencies of sensibility and the necessities of understanding as reciprocally dependent *abstractions* from human, natural experience, so that each of them is not intelligible apart from the other (this approach is the one taken by McDowell—inasmuch as Venturinha emphasizes the *discursivity thesis*,[5] he also belongs to this tradition). Besides, there are those who regard the *passive* and the *active* in knowledge as rooted in a single, underlying *original form of consciousness*, one the 'knowledge' of which is intuitive (non-discursive) and immediate.

It is my aim to take here the latter route and to explore how it would deal with the issue of providing closure for knowledge without excluding the openness of experience. To this end, I will build upon Sosa's notion of *constitutive*

[3] *Ibid.*, 44. Notice that Kant defines the divine, intuitive intellect as one which "would have no objects except actual ones." See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment: Including the First Introduction*, translated by W. S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 284. This means that for such an understanding there would be no distinction between possibility and actuality.

[4] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 52.

[5] *Ibid.*, 8.

awareness,[6] drawing from it some unexpected consequences. Let me hasten to add that I see this approach not as an alternative but as *complementary* to Venturinha's method; as one that also would help to justify what one expects from the world—*contingency*—without falling into the traps either of scepticism or of empiricism.

2

When the question about what it means to say that facts are linguistically, and so contextually given[7] is raised it is not just the notion of the contextual that stands in need of clarification but with it, also, the non-contextual. What does the non-contextual consist in? There are at least two predominant opinions. For some—and here, Annalisa Coliva's way of conceiving hinges as constitutive of rationality and as "of an anti-realist nature"[8] would be illustrative—the notion of a contextual fact is *contrasted* with the notion of a *trans-contextual* fact; for others, it is contrasted with that of a *'real' fact*, one that refers to *reality* pictured as outside an external boundary that encloses not so much particular positions within the logical space as the logical space of contexts and "agreement structures"[9] itself.

Each contrast seems to be as reasonable to make as the other. They are, however, logically independent as each one is grounded in different motivations.

Consider the distinction between contextual and trans-contextual truths (and facts). One could picture epistemic perspectives on the model of possible worlds. Perspectival and trans-perspectival truths alike are thus *modal truths*. As such, both of them are quantifications over possible perspectives (worlds). However, a perspectival truth is that which is true if and only if there is some possible perspective (context) in which it is true, while a trans-perspectival truth is true in every possible world or perspective. As far as I understand it, the point of the contrast is to make room within a perspectivist theory for those *logical* and *methodological* truths required for fixing the limits of sense, and, thus, for providing a criterion of what it would make a perspective both intelligible and accessible. Besides, it helps to accommodate objectivity, at least in the sense that trans-perspectival truths are analogous to transcendental rules.

It is not clear, however, whether a logical system of possible epistemic perspectives can go proxy for the robust sense of the *independence of reality*, and thus, of the meaning of objectivity, that epistemologists usually display. It is the

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[6] Ernest Sosa, *Judgment and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 198–199.

[7] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 8.

[8] Annalisa Coliva, *Extended Rationality: A Hinge Epistemology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 149.

[9] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 22.

task of the second contrast (between contextual and 'real' facts) to make this worry explicit—the worry about a contextualism that threatens to disconnect thought from reality as it is and so that, at its best, it simply advances what it seems an ersatz view of objectivity.

The picture here is that of reality as the seat of true objectivity. Which reality? For the metaphysical realist, not reality as the empirical and conceptual reality of the ordinary world—*that* whose *contents* are available to agency. But reality viewed as *radically independent of thinking*, as being outside the reach of rational relations and rational evaluation, as a certain x for which 'the Given' stands as a permanent placeholder and a promissory note that will never be cashed out. It is this reality that stands as the measure of 'true' reality so that the thinkable world of ordinary experience comes to seem as if it is falling short of the genuine article by comparison.

Of course, it is this notion of reality in itself that makes radical scepticism not only possible, but also intractable.

3

There are three main ways in which the world might be *radically unavailable* for the epistemic agent, meaning by 'radically unavailable' not so much the failures and mishaps attendant to the normative profile of the epistemic mechanisms that govern our daily navigation through the world—as scenarios in which there would be an *ontological gap* between mind and world so that the agent would not in the least be *responsive and sensitive* to the reality around her.

[Cases 1] Firstly, the unavailability of the world could depend on a *situational factor* (an interferer) that while on the one hand it operates by manipulating the source of beliefs and so by making the victim acquire her beliefs by belief-forming processes whose outputs, even if true, are not grounded in the world, on the other it systematically blocks the exercise and manifestation of the agent's skill while the innermost skill itself does *not* suffer from any intrinsic deficiency. The Cartesian Demon and the BIV scenario stand for this sort of full, but *local* deprivation of complete competence.

[Cases 2] A second way in which the agent might be radically distanced from the world would not be because of being badly situated, but because of being *badly constituted*, where one would be badly constituted if one's competences were (or maybe if they could easily be) systematically and intrinsically *unreliable*. This is the place of Descartes' fourth sceptical scenario as well as of the hypothesis of the deceiving God.

[Cases 3] Finally, the unavailability of the world could be understood not as a matter of our failure to *know* (represent) it, whether because of constitution or of situation, but instead as the ontological gap between the sort of thing one can think/judge/believe and the sort of thing that can be the case. The point is that it appears to be *intrinsic* to the very idea of thought an *unbridgeable distance* from the world. Why? In a nutshell: because for experience to play a role in cognition as that which (in principle) can be thought it is necessary for its contents to be produced by thinking, or, in other words, because *thought can come to content only because content is conceptualized*.

On this model, it is logically impossible to stretch out rational relations of justification all the way out to the world. The sphere of epistemic activity is frictionless and self-sustained, while the world as such is (at best) able to preserve its independence at the cost of being unintelligible (unthinkable). Thought would thus be possible as long as it is not directed to reality.

4

In view of the foregoing, one could easily claim that the *main* target of scepticism should be our *animal sensitivity* to the world as a matter of our external, cognitive skills, their situation and intrinsic reliability—sensitivity which epistemologists must secure. This approach would privilege cases 1 and 2 over 3.

However, such a claim would rest on a *factorizing analysis* of human cognition that presents conceptual capacities as some extra ingredient—a residue—*in addition* to apt states of the informational system. Sensitivity to the environment would thus be first-order, with no contribution on the part of thought. Which in turn would serve only to account for how we *passively* access to fully-determined, animal deliverances (of content as well as of degree of confidence). The problem for this account is that it is a full-fledged version of the Myth of the Given, so imploding in the face both of how content is belief-determined and of how judgments do not overdetermine seemings.

To my mind, Venturinha's crucial insight is that far from being conjunctively related, sensitivity and conceptual awareness are *internally* related in human cognition, and so it is *rational activity* that is the special way in which we humans are responsive to external reality. Since the availability of the world is thus taken up into the sphere of agency, case 3 comes to be at least as pressing as the sceptical challenges of concern to externalists.

Again, what is the challenge? *That* because the conditions that have to be met for one to become conceptually aware of something are such as to prevent awareness of any 'bare' feature of objective reality, blindness is the mark of

thinking. It is, therefore, as if *givenist* externalism were evaded only at the cost of free-floating internalism. While for the latter the world would be out of the reach of the agent, for the former there would be no agent for whom the world is out of reach. How is then human cognition possible?

What is required is, against givenism, that there is no (human) sensitivity to reality without awareness, and, against internalism, that there is no conceptual awareness without a general, *inbuilt* sensitivity to the world. The issue here is *how to make sense of this inbuilt sensitivity*. As I said above, I shall explore the hypothesis that such sensitivity, which is implicit in conceptual/representational awareness, is grounded in a sort of primitive, foundational, *factive awareness*. This would provide for the issue of the *self-presenting* a relevant, even pressing role in epistemology.

5

Worries about the possibility of thought, understood as an activity directed to reality, are in a sense deeper than worries about the possibility of knowledge. These deeper worries have also found intuitive expression in the Agrippan Trilemma, particularly in the trope of *arbitrary presupposition*, so destructive as a criticism of general default hinges considered as *principles* that govern our epistemic practice.

The problem for hinges goes as follows. One does not argue that hinges are true, because, if they are indeed epistemic, foundational principles, one *cannot* argue for them, in the sense that they are *necessarily unsupportable*. However, does not this entail that it is permissible to choose at will any assertion as a principle? Not at all. Empirical propositions are *formally* excluded from being principles precisely because they can be rationally grounded.

The worry is that, even so, non-empirical principles can be contrasted with their opposites. The two opposing principles would thus be, by stipulation, equally unsupportable. From which it follows that they would be epistemically on a par, and so, that one is rationally forbidden to commit oneself to the truth of neither. Stated badly, Pyrrhonians drive suspension home by pointing out that it is not possible to conciliate hinges' lack of support with their not being bare, arbitrary assertions.

Maybe agents cannot help believing that hinges are true, but with what right does one assume that the way we cannot help but think corresponds to the way things really are? This is a question that even if granted that faculties are reliable and situation is normally propitious, still remains. A reliable, causal chain does not make up for a web of reasons that hangs in a vacuum.

6

Let us go back to the rough ground of *Description of Situations*!

Chapter 5 provides a ground-breaking discussion of Charles Travis' critical dialogue with Frege's version of the objectivity of thoughts. The bone of contention is how to conciliate the fact that acts of thinking are *subjective* performances and particular states of consciousness with the *objectivity* of the content to which they are directed. Curiously, the conciliation lies at the original, bare structure of *subjectivity*—viewed as a *self-reverting activity* where the object of thought is the activity of thinking itself, or, in Sosa's words, as a kind of underlying, *constitutive awareness* that eludes the "act-object model"[10] of analysis.

Constitutive awareness should be defined by the following traits:

(i) Contrary to *noticing/representational awareness*, constitutive awareness is non-thetic; this means that being the same as *self-consciousness*, it is a presentation (*Darstellung*, in contrast with *Vorstellung*) such that the subject of awareness is its own object without the mediation of further acts of awareness and without the application of concepts; the subject presents itself *immediately*.

(ii) Immediate self-consciousness is not, at least within ordinary experience, an independent state of consciousness (a particular instance of consciousness) but rather the *necessary ground* that makes representational consciousness possible; it is therefore the basic *form* of awareness without which awareness of objects would not even be awareness (there is no representation that is not *for someone*; the representational relation cannot account for *the reference to subjectivity that presupposes*); it is thus, by definition, objective and universal, since it is what qualifies every individual subject as a subject and every act of thinking as thinking in the first place.

(iii) Sosa is also eager to stress that constitutive awareness is required to escape the web of self-enclosed beliefs characteristic of free-floating conceptualism, so being the only available way out of frictionless coherentism and the only element *present* within the 'conceptual scheme' that inasmuch as it is *independent* of it, can do a *foundational* job in epistemology.

(iv) Finally, it is of the greatest significance that self-awareness is not awareness of a thing or object that is passively given to consciousness—of the I conceived as an elusive and intangible 'something'—but rather of the general activity of thinking which, implicit in every instance of quotidian experience, is made explicit by the philosopher. The structure of subjectivity is thus disclosed as

[10] Sosa, *Judgment and Agency*, 198.

that of *making an object of thought of the general activity of thinking*, namely as *self-reversion* and *immediate identity of subject and object of awareness*.

For these reasons, it would not seem too fanciful to suggest that by negatively claiming that self-awareness does not fall under the act-object model of awareness, Sosa is very close to the positive claim that it is of the essence of a *Tathandlung*. If so, experience would not be grounded in something already given (a fact) but rather in activity directly present as an object of thought (a fact/act)—in *intentional activity* that instead of being directed towards a given object, revolves upon itself and makes of intentionality itself its intentional object.

7

Be that as it may, one might legitimately complain that, even if true, the previous reflections would provide for a closure of knowledge *at the expense of the world*.[11] After all, from the invulnerable peak of self-consciousness there seems to be no world to be regained.

I think, however, that this dismissal is too quick. Mainly because it leaves us enclosed within the sphere of frictionless consciousness, and so it leaves us lost among the shallow representations of the understanding. What is required is an argument that while finding the world within the *immanence* of consciousness, it shows that neither can it be fully reduced to the necessities of thought nor can it be derived from a higher principle, i.e., transcendental spontaneity. The task is how to combine the apodicticity of the transcendental with the contingency of the world of experience. And the solution lies in the feasibility of transforming what common sense interprets as the external conflict between I and world (a conflict which is the fertile soil upon which the weeds of scepticism and empirical idealism thrive) into an *internal conflict* between two necessary, mutually irreducible aspects of constitutive awareness—*spontaneity* and *constraint*. This would make of the *transcendental disunity of the self* a necessary condition for the possibility of self-awareness.

8

The first thing to be said is that even although it constitutes the underlying structure of consciousness, self-reversion necessarily falls under the universal configuration of thought and awareness—the form *Subject-Object* (*S-O*), namely the separation between subject and object that is necessary for any possible

[11] Similar worries can be found in Chapter 10, within the context of a discussion on Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. See Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 78.

consciousness. This means that even in self-awareness the immediate unity of the two poles of awareness comes together with its necessary distinction, so that, to express the same thought from two opposite perspectives, on the one hand, the subject never comes to consciousness as unrestrictively free while, on the other, in every act of self-presentation it always remains a sort of *residual subjectivity*, never to be fully captured and determined as long as there is consciousness. One can be aware of oneself only as *limited activity*; the indeterminate spontaneity that lies at the core of subjectivity cannot be an object of consciousness, even though it is a necessary condition for it. The I is thus an I inasmuch as it is both infinite and constrained. The division between freedom and passivity is necessary for the possibility of any experience whatsoever, including our awareness of our own freedom and subjectivity.

As I said at the beginning of this paper, the feeling of reality is the feeling of constraint and friction. However, this feeling is much more than the immanent, abstract remnant of *objectivity* that might account for the possibility of representational awareness (awareness of 'given' objects) once we leave givenism behind and are serious about the idea that nothing in thought comes from the outside. For being *genuine*, this feeling must be an *original* feeling and this means that it cannot be grounded in something more fundamental. By showing that friction is the necessary condition for self-awareness, we come to see how the world shares the apodicticity of transcendental subjectivity while it opens the transcendental to the contingency of experience. No I, no world. No world, no I.

9

But the suspicion of anti-realism still remains. It consists in the idea that the price to pay for putting an end to radical scepticism is too high, namely that of renouncing the independence of reality.

To begin with, there is something wrong in accusing of anti-realism a view whose main claim is that the ordinary world of common experience is the only *real* world; especially if we take into account that it is metaphysical realism that demotes the ontological status of the ordinary. It is important to note in this respect that, on the metaphysical view of reality, empirical beliefs are, if at all, true *conditionally*, true only if the apparent world happens to align with the 'real' one. By contrast, on a picture of the ordinary world as 'flatly real,' empirical truths are *unconditionally* and *categorically* true, in agreement with common sense. The point is that once the contrast between the apparent and the 'real' world is abandoned, it makes no longer sense to think of empirical reality as an apparent, unreal world. A point that was tersely expressed by Wittgenstein when referring to

consciousness as "the very essence of experience, the appearance of the world, the world,"[12] that is, as *life* itself.

Notice, besides, that on the view here proposed the constraint for our thinking that is the mark of reality does not lie in *empirical experience* but rather in something more fundamental that involves all forms of awareness. Being constitutive of consciousness, the binding of subjectivity and reality cannot thus be invalidated by reflection without reflection self-invalidating itself.

Let me add that on this picture epistemic vertigo, conceived as a *longing* for unrestricted spontaneity and for the *unfulfillable unity of consciousness*, would make perfect sense as Venturinha reads it—not so much as a psychological phenomenon but rather as the objective indication of the human predicament, of how we are situated in reality.[13] After all, contingency and 'the given' stand for those irrational aspects of our consciousness of objects that while reason demands that should not be considered as final and irreducible (our rational task is to make them intelligible), are necessary for the possibility of consciousness itself. Philosophy can alleviate this contradiction by making sense of it as natural to our condition of finite agents and as constitutive of awareness. What philosophy cannot do is to dismiss this predicament. That is to court anti-philosophical philistinism.

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Let me end by succinctly showing how my proposal accommodates two of the most significant attitudes of Venturinha regarding hinge epistemology—his *reluctance* (that I fully share) to hold that hinges perform a normative, evidential function within ordinary epistemic practices, as it is manifested in his doubts regarding the possibility of a transcendental deduction of categories;[14] and his conviction that we are *at home in the world* in an intimate and fundamental way, namely in a non-epistemic way, as it is displayed by his ultimate appeal to a moral way out of scepticism.[15]

It is my view on the first issue that the project to justify general hinge commitments such as 'There is an external world' as necessary presuppositions of actual, particular judgments, and thus, to demonstrate their applicability to

[12] Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data'," in James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (eds.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical occasions 1912–1951* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 202-367, 255.

[13] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 87.

[14] *Ibid*., 54–55.

[15] *Ibid.,* 86–87.

determinate, sensuously given objects, grows out of the task of *securing reality* and *providing closure for knowledge* in order to distinguish *objective* from *subjective* phenomena within experience. The problem lies in the fact that the apodicticity of reality can only be gained (or lost) at a transcendental level, and so as primitive and *indeterminate*. Otherwise, the confusion between the grammatical and the empirical would result. Wittgenstein has shown only that we need to assume that every event has some indeterminate cause or that events are given within the world. He has not shown that we need to assign any determinate cause or any determinate reality to an event. Nor has he shown how we could do it. The point is that if, on the one hand, this way of securing reality would *exclude the openness of experience*, it would leave hinges, on the other, *hanging in the air*, namely as brute norms that, detached from subjectivity itself, would be arbitrary.

As for the second issue, let me say for now that in my proposal it is accorded to the feeling of reality (as well as to the opposite feeling of spontaneity and freedom) the status of ultimate fact. But an ultimate fact cannot be itself significantly affected by discursive thinking. This is why, I think, those two facts of consciousness can be conceived neither as objects of opinion nor as objects of thought and knowledge. They are objects of *faith (Glaube*).

In his book, Venturinha refers approvingly to the highest rank accorded by Kant to *Glaube*, as well as to the connection of *Glaube* with the moral dimension. As it happens, there is no deeper agreement than such agreement *in faith*.

ON CONTEXTS, HINGES, AND IMPOSSIBLE MISTAKES

Anna BONCOMPAGNI

ABSTRACT: In this commentary on Nuno Venturinha's *Description of Situations*, after highlighting what in my view are the most significant and innovative features of his work, I focus on Venturinha's infallibilist approach to knowledge. This topic allows for a wider discussion concerning the pragmatist aspects of the later Wittgenstein's philosophy. I discuss this in three steps: first, by describing the general similarity between Wittgenstein and the pragmatists with respect to the emphasis on contexts; second, by focusing on the kind of fallibilism endorsed by the pragmatists and its compatibility with Charles S. Peirce's concept of the "indubitables," which I take as a precursor of Wittgenstein's concept of hinges; and, finally, by advancing the hypothesis that it is possible to find a form of fallibilism in the later Wittgenstein too, notwithstanding his insistence on the impossibility of mistakes. My conclusion is that while Venturinha's contextualism finds support in the later Wittgenstein's writings, his infallibilism does not.

KEYWORDS: contextualism, fallibilism, infallibilism, pragmatism, Wittgenstein

To analyze an ordinary proposition, such as "There is a lamp on my table," or "I am working at a table," and to treat such analysis as a starting point from which it is possible to get anywhere. This is the methodological opening chosen by Nuno Venturinha for his *Description of Situations*, a short and yet incisive and highly original work in contextualist epistemology.[1] The idea, inspired by Wittgenstein, is that the description of a situation should offer all that is needed for a comprehensive philosophical analysis ranging from language to ontology, from truth to modality and possible worlds, from the nature of thought to transcendentalism, from skepticism to social dependency. This is an ambitious project carried out in an unconventional way: at first glance, "I am writing at a table" (maybe by the fire?) seems all too familiar as the beginning of a

[1] Nuno Venturinha, *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

philosophical reflection; however, Venturinha starts from the *proposition* rather than the situation itself, examining its different constituents, the way in which the words are interrelated, and the way in which they explicitly and implicitly refer to or imply a whole cluster of contexts, theories, and philosophical perspectives.

Venturinha's work however is not only original because of its methodological and stylistic choices: it is so also in virtue of its contents. While he does not explicitly identify with any of the existent variants in epistemic contextualism, he undertakes a wide-ranging historical-philosophical journey, putting different perspectives into dialogue and finding allies (or at least partial allies) in thinkers as diverse as Aristotle, Aquinas, Bolzano, Frege, and (mostly) the later Wittgenstein of *On Certainty*, as well as David Lewis and Fernando Gil. Venturinha's theoretical aim is to propose a form of contextualism compatible with and indeed *grounding* a realist position. He claims that "a contextualist approach is required if we pursue solid epistemic standards"[2] and wants to find a way to conciliate contextualism with "the objectivism that a contextualist perspective *seems* to challenge."[3] As he puts it elsewhere, the attempt is to keep together "a realist epistemological view with the relativity that results from the context-sensitivity inherent in our knowledge attributions."[4] The picture he draws is that of a world composed of states of affairs upon which individual and perspectival representations *supervene*.[5] And if this is somewhat reminiscent of the *Tractatus*, Venturinha's use of the later Wittgenstein of *On Certainty* wants to highlight something very similar. Unlike contemporary contextualists who are primarily interested in the variability of our knowledge attributions, in Venturinha's reading, Wittgenstein shows that we are always led to assume something as evident, whatever context we might happen to inhabit or consider. It is this background of presuppositions that allows the ordinary evidence to *be taken as evidence*, and this is what guarantees, in the end, objectivity and realism.

Whether a realist interpretation of Wittgenstein is feasible and fruitful or not is itself a huge topic for discussion, as is the tenability of a strongly realist version of epistemic contextualism, and I prefer not to deal with either in the short space of this commentary. Rather, I am interested in focusing on a related but more circumscribed issue; namely, that of fallibilism vs. infallibilism. Connected to Venturinha's realist attitude are his commitment to the factivity of knowledge, his

[2] *Ibid.*, 32.

[3] *Ibid.*, 85, my emphasis.

[4] Nuno Venturinha, "Précis of *Description of Situations*," *Philosophia* 48 (2020): 1683–1690, here 1683.

[5] *Ibid.*

conviction that a contextualist approach is (and must be) able to preserve that factivity, and his endorsement of a form of infallibilism (see chapter 6 in particular). Following David Lewis, Venturinha excludes from the domain of legitimate knowledge claims all those possibilities that we are "properly ignoring," those possibilities that contrast with our proper presuppositions; in this way, certain hypotheses (typically, skeptical hypotheses) remain outside the scope of what we are considering. But within that scope—and here is where infallibilism enters the scene—our knowledge, if it is knowledge, is infallible.

Venturinha expands on this in his more recent "Non-sceptical Infallibilism,"[6] where he quotes, with approval, Lewis' infallibilist take: "To speak of fallible knowledge, of knowledge despite uneliminated possibilities of error, just *sounds* contradictory."[7] Yet, there is an intuitive sense in which fallibilism simply reflects a common conception of knowledge, according to which, roughly, *S* knows *p* on the basis of *r* provided that *r* makes *p sufficiently probable*, with only a minimal and negligible residue of uncertainty; this was what Cohen had in mind when he claimed, a few decades ago, that fallibilism—though in need of refinement—was generally accepted in epistemology.[8] After all, claiming that we know something and at the same time acknowledging that it still might turn out that we are wrong is not only possible, but pretty common. This is especially clear whenever we take a retrospective look at our knowledge claims, recognizing that we *thought* we knew something, and we were justified in our claim then, but we actually were wrong. The contrast between the two views has recently led DeRose[9] to distinguish between an intuitive and a more demanding "GC (Genuine Conflict)" version of fallibilism, whereby Cohen is using the former, and Lewis the latter: in this view, the opposition between seeing fallibilism as reasonable knowledge (Cohen) and seeing it as a kind of madness (Lewis) is merely verbal, as it depends on there being two different concepts of fallibilism at play in the two theories.

Now, Venturinha does not want to deny that human beings are fallible creatures and have false beliefs. This is patently true for him.[10] What he claims, rather, is that "someone who knows that *p* cannot be mistaken about *p*—even if

[6] Nuno Venturinha, "Non-sceptical Infallibilism," *Analysis* 80 (2020): 186–195.

[7] David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1996): 549–567, here 549.

[8] Stewart Cohen, "How to be a Fallibilist," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988): 91–123.

[9] Keith DeRose, "Contextualism and Fallibilism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Contextualism*, ed. J. J. Ichikawa (London: Routledge, 2017), 145–155.

[10] See Venturinha, "Non-sceptical Infallibilism," 188.

one can admit a possibility in which one would be under the illusion of knowing that *p*;" and this is because "any far-fetched possibilities in which not-*p* are contextually excluded."[11] This is a form of infallibilism, he affirms, because there cannot be a lack of knowledge with respect to what it is fundamental to assume in the actual context under consideration.

While I think that the existence of different notions of fallibilism does matter—and that Venturinha's position might also be called fallibilist according to a relaxed notion of fallibilism (whereby excluding certain hypotheses means admitting that we cannot really *know* that such hypotheses cannot occur)—it is important to understand what exactly Venturinha is ruling out here, because, regardless of such labels, therein lies the substance of his claim. If I am reading him correctly, besides excluding skeptical scenarios, he is also ruling out the possibility of a non-general, non-radical, non-skeptical kind of fallibility. His position then amounts to affirming that if one knows, one is infallible in their knowledge, *contextually speaking*.

It can be argued that an infallibilist position is compatible with and supported by Wittgenstein's views in *On Certainty*. Indeed, the indubitability of hinges is often stressed by Wittgenstein (as well as commentators), along with the impossibility of making genuine mistakes about hinges, and the claim that to make a mistake about our basic assumptions, presuppositions or beliefs would look like a mental disturbance rather than a mere error. He defines objective certainty itself (the kind of hinge certainty he is investigating) as characterized by the logical impossibility of mistakes.[12] So, for instance:

> Would this be correct: If I merely believed wrongly that there is a table here in front of me, this might still be a mistake; but if I believe wrongly that I have seen this table, or one like it, every day for several months past, and have regularly used it, that isn't a mistake?[13]
>
> In certain circumstances a man cannot make a mistake. ("Can" is here used logically, and the proposition does not mean that a man cannot say anything false in those circumstances.) If Moore were to pronounce the opposite of those propositions which he declares certain, we should not just not share his opinion: we should regard him as demented.[14]

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, translated by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), § 194.

[13] *Ibid.*, § 75.

[14] *Ibid.*, § 155.

I have suggested that the way in which Wittgenstein deals with doubt and certainty shows similarities with a pragmatist perspective.[15] Yet, the pragmatist perspective is traditionally and uncontroversially taken as the exemplary case (maybe the very origin) of a fallibilist approach to knowledge.[16] But if Venturinha is right in finding support for his infallibilist account of a contextualist epistemology in a Wittgensteinian approach to certainty and evidence, then there must be some incoherence or incompatibility between the Wittgensteinian and the pragmatist views of knowledge.

I think there are differences between the two, but these differences are not so much related to their respective attitudes towards the fallibility or infallibility of human knowledge (including contextual human knowledge). I will show this in three steps: first, by describing a general similarity between Wittgenstein and the pragmatists with respect to the emphasis on contexts; second, by focusing on the kind of fallibilism endorsed by the pragmatists and its compatibility with Charles S. Peirce's concept of the "indubitables," which I take as a precursor of Wittgenstein's concept of hinges; and, finally, by advancing the hypothesis that it is possible to find a form of fallibilism in the later Wittgenstein too, notwithstanding his insistence on the impossibility of mistakes on hinges.

The existence of general similarities between Wittgensteinian and pragmatist views on the importance of contexts is generally acknowledged. Following Medina[17] it is possible to identify some features that are common in both Wittgenstein and the pragmatists: the materiality of language (the embeddedness of linguistic practices in forms of life); the performativity of language (the inseparability of words and actions); the social character of the contexts in which words and sentences acquire meaning; and the temporal dimension of such discursive contexts. Medina also highlights the tacit background agreement that, in both views, allows a sharing of perspectives that in the end *is* meaning itself, a background that in his opinion is not to be intended as a foundation. What both views suggest, Medina observes, is that once contexts are properly taken into

[15] Anna Boncompagni, *Wittgenstein and Pragmatism:* On Certainty *in the Light of Peirce and James* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[16] Hilary Putnam has famously claimed in *Pragmatism: An Open Question* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 21: "That one can be both fallibilistic *and* antisceptical is perhaps *the* basic insight of American Pragmatism."

[17] José Medina, "In Defense of Pragmatic Contextualism: Wittgenstein and Dewey on Meaning and Agreement," *The Philosophical Forum* 35(3) (2004): 341–369. Medina discusses Dewey in particular, but his reasoning can safely be extended to pragmatism in general.

account, the underdetermination of meanings does not result in indeterminacy; on the contrary, it results in meanings becoming contextually *determinate*.[18]

Granted this, let me turn to the pragmatists' attitude concerning doubt and certainty. I'd like to call attention here to Charles S. Peirce's writings on critical common-sensism, which represent his way of absorbing and at the same time overcoming Thomas Reid's common-sense philosophy. Besides echoing Reid's rejection of the "closet doubt" of philosophers in his own rejection of the "paper doubt" of a Cartesian skeptic (in much the same style as Wittgenstein does), Peirce is here interested in identifying a class of indubitable assumptions that are generally common to humankind and are in principle exempt from doubt (to use a Wittgensteinian expression).

There are, according to Peirce, three kinds of "indubitables."[19] Indubitables of the first kind are perceptual judgments: we cannot doubt what we perceive. Those of the second kind are acritical inferences, where "acritical" means "unexamined:" our reasoning proceeds according to some instinctive general principles, habits of thought, guiding rules, of which we are normally unaware. Basically, these are the rules of logic or reasoning. Finally, the third type of indubitables are "original beliefs of a general and recurrent kind," where "original" means "uncriticised." These original beliefs are instinctive and common to all human beings; they *can* change through time, but very slowly and almost imperceptibly. Examples are the belief that fire burns, and the belief in the criminality of incest. Now, what perceptual judgments, acritical inferences, and original beliefs have in common, is that we normally take them for granted in our ordinary life, in an instinctive, natural, implicit way, without doubting them, and without the need to somewhat justify or ground them. But the reason why they are indubitable is not that they are self-evident truths: rather, the point is that *in our present situation, we do not see that they are subject to doubt*.[20] Indubitability, therefore, does not entail truth: human knowledge is fallible, and it is fallible even

[18] See in particular John Dewey's paper "Context and Thought," in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953*, Volume 6 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 3–22, with its insistence on the fact that "neglect of context is the greatest single disaster which philosophic thinking can incur" (11), and more generally his *Experience and Nature*, in *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953*, Volume 1 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).

[19] Charles S. Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, vols. I–VI*, ed. by P. Weiss and C. Hartshorne (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 5.442 (volume number, paragraph number).

[20] J.E. Broyles, "Charles S. Peirce and the Concept of Indubitable Belief," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 1, 2 (1965): 77–89.

on indubitables. Without contradiction, from this perspective, it is possible to consider something indubitable, and yet acknowledge that we might be wrong. This is so even for perceptual judgments: perception too indeed for Peirce is indubitable but always fallible. Additionally, in explaining what the difference is between his view and Thomas Reid's, Peirce emphasizes that *critical* commonsensists are critical in that they assign a great value to doubt (the genuine doubt of a real inquiry, of course, not the paper doubt that Peirce criticized). This means that they are aware that nothing prevents an indubitable to be doubted, and even to be declared false, in the future. Indubitables indeed only remain such "in their application to affairs that resemble those of a primitive mode of life."[21] To reiterate, in this view there is no contradiction between indubitability and fallibility:

> [W]hile it is possible that propositions that really are indubitable, for the time being, should nevertheless be false, yet in so far as we do not doubt a proposition we cannot but regard it as perfectly true and perfectly certain.[22]

Given the similarity between Peirce's indubitables and Wittgenstein's hinges, one can ask whether this conclusion holds for Wittgenstein as well. My answer is both yes and no. Let me first explain why I think not.

The views are not the same because in Peirce, but not in Wittgenstein, there is only a difference of degree between indubitability and dubitability, and what is indubitable belongs to the same "realm," so to speak, of what is dubitable: the epistemic realm. Indubitables and ordinary beliefs, in the end, are made of the same stuff. Conversely, in Wittgenstein there is a difference in kind or a categorical distinction between hinges and ordinary beliefs, and the indubitability of hinges is logical, not empirical: it is because of the framework role that a hinge plays in a language game, that it cannot be put in doubt. This is a big difference indeed, and it is traceable back to a more general difference between Wittgenstein and pragmatism, having to do with the nature of knowledge and inquiry and the relationship between science and philosophy. But I do not want to linger on this. The "yes" side of the answer is what matters: I believe that, notwithstanding his insistence on the impossibility of making mistakes concerning hinges, a *form* of fallibilism is present in Wittgenstein too. This might sound contentious, and I am certainly not claiming that Wittgenstein was a fallibilist in the same sense of Peirce (as I hope to have shown above); nevertheless, I think it is worth examining a couple of remarks from OC in order to investigate this further:

> I say "I know p" either to assure people that I, too, know the truth p, or simply as

[21] Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 5.445.
[22] *Ibid.*, 5.498.

> an emphasis of |-p. One says too, "I don't *believe* it, I *know* it." And one might also put it like this (for example): "That is a tree. And that's not just surmise."
> But what about this: "If I were to tell someone that that was a tree, that wouldn't be just surmise." Isn't this what Moore was trying to say?[23]
>
> It would not be surmise and I might tell it to someone else with complete certainty, as something there is no doubt about. But does that mean that it is unconditionally the truth? May not the thing that I recognize with complete certainty as the tree that I have seen here my whole life long—may this not be disclosed as something different? May it not confound me?
> And nevertheless it was right, in the circumstances that give this sentence meaning, to say "I know (I do not merely surmise) that that's a tree." To say that in strict truth I only believe it, would be wrong. It would be completely misleading to say: "I believe my name is L.W." And this too is right: I cannot be making a mistake about it. But that does not mean that I am infallible about it.[24]

Wittgenstein is here interested in the difference between saying "I know" and saying "I believe." In this context, he notices that telling someone with complete certainty "I know (and do not merely surmise) that that's a tree" is right, precisely like in the case of one's name: "I know" and do not merely "surmise" or "believe" that my name is so-and-so. Additionally, I cannot make a mistake on this. It is indubitable. Nevertheless, "that does not mean that I am infallible about it." The last sentence is surprising if one interprets indubitableness and the impossibility of mistakes in an infallibilist framework. But I think it should not be interpreted too straightforwardly as a fallibilist claim either, if fallibilism is intended as something that keeps the door open to skepticism. Wittgenstein is not claiming that we will never really know what our name is, or we will never really know whether there is a tree in front of us when we see a tree. He is saying that it is correct to speak of knowledge here—even indubitable knowledge—in the *grammatical* sense of knowing. "I know" here signals the fact that "this stands fast," that there is no such thing as a doubt in this context, that this is an objective certainty. It does not express an epistemic relationship between a subject and a proposition.[25] If I understand him correctly, the point he is making is that this kind of obvious, practical, active, tacit, animal certainty is unshaken, because it is not a form of knowledge in the *empirical* sense of the term. As Stanley Cavell famously

[23] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 424.

[24] *Ibid.,* § 425. Notice that Wittgenstein wrote these remarks on the same day when he also observed: "So I am saying something that sounds like pragmatism. / Here I am being thwarted by a kind of *Weltanschauung*." (§ 422, March 21st, 1951)

[25] On the grammatical use of "I know" see Annalisa Coliva, *Moore and Wittgenstein: Scepticism, Certainty and Common Sense* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 74 ff.

argued, Wittgenstein is saying that our basic and fundamental relationship with the world is *not* one of (empirical) knowing. This is to say that, *if we want to see this relationship as one of knowing*, then we must admit that we do not really know that this is a tree, that my name is so-and-so, etc. We do not know this, in the empirical sense of "knowing," *because* we know this, in the grammatical sense of "knowing:" we are sure about this, it stands fast for us.

Where is the fallibilism in this position? It lies in the acknowledgment that it *still* might turn out, for some unexpected reasons, that we failed. It might turn out that the tree that I have seen here my whole life long eventually discloses as something different (say, a picture, or a hologram). It might turn out that one morning I open the door of my house and find myself in front of a ravine, because a landslide has occurred during the night. Or it might turn out that according to the General Registrar's Office my name is spelled differently that I have always thought. The physical possibility of a failure of knowledge remains open.[26] Why is this not a form of skepticism? Because this physical possibility does not touch the objective certainty and the instinctive trust with which I live. It is misleading to conclude, from the extremely unlikely possibility that when I open my front door I find myself in front of a ravine, that the certainty with which I open the door every day is just "hastiness or superficiality."[27]

Perhaps Venturinha would reply to my concern by highlighting that the very unlikely possibilities described above were already excluded from the contextual situation we are considering, and that within the context we are considering, our knowledge is infallible. Yet, it is precisely in *this* context, and not in a hypothetical skeptical scenario, that it might turn out that my front door opens on a ravine. The possibilities that need be excluded, as I see the problem, are alternative contexts, such as the skeptical ones, rather than extremely unlikely but nonetheless concrete possibilities within our context. And because we cannot exclude them, we cannot claim that our knowledge is infallible.

To wrap up. Among the merits of this challenging and thought-provoking little book, is the stimulation of reflections on a vast array of topics. I have chosen

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[26] See Luigi Perissinotto, "'… to begin at the beginning': The Grammar of Doubt in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*," in *Doubt, Ethics and Religion: Wittgenstein and the Counter-Enlightenment,* eds. Luigi Perissinotto and Vicente Sanfelix (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2011), 155–182.

[27] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 358. This does not mean that in order to defeat skepticism we just have to appeal to natural dispositions or pragmatic reasons in a Humean / Strawsonian fashion. Contrasting skepticism rather requires showing that it is part of the grammar of our concept of doubt, that doubt can only arise against a backdrop of certainty. This of course is a much wider issue on which I cannot expand here.

one—fallibilism vs. infallibilism—which has allowed me to expand on some similarities I see between the later Wittgenstein of *On Certainty* and the pragmatists. If my reading of *On Certainty* is correct on this point, then Venturinha's contextual infallibilism does not find support in the later Wittgenstein—more specifically: the "contextualist" part of it does, but the "infallibilist" part does not. I am sure his reply will provide new insights and push the debate further, both on *On Certainty* and on contextualism.

SOCIAL SITUATIONS AND WHICH DESCRIPTIONS: ON VENTURINHA'S *DESCRIPTION OF SITUATIONS*

Marcin LEWIŃSKI

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I approach Venturinha's ideas on contextual epistemology from the perspective of linguistic practices of argumentation. I point to the "thick" descriptions of social situations as a common context in which our epistemic language-games take place. In this way, I explore promising connections of Venturinha's work to key concepts in recent speech act theory, social ontology and social epistemology.

KEYWORDS: contextualism, presumptive knowledge, social ontology, thick descriptions

1. Arguments and Enthymemes

Nuno Venturinha's erudite book *Description of Situations*[1] seeks to solve one of the perennial epistemological puzzles—can we find a solid ground for what we call knowledge in the space between epistemic fundamentalism and skepticism?—through a defense of a Wittgenstein-inspired contextualist approach. In view of Venturinha's expertise in Wittgensteinian philosophy,[2] this inspiration is not only unsurprising but also fruitful, as it lets him sketch an original form of contextualist epistemology grounded in linguistic practices.

Given the immense scope of the problems discussed, this brief book is a tour de force of concise exposition and tightly controlled argument. As a result, much remains implicit. The inevitable gaps can be filled by a principle-of-charity wielding reader and treated as intriguing enthymemes. However, in a compact text where lengthy elaborations are verboten, and detail is at times scarce, some of

[1] Nuno Venturinha, *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

[2] E.g., Nuno Venturinha (ed.), *The Textual Genesis of Wittgenstein's* Philosophical Investigations (New York: Routledge, 2013).

these enthymemes are hard to accommodate. Before I get to the gist of my commentary, let me briefly go through two examples, one from the opening and one from closing passages of the book. On p. 4 Venturinha speaks of permissibility and near-permissibility and refers to the classic work of David Lewis[3] on score-keeping in language games. Venturinha is of course aware his own argument on (near-) permissible uses of language in describing actions connects to Lewis's point only by analogy, rather than substance, and offers this disclaimer: "Lewis is specifically interested in conversational rules that the speakers of any language can shift"[4] (rather than in general (near-) permissibility of action-attributions Venturinha discusses).

Even if analogical, this argument is inaccurate. Lewis's *rules of accommodation for permissibility*, with the *master* permitting the *slave* to do certain actions, show how conversational rules, underlain by social conventions for the working of *performatives* (notably, those related to the status of authority), can be used to introduce changes to the social context by means of necessary accommodation. What *shifts* with a master's utterance such as "You can leave now" are *not* the rules of the conversation itself but the public conversational score—and, in result, the social context, including mutual rights and obligations governed by newly accommodated norms (the slave can go have his beer rather than wash the master's feet). With the aim of elucidating Austin's puzzle of performative speech—"how saying can make it so"—Lewis thus explains that "the boundary [of permissible actions] shifts […] so as to make the master's statement true."[5] In this way, the world catches up with the language, rather than the language with the world. Exploring this detail further, however, might be stimulating for Venturinha's own approach. In her analysis of Lewis's permissibility, Langton has argued that through the master's orders ("you can,""you cannot") "an *ought* of some kind does come into being, through a rule of accommodation: a local *ought*, relative to a context or practice, which itself stands in need of evaluation; perhaps a practice-internal *ought*, which depends, for its standing, on the worth of the practice itself."[6] The curious interplay of practice-internal and practice-external considerations is very much in line with Venturinha's contextualist perspective, both in epistemic and moral contexts.

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[3] David Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8 (1979): 339–359.

[4] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 4.

[5] Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game," 341.

[6] Rae Langton, "How to Get a Norm from a Speech Act," *The Amherst Lecture in Philosophy* 10 (2015): 1–33, here 27–28. Available online: http://www.amherstlecture.org/langton2015/.

On to the second example. When discussing the practical moral solution to the contextualist puzzles (how to maneuver between epistemic fundamentalism and skepticism), Venturinha writes:

> If my account is right, then it seems as if no action could be considered essentially wrong for there would always be a reason to justify it, the reason that led the agent to decide that way.[7]

In the final passages of the book, Venturinha solves this puzzle by the application of his Disclosure Principle and the resultant self-evaluation of the agent leading to her profound feeling of either moral peace or torment. However, this might not have been necessary. This sentence—again, clearly an enthymematic shortcut—forgoes the distinction between the *motivating* reason and the *justifying* reason for action. The former is a reason "of" the action, a cause that moves the agent to do φ, whether consciously or not. The latter is a reason "for" the action, the public grounding the agent furnishes to defend the rationality of her action. These two types of reason can, of course, coincide: I might want to employ person X precisely because I genuinely find X the best candidate, given the official criteria and the extensive documentation of candidates X, Y, and Z, which the job committee has duly scrutinized. However, I can also give X a preference because he's quite cute or, to use Searle's example, is my old drinking buddy. All this while officially justifying my decision by arguing this is the most hard-working, etc., candidate. In the latter case, "the reason that led me to decide that way" could—even should—"be considered essentially wrong" and I can feel all the resulting moral regret Venturinha is describing (plus the public censure or even punishment, if the gap between the actually motivating and the publicly presented justifying reason is revealed). Venturinha's brief discussion of *akrasia* goes some way toward solving this tension[8]—and it would be thrilling to see a more complete version of his argument elaborated within his overall contextualist proposal.

2. Thick Descriptions of Social Reality

Since I find such details to be what they are—mere *details*—they do not significantly distract from the overall argument of Venturinha's essay. This argument sets off immediately in the opening sentence of the essay—"I am working at a table"—meant to serve as a guiding example for a contextual "description of situation," as the title of the essay has it. Description, however, is a

[7] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 94.

[8] See Javier González de Prado, "Akrasia and the Desire to Become Someone Else: Venturinha on Moral Matters," *Philosophia* 48 (2020): 1705–1711.

tricky task—and Venturinha, via his detailed linguistic analysis, diligently goes through different aspects of this trickiness. Let me focus on the chief activity here, namely, that of "working." What is "working"? Well, it is not *not working*, we are rightly told,[9] but in this negative "not working" we have some distant activities ("swimming in the pool") and some neighboring activities ("tidying up the desk"). An important passage ensues:

> And "tidying up the desk" can obviously be taken as "working" if we generalize the description, especially if we do not take "working" to be the specific task of "writing philosophy." We come to grasp the meaning of *W* not merely by contrasting it to that of *A, B, C,* etc., but by calculating what can count as *W* from a set of contextually acceptable instances of *W* ranging from W_1 to W_n. That explains why we do not indefinitely go on to stipulate what *W* is not (*A, B, C*, etc.). This negative infinity is not processed by us, who focus instead on a circumscribable number of positive possibilities that the context in question elects. An extraordinarily complex interpretation is made at all times and it is through this framework that we organize reality. There is nothing like "working" in itself. What counts as such is something we lay down in our multifaceted linguistic practices.[10]

Many important things happen in this passage and I will have hardly anything more to say about Venturinha's argument than what I can extract from it. Imagine the situation: a man is sitting at a table, looking at something (a book, a notebook, a computer screen, a keyboard), moving his hands in certain ways between some of these objects (say, a book and a keyboard). What is that man *doing*? Or, as Venturinha puts it, what does his doing "count as"? Venturinha spoils the surprise and tells us in the third word of the book that the man is *working*. However, *tidying up* the desk is another possible description; *playing* a strategy computer game is another option; and so is *exercising* his wrists; *testing* his new keyboard; *filling out* a tax return form; *learning* a foreign language; *planning* holidays; etc. All of these can be "contextually acceptable" descriptions of the current situation. Depending on the description, the situation gets ever more complex (he can be *instructing* his colleague how to fill out a tax form; *practicing* how to instruct him, etc.). But at the very least we have two levels of description: (1) that of directly observable body movements in a specified time and location; (2) that of what these particular body movements "mean" or "count as" in this situation. Gilbert Ryle, in his well-known distinction, calls (1) "thin" descriptions while (2) are called "thick"

[9] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 3.
[10] *Ibid.*

descriptions.[11] A boy twitching his right eye might be simply… (1) twitching his eye (due to a nervous tic, perhaps), but he might also be (2) *winking*; *parodying* someone else's wink; or even *rehearsing* how to parody someone else's wink. Similarly, a composer sitting at a piano might be (1) *touching* on the piano keys, thereby producing sounds but also (2) *cancelling, modifying, assembling, reassembling, rehearsing*, etc., parts of his "Hungarian Rhapsody" in the making.[12] Venturinha's philosopher "*working* at a table" is in a similar situation: he is moving his hands over the keyboard, but also possibly doing any of the things mentioned above—plus, possibly, writing a commentary on Venturinha's book.

Ryle does not put it this way himself, but (1) largely correspond to what logical empiricists would call "protocol" or "observation sentences:" directly experienced, brute descriptions of empirical reality. (2) is not only a thicker but also a trickier description: indeed, "[a]n extraordinarily complex interpretation is made at all times and it is through this framework that we organize reality. There is nothing like 'working' in itself. What counts as such is something we lay down in our multifaceted linguistic practices."[13] Three elements here—"framework that we organize reality," "counts as," and "our multifaceted linguistic practices"—all point in one direction, namely that of social ontology.[14] "X counts as Y in context C," as the general formula for constitutive rules allowing for the imposition of socially recognizable status functions on objects, actions, or persons, is the very cornerstone of Searle's social ontology. In the thick social context of organized labor, job contracts, universities, publishing houses, royalties, scientific production indicators, etc. etc., moving one's hands over a table may *count as* "writing philosophy" and this, further, *as* "working" (clearly in Professor Venturinha's case; for someone different, for instance an aspiring aristocrat-philosopher, "writing philosophy" would rather count as pastime). Indeed, within this framework that we organize social reality, we constantly engage in our multifaceted linguistic

[11] Gilbert Ryle, "Thinking and Reflecting," in *The Human Agent: Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, vol. I, 1966–1967* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1968), repr. in *Collected Papers, Volume 2: Collected Essays 1929–1968*(London: Routledge, 2009), 479–493; "The thinking of Thoughts: What is 'Le Penseur' doing?", *University Lectures* 18 (1968), repr. in *Collected Papers, Volume 2: Collected Essays 1929–1968* (London: Routledge, 2009), 494–510.

[12] Ryle, "Thinking and Reflecting," 491.

[13] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 3.

[14] See esp. John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Raimo Tuomela, *Social Ontology: Collective Intentionality and Group Agents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

practices to negotiate and modulate the meaning of underdetermined, dynamic social concepts such as those of "working."[15]

All this has direct relevance to Venturinha's essay. Social reality pops up throughout his argument, sometimes in unexpected places. When discussing the conceptual dependence of direct empirical evidence on what Wittgenstein called *hinges*— "the necessary evidence to situate us in experience regulating what is and is not subjected to doubt"[16]—Husserl *proto-proto-doxa*, and Gil *primary evidence*, he resorts to the following example:

> If I present my passport to produce evidence of my identity, an extensive field of primary evidence will keep on working beneath that proof. It is this horizon of prima facie evidence that is under scrutiny. […] What is at issue is not the verifiable existence or truth of a certain thing—e.g. my passport—but what allows me to hold a certain thing—again, my passport—to exist or to be true.[17]

"What allows my passport to exist," "an extensive field of primary evidence working beneath" is, again, the thick background of social reality: nation-states, borders, citizenship rules, international agreements on the rules of entry, immigration officers, business or leisure travel, etc. According to Searle,[18] the social world is *ontologically subjective*: it exists only thanks to subjective intentional acts of individual human beings, who decide, for instance, that this type of a small notebook with a picture counts as a passport, but this one as a vaccination record. (The *ontologically objective* natural world would by contrast exist as well without any human experience, as argued by Venturinha too.) However, it is *epistemically objective*: it consists largely of subject-independent facts which could be subjected to objective inquiry, e.g., in sociology or economics. *That* this document is a passport and not a vaccination card is not a subjective experience of an immigration officer, but a fact that we both need to recognize—and if we don't, we can go through the motions of public reason, perhaps in a court, to settle this fact. (*Epistemically subjective* perceptions—"your passport looks red in this light, strange…"—are, again, carefully described by Venturinha via the classic work of Descartes, Kant, Husserl, and others.) Why mention this? Well, *descriptions* can be (epistemically) objective or subjective, and *situations* can be (ontologically) objective or subjective too. So we have four scenarios here: objective descriptions of the objective, natural world (e.g., natural sciences); objective descriptions of the

[15] See Peter Ludlow, *Living Words: Meaning Underdetermination and the Dynamic Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
[16] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 52.
[17] *Ibid*., 53.
[18] Searle, *Making the Social World*.

subjective, social world (e.g., social sciences); subjective descriptions of the objective, natural world (e.g., a still nature painting); subjective descriptions of the subjective, social world (e.g., a personal, historical narrative). I am not sure Venturinha is clear enough about which type of "descriptions of situations" he is focusing on: *All* of them? *Some* of them?

3. Propositions and Language Games

In any case, the inevitable background of social reality clearly has relevance to Venturinha's objectives, materials and methods. The deliberately chosen material from which he starts is a single "ordinary proposition" and the avowed method that of a first-person singular introspection, eternalized in the work of Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, some of the main characters in the story.[19]

Venturinha openly follows Wittgenstein in the methodological belief that:

> [N]ew work should depart from "the analysis of an ordinary proposition, for example 'there is a lamp on my table'," inasmuch as "we should be able to get everywhere from there." This, Wittgenstein added, would be in agreement with a conviction he was forming in himself according to which his volume should proceed from "a description of nature," something specified as "the description of a situation," with this containing "the material for all the rest" (*Vienna Edition*, vol 3, MS 110: 243, my translation). Although his later writings exhibit traces of this methodology, possibly consisting of the first experiment in contextualist epistemology, there is no item in Wittgenstein's *Nachlass* that corresponds specifically to the pathway proposed in that remark.[20]

Note here that "there is a lamp on my table" is, on the most straightforward interpretation, a protocol sentence that needs (and allows for) no more than a thin description of the ontologically objective world: "a description of nature." No tricky, socially recognizable *as* something entity is being involved here—perhaps beyond the "myness" of the table, which might presuppose the notion of private ownership, but not necessarily so ("my" might just as well signify a temporary possessive, such as when "my table" in the library is the one that I just put my books on and sat at). This, we might say, is a crucial delimitation of Wittgenstein here, one that spares him the trouble of getting into the Pandora's box of thick descriptions, descriptions of society. This delimitation is, however, also a serious limitation, and one he became acutely aware of when working toward *Philosophical Investigations*. There, as we all know, rather than a single ordinary proposition describing nature, Wittgenstein chose as a point of departure the

[19] See Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, chapters 8, 9, and 10, respectively.

[20] *Ibid.*, ix–x.

language "meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B"[21] and, consequently, a language-game, "the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven."[22] Wittgenstein perhaps realized that the project of departing from a single proposition—the basic method of logical analysis, esp. around the 1930s—is a futile project. Instead, in order to investigate the connection between language and situation, the underlying theme of Venturinha's essay, we need to take a wholly different perspective, that of language games and forms of life that determine our uses of language all the way down to single sentences and words.

Venturinha is, of course, aware of all that. He duly acknowledges "the difficulties associated to a view that turns on an internalist axis"[23] and agrees with Wittgenstein that:

> As soon as we begin to question our situation, we see that the natural perspective we have of ourselves and the world is grounded on evidence that did not result from an inquiry. It is precisely a natural evidence, one that was acquired, as the later Wittgenstein would have it, in the "practice of language."[24]

Indeed, the closing chapters of the book (11 and 12) clearly look toward the social aspect of language, public reason, and moral social commitment as the solution to the initial puzzle. This, however, generates a certain tension in the philosophical method and orientation, namely that between the first-person phenomenological epistemology and the third-person social ontology (compare Descartes's "I" descriptions with Ryle's "he," late Wittgenstein's "they," and Searle's and Tuomela's "we" descriptions of situations). Via his Wittgensteinian inspiration, Venturinha maneuvers between the two—like so many philosophers before him, notably Husserl—but at times the results remain unclear.

4. Argumentation: Defeaters and Presumptions

In his closing argument, Venturinha addresses another crucial tension of his essay, namely the one between contextualism and objectivism. Returning once again to Wittgenstein's *hinges*, he claims the following:

> The acquisition and use of what I have called key epistemic operators are for him subordinated to the natural course of our lives and not to any social determination. That even babies apply modal categories when they take an object

[21] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition by G.E.M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), § 2.
[22] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 7.
[23] Venturinha, *Description of Situations*, 15.
[24] *Ibid*., 50.

> as existing, looking at it or touching it, is not something caused by our socialization. Some animals do exactly the same at a basic level. What this shows is that our social dependency, with its rule-following, lies within a deeper form of ontological dependence which matches the very idea of human nature. This opens the way to conciliate the contextualism that must be conceived in order to render a situation epistemologically intelligible with the objectivism that a contextualist perspective seems to challenge, with sceptical paradoxes appearing in an entirely new light.[25]

This passage opens several philosophically fascinating issues. Can we construct a defeasible but solid argument to the effect that social reality, at its bottom, "matches the very idea of human nature"? Can we defend some kind of isomorphism or correspondence between the social and the natural order? Will, for instance, Cohen's "moron society" and "genius society"[26] match human nature in relevantly similar ways in their epistemic endeavors? Would they share enough of common hinges to corroborate Venturinha's objectivist argument? If, as argued extensively by the late Wittgenstein, Davidson and many others, our knowledge is essentially conceptual and thus language-dependent, would we eventually not need a concept of language that is different than the late Wittgenstein's? Some kind of "natural" language over and above socially-determined practices of language? This list of hard questions can easily continue…

One possible path to explore when facing these questions would be something in the spirit of an argumentative version of social epistemology, as developed, among others, by Goldman[27] and Rescher[28]—but also, in a much more embryonic form, by Cohen,[29] whose work is extensively discussed by Venturinha. This path, it seems, would be congenial to many of Venturinha's ideas and solutions. One crucial concept here would be the counterpart of defeaters, namely *presumption*.[30] While Pollock's concept of defeaters is part and parcel of contextualist epistemology, Rescher argues that what is left after the relevant defeaters of *q* are successfully overcome, is not the knowledge of *q*, but rather presumptive acceptance of *q,* the acceptance of the so far best "truth-candidate" *q*.

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[25] *Ibid.*, 85.

[26] Stewart Cohen, "Knowledge, Context, and Social Standards," *Synthese* 73 (1987): 3–26.

[27] Alvin I. Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

[28] Nicholas Rescher, *Presumption and the Practices of Tentative Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[29] Cohen, "Knowledge, Context, and Social Standards."

[30] Marcin Lewiński, "Argumentation Theory without Presumptions," *Argumentation* 31 (2017): 591–613; Rescher, *Presumption and the Practices of Tentative Cognition*; Maciej Witek, "Illocution and Accommodation in the Functioning of Presumptions," *Synthese* (2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-019-02459-4.

In lieu of firmer yet unattainable grounds, presumption authorizes us to reason *as if* the premises were true and *as if* the inference was warranted to reach a conclusion on which we can then proceed *as if* it were true.[31] Importantly, this *as-ifness* is not Husserl's first-person *as-ifness* understood as perceptual modality (discussed by Venturinha on pp. 75-76), but an intersubjective *as-ifness*, achieved in collective critical testing of claims through public argumentative practices. The endpoint of such practices would be presumptive, intersubjectively shared evidence not unlike in Cohen's proposal.[32] Moreover, argumentative discussions—as epitomized in Socratic dialectic—also bring about the all-important conceptual clarification, sometimes intricately indistinguishable from substantive inquiry.[33] In this way, it is indeed Wittgenstein's natural "practice of language" that generates the evidence we can intersubjectively understand and scrutinize.

However, it is of course all too easy to create partial alternative proposals without taking the entire burden of proof necessary for a book. This is the privilege of the commentator. The privilege of the author is to have the book published and to go with glee through the easily refutable criticisms of commentators. I hope I have only produced those—otherwise, I wouldn't have done justice to Venturinha's work well done at his table.

[31] Lewiński, "Argumentation Theory without Presumptions."

[32] Cohen, "Knowledge, Context, and Social Standards."

[33] Donald Davidson, "Dialectic and Dialogue," in *Language, Mind and Epistemology*, eds. Gerhard Preyer et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 1994), 429–437; Ludlow, *Living Words*.

REPLIES TO CRITICS

Nuno VENTURINHA

ABSTRACT: This text brings together replies to three commentaries on my *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (Springer, 2018) written by Modesto Gómez-Alonso, Anna Boncompagni and Marcin Lewiński.

KEYWORDS: hinges, infallibilism, pragmatism, revisionism, scepticism

1. Reply to Gómez-Alonso

Modesto Gómez-Alonso's commentary provides a remarkable overview of my main lines of argument in *Description of Situations*.[1] As he stresses right at the beginning of his text, I am not interested in epistemic contextualism to place all the emphasis, as many others do, on the social dependency of our knowledge claims and the relativism that is often associated with such a perspective. My interest in contextualist epistemology lies, quite differently, in connecting what is necessarily context-sensitive with an objectivity that must be presupposed if we wish to have a realist view of the world. Our daily practices clearly show that we are realists through and through, but one of the most vexing outcomes of philosophical analysis is how realism can vanish so quickly. On the one hand, the fact that our knowledge attributions are context-dependent seems to leave no room for any reality other than the physical reality behind our language drills. On the other hand, the recognition that subjectivity plays a decisive role in the constitution of experience brings to light sceptical worries which are by no means easy to overcome. Interestingly enough, contextualists argue that scepticism can be surpassed if we assume that epistemic standards simply vary according to the situations at stake. The high demand for certainty that takes place in the context of a philosophy class to illustrate the sceptic's view actually contrasts with the relaxed standards we usually make use of to know the very same things. Notwithstanding this ingeniously pragmatic response to the problem of scepticism, there is a specific aspect of the problem that contextualism cannot cope with: modality. This is at the core of radical scepticism.

[1] Nuno Venturinha, *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

As Gómez-Alonso observes, all my effort in *Description of Situations* was to guarantee, in his apt words, "that *the closure of knowledge and the openness of experience are compatible*." It leaves me epistemologically uneasy that my typing these remarks here and now will not constitute a state of affairs that forms part of the world and exists independently of my knowing it. That is what "closure of knowledge" in this context is about. Regardless of there being no one else around in my room capable of noticing this state of affairs, it must belong to the history of the world. Everything that is now happening without being noticed by anyone also belongs to what is called in the book a "depository" of states of affairs. Of course, by arguing this way, I am left with the complicated job of explaining where this depository has its headquarters and how on earth it relates to individual consciousness. The variety of individual representations is just what promotes the "openness of experience" Gómez-Alonso refers to. David Lewis said he was a realist about possible worlds.[2] Well, I am a realist about *actual* states of affairs. I guess the majority of physicists would say: "We all are!" Still, this is of little help to convince some anti-realist philosophers.

Gómez-Alonso claims that much of *Description of Situations* was "inspired by a *non-dualistic reading* of Kant" in regard to cognition. I do, in fact, devote the entire Chapter 9 to his transcendentalism but I would not go that far. Gómez-Alonso also claims that I subscribe, in a McDowellian way, to "the *discursivity thesis*" and he then proposes another non-dualistic approach, one in which we would have an "*original form of consciousness*, one the 'knowledge' of which is intuitive (non-discursive) and immediate." According to Gómez-Alonso, this can be taken "not as an alternative but as *complementary* to Venturinha's method." Let us see if it works.

Gómez-Alonso introduces an important distinction, "the distinction between contextual and trans-contextual truths (and facts)," and also speaks about "perspectival and trans-perspectival truths." The realm of the "trans-contextual" or the "trans-perspectival" would be that of a possible world which does not need to be made actual by a given context or perspective. As Gómez-Alonso notes, this "helps to accommodate objectivity, at least in the sense that trans-perspectival truths are analogous to transcendental rules." But he keenly recognizes that in the eyes of a "metaphysical realist" what is at stake is the very fact of reality. As an advocate of metaphysical realism, I do not think that trans-contextualism or trans-perspectivism is required to explain that, for instance, my cellar comprises such and such wines, which are at such and such a stage of bottle development, etc. It could be argued, however, that this realistic assumption is possible because it is

[2] David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 1–5.

made by me, who already *knows* the bottles and can represent them. But what about that which has never been experienced at all? I would not say that it belongs to a possible world. My view is that it is as actual as the objects I have before me. Indeed, I go as far as to claim that any unknown situation is ontologically context-determined. It does not matter whether the *context of reality* can be captured by us. No doubt it will not be entirely captured. But when we capture some aspect of it, this cannot be the result of *our* situated knowledge. What is happening with my bottles, including those processes I am completely ignorant about, is happening in our actual world. If I came to learn some of those processes, I would be in a condition to make knowledge claims that are context-sensitive, though my context-sensitivity should be taken as subordinated to that of reality itself. Gómez-Alonso is aware of what it means to hold this position. That is why he cuttingly writes that "it is this notion of reality in itself that makes radical scepticism not only possible, but also intractable." What a philosophical misadventure that it is the most forceful realist who opens the door to the radical sceptic!

How then can scepticism arise? What can lead us to cast doubts about things which it seems so natural for us to take for granted? Gómez-Alonso avers that "Venturinha's crucial insight is that far from being conjunctively related, sensitivity and conceptual awareness are *internally* related in human cognition," in such a way that "it is *rational activity* that is the special way in which we humans are responsive to external reality." Gómez-Alonso's strategy, as indicated above, is to conceive of this "sensitivity" as something that is not rationally absorbed, but has a life of its own. In order to render this mechanism possible, it must be "grounded in a sort of primitive, foundational, *factive awareness*," he says. I absolutely agree. The problem with this view is that "awareness" only springs from an individual who already integrates the given in his or her subjectivity. One might say—and I would fully endorse it—"What I'm aware of is real." But this will not detain the sceptic. I should point out that this sceptic is not some baffling creature that philosophers are prone to allude to. The most impetuous sceptic is obviously an uncondescending interlocutor who, like Wittgenstein's imaginary opponent in the *Philosophical Investigations*, can be found in ourselves. Gómez-Alonso suggests, following Ernest Sosa's lead, a kind of "constitutive awareness" which, more than representing reality, *presents* it. Despite its practical aptitude, the "immediate identity of subject and object of awareness" that is required by this form of intentionality would be no less problematic than Husserlian phenomenology is—and Gómez-Alonso has a note reminding the reader of my worries about it in Chapter 10 of the book. What does he recommend? That "conceptual awareness" be thought of as involving "*spontaneity* and *constraint*,"

with the latter being the necessary imposition of the world upon our cognitive capacities. Somewhat like Kant, we could say that: "Thoughts [viz. spontaneous acts] without content are empty, intuitions [viz. constraints] without concepts are blind."[3] However, it is not exactly so since Gómez-Alonso argues that "the *transcendental disunity of the self* [would be] a necessary condition for the possibility of self-awareness." While in Kant an intuition can only be given according to a transcendental scheme, the domain of what can constrain us would have to be completely de-transcendentalized in order to avoid any kind of idealism. But Gómez-Alonso knows that we are inexorably tied to "the universal configuration of thought and awareness" and that in the end "nothing in thought comes from the outside." This is what fuels the modal problem in Kant, as I explain in Chapter 9 of the book.

My struggle against the correspondence theory of truth, including the Kantian one, in Chapter 3 was precisely meant as an attempt to de-subjectivize such "universal configuration." The epistemological programme of *Description of Situations* makes traditional correspondism implode to give way to reality, which determines the multiple possible accesses to it—including our own. Herein lies my interest in Wittgensteinian "hinge epistemology" that Gómez-Alonso also discusses. Following Duncan Pritchard, I see hinges as "arational commitments"[4] that manifest—not only for us, rational beings, but for a number of other animals—the primacy of the real. They somehow occupy the place left by the Tractarian elementary propositions consisting of ultimate ontological links with the world. Without those hinges, there would be no connection between inner and outer, no possibility of forming higher-order beliefs like those we have. They are thus the best weapon against scepticism. For the anti-realist interpreter of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, hinges will simply point to what in a certain linguistic milieu of social practices came to be more or less naturally conventioned—therefore leaving the sceptical problem unresolved. In a different way, I take hinges to be the primary contextual factors that situate us in experience. Gómez-Alonso's conclusion is that our "feeling of reality" should be accorded a special status, that of an "ultimate fact," which, to use Kant's jargon,

[3] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), B 75.

[4] Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemic Angst: Radical Skepticism and the Groundlessness of our Believing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 71.

will correspond neither to "matters of opinion" nor to "facts" (of knowledge) but merely to "matters of belief."[5] The same, I am convinced, can be said of hinges.

2. Reply to Boncompagni

The focus of Anna Boncompagni's insightful commentary is the conflict between fallibilism and infallibilism, more specifically my "endorsement of a form of infallibilism." In opposition to the Lewis-inspired epistemological approach I take in *Description of Situations*, Boncompagni sets out to defend the coherence of a fallibilist view such as articulated by Stewart Cohen. As she puts it, "claiming that we know something and at the same time acknowledging that it still might turn out that we are wrong is not only possible, but pretty common." Boncompagni illustrates this by mentioning those cases in which we reflect upon our previous epistemic position and realize that "we *thought* we knew something," even if there was a justification for thinking so, when after all "we actually were wrong."

Let me begin by making two comments on this. The first is that there is an important difference between recognizing that we could be wrong about what we claim to know *and* realizing in retrospect that we were under the illusion of knowing it. I can be very much convinced that I know a multitude of things and still leave room for reconsideration. What happens in this case is that my presumptive knowledge will remain in force unless it is proven otherwise. This is completely different from arriving at the conclusion that my *knowing* this or that was in fact a mere presumption of knowledge. So where does fallibilism fit here? On the one hand, if the fallibilist's point is to underscore that we could always be wrong, including about what remains unshaken, then the outcome is not so much that our knowledge is *fallible* but *revisable*. Some epistemologists make no distinction between fallible and revisable knowledge, but it is one thing to affirm that knowledge can be defective or unreliable and quite another thing to say it can be subject to revision. On the other hand, if the fallibilist wants to stress that our knowledge has already been proved erroneous sometimes, and will probably be so again, then fallible knowledge would be identifiable only retrospectively. Thus, it does not seem to make much sense to be a fallibilist since either you conjecture that you may well be mistaken about your knowledge claims, while nevertheless maintaining them, or you simply admit that you were wrong about certain things,

[5] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, edited by Paul Guyer; translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 467.

but now you know them.[6] In other words, either fallible knowledge is projected as possibly being the case in the future or it is projected as having been the case in the past—it is never a reality in the present. As an epistemological program, fallibilism is a mere expression of suspicion, which can sit more comfortably with revisionism.

My second comment concerns the kind of revisability involved in a falliblist view. The diagnosis made by the fallibilist that our knowledge is fallible—more accurately, that it can be or was fallible—does not apply to the generality of the things we know but to particular elements of our worldview. We can revise some of these elements, for example that Italian is not the only official language in Italy and that German is also spoken in the autonomous province of South Tyrol. In doing so, we look at our previous claim not as faulty but as incomplete. Even if we could be utterly wrong about something, like proponents of geocentrism were until the imposition of heliocentrism as the correct astronomical model, there cannot be a collapse of all aspects belonging to that picture. Not everything in the Ptolemaic model was evidently discarded. Copernicus kept the idea that the orbits of the planets were perfectly circular, although they would be found to be elliptical, but he also kept many other concepts, definitions, presuppositions, etc. This basis that must be inevitably assumed by everyone—common man, philosopher or scientist—is incompatible with an understanding of knowledge as essentially fallible because it is the starting point for any practice. Boncompagni mentions with approval a paper by Keith DeRose in which he distinguishes between "intuitive fallibilism," the "sensible" perspective put forward by Cohen, and "GC-fallibilism," the "genuine conflict" or, as DeRose also describes it, the "real conflict between the likes of 'I know that p' and 'It's possible that not-p_{ind}'" identified by Lewis and which led him to adopt an infallibilist stance.[7] But I think that DeRose's survey of the various ways in which we can consider this conflict does not do justice to Lewis' perceptive account of the inconsistency of fallibilism.[8] I shall try to explain why.

[6] A fully fledged fallibilist will want to admit that she may be continuously mistaken about any of her knowledge claims, but she has to stop somewhere under pain of becoming a radical sceptic.

[7] Keith DeRose, "Contextualism and Fallibilism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Contextualism*, ed. J.J. Ichikawa (London: Routledge, 2017), 145–155, repr. as Appendices E and F in *The Appearance of Ignorance: Knowledge, Skepticism, and Context, Volume 2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 287. As DeRose explains (*ibid.*, 286, note 7), "p_{ind}" expresses the indicative mood that is necessary to keep.

[8] See the aforementioned Appendix F, in which Lewis' name is not even mentioned.

The problem is not that a subject *S* often fails to provide a reason *r* or an evidence *e* to holding *p* as true, assuming that *r* or *e* should entail *p* and that infallible knowledge would correspond to such entailment. Since we can never be sure about the completeness of *r* or *e*, this entailment conception of infallibilism, as Cohen rightly saw, leads to an "immediate skeptical result."[9] However, contrary to Cohen's conclusion, the solution cannot be found by reverting to fallibilism for this can also lead to scepticism. Susan Haack, for instance, has shown that it is reasonable to think that, "on an epistemological interpretation," a fallibilist view "collapses into scepticism."[10] She sums up her take on this issue more judiciously as follows:

> (…) if we distinguish *strong* and *weak* accounts of knowledge, according as the warrant for a belief to count as knowledge must be infallible or merely good [*viz.* fallible], and hence *weak scepticism* (we have no strong [*viz.* infallible] knowledge) and *strong scepticism* (we have no weak [*viz.* fallible] knowledge), then *fallibilism entails weak but not*—not so far as the present argument goes, anyway—*strong scepticism*.[11]

This mitigated or "weak scepticism" that Haack attaches to fallibilism is the necessary consequence of her construal of infallibilism as entailing a "strong scepticism." This becomes perhaps clearer if we rewrite Haack's argument in terms of constructive or destructive dilemmas, which are disjunctive forms of *modus ponens* or *modus tollens*, respectively. Let *SK* stand for "strong knowledge" and *WK* stand for "weak knowledge," and let *SS* stand for "strong scepticism" and *WS* stand for "weak scepticism." We then get, for example, the following:

$$(WS \vee SS), (WS \rightarrow \neg SK), (SS \rightarrow \neg WK) \vdash (\neg SK \vee \neg WK)$$

which amounts to

$$SK \rightarrow \neg WK$$

Or, corresponding more exactly to Haack's wording:

$$(SK \vee WK), (WS \rightarrow \neg SK), (SS \rightarrow \neg WK) \vdash (\neg WS \vee \neg SS)$$

which amounts to

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[9] Stewart Cohen, "How to be a Fallibilist," *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988): 91–123, here 91. DeRose brings this view into question arguing that "'infallibilism,' as Cohen is construing it, does not actually by itself doom us to skepticism," but he concedes that we could have a sceptical outcome if it were "combined with some restrictive account of what our reasons or evidence might be" (*The Appearance of Ignorance*, 285).

[10] Susan Haack, "Fallibilism and Necessity," *Synthese* 41 (1979): 37–63, here 49.

[11] *Ibid.*, 56.

$$WS \rightarrow \neg SS$$

If we now replace *SK* with *I*, for infallibilism, and *WK* with *F*, for fallibilism, we get in the first case:

$$(WS \vee SS), (WS \rightarrow \neg I), (SS \rightarrow \neg F) \vdash (\neg I \vee \neg F)$$

which should be equivalent to

$$(WS \vee SS), (WS \rightarrow F), (SS \rightarrow I) \vdash (F \vee I)$$

And in the second case we get:

$$(I \vee F), (WS \rightarrow \neg I), (SS \rightarrow \neg F) \vdash (\neg WS \vee \neg SS)$$

which again should be equivalent to

$$(I \vee F), (WS \rightarrow F), (SS \rightarrow I) \vdash (\neg WS \vee \neg SS)$$

The problem with these arguments is that the construal of *I* as $\neg F$ and *F* as $\neg I$ would make the consequents of the implications collapse into the same element alternating between its affirmation and negation and thus failing to form a proper dilemma. And of course we could also construe *SS* as the reverse of *WS* and *WS* as the reverse of *SS*. I think this is not the best way to deal with the question and that it is wrong to postulate that infallibilism entails "strong scepticism." Lewis calls our attention to the inexorability of taking to be true what is epistemologically vital for us in each context, and that is why, in his view, an infallibilist conception of knowledge is the best antidote against scepticism. This is also the reason why Lewis regards both fallibilism and scepticism as "mad,"[12] a view that, as pointed out in *Description of Situations*, echoes that propounded by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty*. This brings me to the central criticism made by Boncompagni in her commentary.

Although she admits that "the indubitability of hinges is often stressed by Wittgenstein" and that, according to *On Certainty*, "to make a mistake about our basic assumptions, presuppositions or beliefs would look like a mental disturbance rather than a mere error," Boncompagni regards Wittgenstein as a pragmatist much in the spirit of Peirce. She is therefore happy to accept that *On Certainty* involves a contextualist analysis—one that Boncompagni also identifies in pragmatism—but she rejects the infallibilism I see attached to contextualism. Boncompagni highlights Peirce's "indubitables," which consist of "perceptual judgments, acritical

[12] David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1996): 549–567, repr. in *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 418–445, here 419.

inferences, and original beliefs" that, contrary to the present evidence, could turn out to be false in the future. Their indubitable character does not result from a self-evident truth but rests instead on the necessity prompted by the situation which we are in. The pragmatist corollary is that our knowledge "is fallible even on indubitables," which are so only because we need them to be like this in the course of our various practices. The regularities we find in experience are in the end pragmatically justified. However, and this is an important caveat, Boncompagni considers that this applies to Wittgenstein only partially. She recognizes that, unlike Peirce, Wittgenstein traces "a categorical distinction between hinges and ordinary beliefs," arguing that "the indubitability of hinges is logical, not empirical." But, in her view, this does not eclipse "a *form* of fallibilism" that can be found in Wittgenstein. I will conclude by saying why I disagree.

Boncompagni quotes §§ 424 and 425 of *On Certainty* where, at the very end, Wittgenstein states that he cannot be mistaken about his own name nonetheless adding: "that does not mean that I am infallible [*unfehlbar*] about it."[13] But I do not see this as a capitulation to fallibilism—nor does Boncompagni see it that way. No one, except a child or a demented person, can be mistaken about their name, the name they are called by, which they use to be identified, etc. If I suddenly found out that I had been adopted, that my real name was different, I would certainly suffer some emotional disorder, but I could easily accommodate in my worldview that I had been given another name when I was born and identify "N. V." with whatever that name was. As said above, I look at these kinds of cases as properly falling within a revisionism that we obviously need to tolerate. Boncompagni will say that I am then a fallibilist, but I am not. If I had been given another name at birth, I would not cease to be called "N. V." and would not regard this name as involving a *Fehler*, a "mistake." Similarly, if I disliked the name given by my parents and were to take another name, someone who called me "N. V." would not be at all mistaken. Not only witnesses but also my documents would state that I had indeed used that name. In addition, those who thought that my name was "N. V.," unaware that I had taken another name, would not be mistaken about what a man is, a first and a family name are, the role an identity plays in society, the world human beings belong to, etc. It is exactly this network of presumptions that is at the heart of Wittgenstein's—and Lewis'—infallibilism. The emphasis put on the systematic nature of our knowledge allows revisability but only in the interior of that system, which as such can never be considered fallible. What most fallibilists fail to see is that their reservations about the knowledge we have are

[13] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, Revised edition by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), § 425.

either amenable to our revision, leaving the infallibilist perfectly happy, or collide with the systemic structure of belief formation, and this is where people like Wittgenstein and Lewis enter the scene. What they say is that this second kind of reservation, which results in a sceptical argumentation, is in fact inoperative since it is logically incoherent. It is only from a theoretical point of view that it seems possible to doubt that I have a body or that the Earth already existed long before my birth. From a practical point of view, a fallibility about this is immediately undercut. As a pragmatist, Boncompagni does not contest this. The fallibilism she finds in *On Certainty* is more subtle. Let me end by sketching out her view and how the infallibilism I defend responds to it.

Boncompagni argues that, even contrary to all evidence, "it *still* might turn out, for some unexpected reasons, that we failed," and she gives some examples for possible cases of epistemological failure: trees that I have always seen as trees could after all be pictures or holograms; a landslide could occur while I was sleeping and after waking up my front door could suddenly open onto a ravine; or the registered spelling of my name could be different to what its correct spelling has always been for me. Boncompagni's point is that experience itself can invalidate our deepest beliefs. "The physical possibility of a failure of knowledge remains open," she says. Boncompagni does not suggest these possibilities of error urge us to adopt a sceptical attitude. Her perspective is that they by no means affect "the objective certainty and the instinctive trust" that our praxis requires. However, these possibilities are there and, so she thinks, we cannot eschew them. As a consequence, "we cannot claim that our knowledge is infallible." Boncompagni anticipates that, within the framework of my contextualist perspective, such possibilities are excluded insofar as they are *irrelevant alternatives* to our current situation. But I am arguing for an infallibilist view that goes beyond "relevant alternatives" theories.[14] If I know that I have a magnolia tree in my garden, that I have planted and watered it, why should I be a fallibilist about "the tree that I have seen here my whole life long," to use Boncompagni's own words, unless I was a radical sceptic? How can it "eventually disclos[e] as something different (say, a picture, or a hologram)" and still fit into a situation that can be depicted? It is noteworthy that she is not referring to some tree that I just saw at a distance, which could for instance belong to a film studio facility, but to one I am fully acquainted with. The same impossibility of depicting the situation is present in her example of the landslide. First, it is highly implausible that if there were a landslide

[14] I elaborate on this theme in a critical notice of Jessica Brown's *Fallibilism: Evidence and Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), which is mentioned by Boncompagni. See Nuno Venturinha, "Non-sceptical Infallibilism," *Analysis* 80 (2020): 186–195, esp. 189–191.

one night I would not wake up. Second, the possibility of encountering a ravine when opening my front door next morning is only an admissible possibility if my house is built on a steep slope. There are thus specific truth-conditions for that event. This possibility is empirically cancelled by the geography of the place where I live, which is pretty much flat. But anyone living near steep slopes should definitely be worried about landslides at night. What these two examples show is that they are not, as Boncompagni believes, "concrete possibilities within our context," even if far-fetched or remote. They can represent possibilities of error only within some specific contexts—precisely, when they are representable. In all other cases they are abstract possibilities that, *pace* Boncompagni, illustrate how, strictly speaking, fallibilism coincides with scepticism. What needs to be understood is that it is an entire structure of reasons that leads us to ponder the possibility of being erroneous. The third example given by Boncompagni, the possible misspelling of my name when confronted with official records, does not convince me either of the merits of fallibilism. I could discover that my surname was actually spelled with an accent and I would try to figure out why in my documents, since I remember them, it appears without a diacritic. But I do not think that this should be sufficient to say that I was mistaken about my name. I would wonder why in the documents I saw my father's name was also spelled without an accent and try to find a plausible explanation for this. Orthographies change, clerks are sometimes careless—these would be good explanations. Again, this is at best a revisable matter, not something by which we would be epistemologically enhanced by being fallibilists.

My conclusion is that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, there is not too much difference between my infallibilism and Boncompagni's fallibilism. What I emphasize is the problematic closeness between fallibilism and scepticism, which, so far as I can see, only an infallibilist take on knowledge and justification can break.

3. Reply to Lewiński

Marcin Lewiński's commentary raises an array of interesting points from the perspective of pragmatics in the midst of which the social dimension of language, with all its performativity, is decisive. Even though the context-sensitivity defended in *Description of Situations* is at the core of a pragmatic approach, there should be little surprise that a performative outlook is hardly reconcilable with the epistemological objectivism I pursue. Therefore, the challenges posed by Lewiński gain special importance because he presses my arguments from a totally different

angle than the other commentators. In what follows, I shall try to accommodate the chief worries of a pragmatic position within my account.

Lewiński's starting point coincides with the way I open *Description of Situations*. My sentence "I am working at a table" is meant to throw the reader into a situation, analogous to the multiple situations in which we get involved, and lead this reader to realize what is epistemologically implied in the words we use in that particular context. The narrative of *Description of Situations* is strategically oriented around a subject who happens to be me but is supposed to mirror the access anyone has to the world. At every moment, we condense the reality before us into a coherent whole. Each one, equipped with their own background, constantly forms a view of tiny pieces abstractedly cut out from the bulk of experience. These varied pieces do not stand apart from each other but are linked in what is typically called awareness or consciousness. More than just being individuals who construct their personal identity over time, we fill the entire surrounding space with a wide range of conceptualizations—cultural, political, religious, scientific, etc. This, however, is not easy to discern in our regular activities and one mode of grasping the causal mechanisms that constitute these events is to decompose them into situations, which are only accessed by means of propositions. Describing situations amounts to nothing more than analysing ordinary propositions.

The main difficulty with describing a situation is that it is essentially blurred. We refer to specific situations but their contours are barely distinguishable. Situations overlap each other. They are never completely closed in themselves but constantly integrate new aspects and evolve in an unpredictable way. Moreover, their content is not made up only of objects but actions and relations play a fundamental role too. Drinking, raining, smiling are all actions of possible situations which, alone, could never create an actual situation. Many other elements are required to describe, for example, that two people are on a date—say, an elegant bar where they drink some fancy cocktails, on a romantic rainy night, while they smile at each other. Situations are thus made of continuous saturated frames and composed of various conceptual elements that are not exclusive to the situation at stake. In addition, like Aristotelian substances, situations possess their accidents, which can themselves be turned into new substances, or sub-situations, depending on our angle of analysis or recognition. The amount of drink that at a certain time is in each of the glasses form a sub-situation of the main situation of the two people dating. Where, then, does one situation end and another begin so that we can refer to completely different situations even using some of the same words, such as *drinking* coffee at breakfast, driving when it is *raining* or half

smiling politely? It is here that context enters. Contexts are inherently epistemological. The people in the bar could be doing many things other than dating. They could be chatting, conspiring, doing business. But they could not be making parachute jumps, orbiting around the Earth or sailing. Lewiński asks why someone should interpret, as I do, my working at a table as writing philosophy when it could be interpreted in so many different ways. Indeed it can, but what I try to underscore is that any interpretation must be *contextually acceptable*, therefore excluding a whole set of interpretations which, being possible states of affairs in the world, do not ontologically fit in the situation. It is precisely due to this paramount contextual definition that the processing of possibilities does not go on indefinitely but is actually limited to a fairly reasonable number of scenarios. Without contexts, our brains would be stuck between a logical sum"$p_1 \vee p_2 \vee p_3 \vee \ldots$" (either writing philosophy or tidying up the desk or authorizing a nuclear attack or …) and a logical product "$\neg q_1 \wedge \neg q_2 \wedge \neg q_3 \wedge \ldots$" (neither swimming in the pool, nor playing cello, nor hunting the snark nor …).[15] I am sure that Lewiński will not contest that powerful political leaders could authorize a nuclear attack while working at their tables but that an academic is slightly more limited under the same circumstances. What he asks then is what kind of description I am offering. Is it a "thin" or a "thick" description, in the words of Gilbert Ryle? Am I merely concerned with spatiotemporal, behaviouristic descriptions, or is my concern the meaning of the situation?

Lewiński remarks that even though Ryle does not look at the matter exactly so, the "thin" descriptions will "largely correspond to what logical empiricists would call 'protocol' or 'observation sentences'," in the sense that they are "directly experienced, brute descriptions of empirical reality." And he immediately goes on to quote a passage from *Description of Situations*, where I mention that "[a]n extraordinarily complex interpretation is made at all times and [that] it is through this framework that we organize reality," as an evidence for my emphasis on the "thick" descriptions. Lewiński is absolutely right that I am not just interested in "thin" descriptions for the simple reason that they alone cannot explain a situation. A physicalist description of someone sitting at a table could hardly instruct us about what is really happening. What Lewiński does not understand is how I can put together the "social ontology" characteristic of "thick" descriptions and epistemic objectivism when, for philosophers like John Searle, "the social world is *ontologically subjective*." Lewiński notes that "[t]he *ontologically objective* natural

[15] To be more exact, none of these possibilities could ever have been considered if the calculations of logical sums and products had not stopped at some point determining specific notions.

world would by contrast exist as well without any human experience, as argued by Venturinha too," but this presumed objectivity is of little epistemological interest if it does not inform the social reality. There is in fact a gap between my understanding of the objectivist/subjectivist divide and Lewiński's understanding of the same categories. My aim was not to carry out either (i) "objective descriptions of the objective, natural world" (I do not work in natural science) or (ii) "objective descriptions of the subjective, social world" (I do not work in social sciences either). And my aim is definitely far from (iii) "subjective descriptions of the objective, natural world" (I am not a realist artist) or (iv) "subjective descriptions of the subjective, social world" (I am not telling a story). Lewiński says he is unsure about whether I am "clear enough about which type of 'descriptions of situations'" defines my approach. Well, I think the book makes clear that what is at issue is, to use Ryle's own terms, to show how "thick" descriptions are not completely dependent on social factors but are, in the end, subordinated to what can be captured by some "thin" descriptions. Hence, the description of situations that I conduct is different from each of the four types suggested byLewiński, which do not take on board the intricacies of our everyday situations. To describe situations is not a technical endeavour but something that the common man already does at every single moment and that a contextualist epistemology seeks to scrutinize. As Lewiński notices, in my book this scrutiny takes the form of a description that has its roots in the work of the later Wittgenstein, but here again Lewiński fails to take one key aspect into account.

After quoting a passage from my Preface in which I mention a remark from Wittgenstein written on 30 June 1931 and where he identifies "a description of nature" with "the description of a situation,"[16] Lewiński argues that what this idea implies is "a protocol sentence that needs (and allows for) no more than a thin description of the ontologically objective world," adding that "[n]o tricky, socially recognizable *as* something entity is being involved here." It is indisputable that Wittgenstein's middle or transitional philosophy is very much under the influence of both the *Tractatus* and the Vienna Circle and that only in the *Philosophical Investigations* does Wittgenstein fully open, to use Lewiński's nice formulation, "the Pandora's box of thick descriptions, descriptions of society." Nevertheless, it is a mistake to consider that when Wittgenstein refers in this remark to "the analysis of an ordinary proposition, for example 'there is a lamp on my table'" and says that "we should be able to get everywhere from there," since such a situation would

[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vienna Edition*, vol. 3, edited by Michael Nedo (Vienna: Springer, 1995), MS 110: 243, my translation.

contain "the material for all the rest,"[17] he has no more than a physicalist description in sight. The path that led Wittgenstein to the recognition of the social character of language started exactly in the early 1930s, with several remarks from this period making their way into the *Philosophical Investigations*.[18] Two remarks that would form the core of § 122 of the *Investigations*, with its crucial notions of "surveyable representation" and "intermediate links," were drafted only a couple of days later, on 2 July 1931.[19] And the pivotal notion of "language-game"—to which Lewiński alludes as a turning point in Wittgenstein's thought—appears as early as 1 March 1932.[20] More significant than this, however, is the fact that the remark from June 1931 mentioned in my Preface is used as a mere motto for an inquiry that, apart from some engagement with the *Tractatus* in Chapters 2 and 3 and minor references to other texts, only finds an echo in *On Certainty*, which is central in Chapters 7 and 11—the latter entitled "Social Dependency." My effort was to show that it is possible to read *On Certainty* as a fundamentally non-relativist work, with Wittgenstein manoeuvring, to employ Pritchard's terminology, between an understanding of hinges as "arational commitments" or "über hinge commitments," on the one hand, which result in "über hinge propositions" that stand by themselves, and "personal hinge commitments," on the other, which result in "personal hinge propositions" framed according to our socio-cultural world.[21] The corollary is an epistemological model that can accommodate contextualism within a minimal realism, thus avoiding the relativism and even scepticism that standard contextualist approaches—with the notable exception of Lewis' infallibilism—must necessarily admit. I am of course aware that pragmaticians tolerate relativism well and that radical scepticism is quite far from their list of concerns. But the driving force behind epistemic contextualism has always been a reaction to sceptical worries, and *Description of Situations* should be no different.

I would like to conclude with a general comment on an important concept that Lewiński brings to the fore in the final part of his commentary: the concept of

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[17] *Ibid.*

[18] See in this regard Nuno Venturinha (ed.), *The Textual Genesis of Wittgenstein's* Philosophical Investigations (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[19] Wittgenstein, *Vienna Edition*, vol. 3, MS 110: 257. I take the translations of these notions from *Philosophical Investigations*, Revised fourth edition by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), § 122.

[20] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vienna Edition*, vol. 5, edited by Michael Nedo (Vienna: Springer, 1996), MS 113: 88–89.

[21] See Pritchard, *Epistemic Angst*, 71 and 95–96.

"presumption." I have already alluded to the notion of "presumptive knowledge" in my reply to Boncompagni and it can certainly be fruitfully explored, as Lewiński proposes, within the framework of a contextualist epistemology. Presumptions, as he accurately observes, "would be the counterpart of defeaters," which exert a key role in contextual analyses by virtue of the conflicting evidence they originate. The problem with defeaters is that, as Michael Williams elegantly put it, "the severity of standards for knowing is directly proportional to the remoteness of the defeaters that command our attention,"[22] and thus the appeal to defeasibility seems like a never-ending road. Better presumptions than defeaters, for sure. But what I take to be the essential feature of presumptive knowledge is very different from what Lewiński sees as its main trait: the development of "an intersubjective *as-ifness*, achieved in collective critical testing of claims through public argumentative practices." No doubt this is very much needed in our post-truth society. But, as said before, I am interested in the network of presumptions that lie beneath all "argumentative discussions" in which we can get involved, the presumptions that we can by no means drop regardless of the arguments under discussion. It is this space of truth that I consider to be essential and non-negotiable in epistemology.[23]

[22] Michael Williams, "Scepticism and the Context of Philosophy," *Philosophical Issues* 14 (2004): 456–475, here 470.

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