EVALUATING BELIEFS

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Program in Philosophy
written under the direction of
Professor Ernest Sosa
and approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey
October 2010
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation examines some of ways of evaluating beliefs, relevant to epistemology and to metaphysics. Some problems in normative epistemology are solved by properly relating justified belief, rational belief, and knowledge. Chapter 1 uses this strategy to defend externalism about justified belief. Chapters 3 and 4 defend the view that knowledge is the epistemic standard we aim for our beliefs to meet.

Chapter 2 investigates which beliefs are improper because formed in an objectionably circular way. The findings support the Moorean response to Brain-In-a-Vat skepticism, by rebutting the objection from ‘easy knowledge’. The theory of justified belief developed in chapter 1 underwrites the Moorean reply.

Chapters 5 and 6 make a non-epistemic way of evaluating beliefs central to metaphysics. To understand relativity or vagueness in a subject-matter, we must hold that being true or false is not the metaphysically serious evaluation of how a belief answers to reality. Either verdict on a borderline case is ‘acceptable’ in the metaphysically serious
sense. For a matter to be relative is for the ‘acceptability’ of affirming the proposition to vary between judges. Chapters 5 and 6 sketch an approach to metaphysics built from the notion of ‘metaphysically acceptable judgment’, with chapter 6 concentrating on vagueness, and chapter 5 focusing on relativism about knowledge.

Chapter 5 argues that the lottery and preface puzzles manifest central features of our concept of knowledge (introduced in chapters 3 and 4). The proposed version of relativism about knowledge is the only theory to respect those features. The view of knowledge presented in chapter 5 is not an isolated metaphysical extravagance, as the same framework is needed for the right metaphysics of everything that’s vague (argued in chapter 6). It is worth noting that my solution to the lottery puzzle is metaphysical relativism about knowledge, but my rebuttal of Brain-In-a-Vat skepticism concerns epistemic circularity and belongs to normative epistemology. Much recent work incorrectly assumes that the two puzzles receive the same treatment.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to my dissertation committee: Ernest Sosa, Peter Klein, John Hawthorne, and Brian Weatherson. One couldn’t hope for a better group of philosophers to interact with. Peter and John were the biggest influences on the first half of my time at Rutgers. Brian brought a new perspective to the last two years of the project. On just about any topic, it is a challenge not to adopt Ernie’s view wholesale. He oversaw the dissertation serenely.

Let me mention just a few others, rather than attempt a comprehensive list. Chapters 5 and 6 benefited greatly from discussions with Kit Fine, Tim Maudlin, and especially Ted Sider. The graduate students at Rutgers have been great companions. Gabriel Greenberg has been particularly helpful in working through embryonic ideas.

Chapter 1 is to be published in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research.

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Chapter 1: Appearances, Rationality, and Justified Belief

1. Introduction.

This chapter centers on a puzzle. I will present a powerful argument that having an appearance that p (whether perceptual, mnemonic, or inferential) makes you justified in believing that p. This conclusion is very attractive in the case of perception. But it is problematic in case of memory, and can’t be right in case of inference. The puzzle is how to dissolve this apparent conflict of intuitions. Where did we make a tempting mistake?

Here’s the argument we’ll be concerned with.

G1. Suppose it appears to S that p, and S has no particular reason to think she is going wrong with regards to p (i.e. she has no ‘defeating’ beliefs).

G2. Given this, S would be irrational not to believe p (e.g. to suspend judgment towards p).

So,

G3. In the absence of defeaters, its appearing to S that p rationally requires S to believe that p.

So,

G4. S is propositionally justified\(^1\) in believing that p.

So,

G5. If S believes that p on the basis of that appearance, that belief is doxastically justified.

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\(^1\) I gloss the distinction between propositional and doxastic justification in section 2c.
Call this the General Argument From Irrationality (AFI). It supports the view that every kind of appearance gives rise to prima facie epistemic justification. We start with an intuitive grasp of the notions the argument employs, which we will refine as the paper progresses. For example, I explain what I mean by ‘appearance’ in sections 2a and 3.

In section 2, I discuss Perceptual, Mnemonic and Inferential versions of the argument. I explain the problem with the conclusion in the cases of memory and inference. The AFI can’t be sound.

Section 3 develops a theory of justified belief that section 4 uses to refute the AFI. Not all appearances are created equal. If someone infers fallaciously, their inferential appearance is ‘unsound’. That is, the belief is unjustified because there is something wrong with the appearance. Yet if there are no ‘defeating’ beliefs (such as that one has a bad track record on such matters), it would be an error of reason to ‘block’ the formation of a belief from that appearance. I argue the same distinctions apply in the case of memory. Facts about the genesis of a mnemonic appearance can make it unsound, even though it would be irrational for the subject now to block the formation of an occurrent belief from it.

The AFI sets up a case in which it would be an error of reason to block the formation of a belief from an appearance. But that does not mean that the appearance is sound. If it isn’t, the resulting belief is not justified. Lines 2 and 3 of the AFI are true, but lines 4 and 5 do not follow. Section 5 shows this to be an instance of a broader truth discussed in the ethics literature (e.g. John Broome 1999). In general, being in a mental state that rationally requires you to F does not mean that you are justified in F-ing.
Section 6 answers three objections to my view, rebutting other arguments (more familiar than the AFI) that appearances suffice for justified belief. Section 7 considers the upshot for the debate between internalism and externalism about epistemic justification. Internalism about perceptual justification does not sit happily with my treatment of inference and memory. The previously attractive view that perceptual appearances make a belief justified now looks unappealing. The previously outlandish view that only *seeing that* $p$ makes a basic perceptual belief that $p$ justified now looks alluring.

2. The Arguments From Irrationality.

The General AFI supports the view that appearances of all types give rise to epistemic justification. Michael Huemer endorses this view (Huemer 2001, 2006, and 2007). He calls it ‘Phenomenal Conservatism’.\(^2\) The official statement of his view is (PC).

\[
\text{(PC) If it seems to } S \text{ that } p, \text{ then, in the absence of } \text{defeaters, } S \text{ thereby has at least some degree}^3 \text{ of justification for believing that } p. \text{ (Huemer 2007, p. 30)}
\]

A defeater is “countervailing evidence” the subject has (2001 p. 100). I take defeaters to be beliefs $S$ has that cast doubt on $p$ or $S$’s ability to know that $p$ in that way. In the terminology of Huemer 2001, his claim is that all appearances give rise to prima facie justification, which can be defeated. When it isn’t defeated, there is overall justification

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\(^2\) By contrast, Gilbert Harman’s ‘conservatism’ concerns rational change of belief, not which beliefs are ‘justified’ in the traditional sense (1986 p. 29).

\(^3\) Huemer adds this qualification to his 2006 and 2007 because a “weak and wavering” appearance does not make belief fully justified. A strong and consistent appearance does. (Huemer 2006 n. 5, 2007 p. 30 n. 1.)
for the belief.\textsuperscript{4} Huemer intends PC to account for inferential as well as non-inferential justification (Huemer 2007 p. 30 n. 1). The view is attractive. I focus on the AFI because it is the clearest way to motivate my positive view, rather than because it is particularly prominent in the literature. Some more common arguments are considered in section 6.

2a. Perception.

There are two things one might terms a ‘perceptual appearance’ of the visual kind. (I use the terminology of John Pollock and Iris Oved 2005. See chapter 2 for a bit more on the distinction.) Firstly, one has a ‘visual image’, a non-conceptual, map-like representation of one’s environment. The visual image carries only a restricted kind of information: the distribution of surfaces in three dimensions, a certain kind of colour distribution on those surfaces (explained below), maybe movement and a few other things. Let’s say that a visual image is a ‘basic’ perceptual appearance. On the basis of the information carried by a basic perceptual appearance, one applies concepts, such as HAND, ZEBRA, and ALVIN GOLDMAN. In so doing, one has a ‘non-basic’ perceptual appearance that the thing is a hand, or a zebra, or is Alvin Goldman. I think that the visual image and concepts such as RED represent different kinds of property that we call ‘colour’. (See Pollock and Oved 2005.) My visual image represents the wall in front of me as varying in ‘phenomenal colour’—it is lighter near the window. I conceptually represent the wall as of uniform ‘objective colour’—a shade of cream. I don’t pick one patch of phenomenal colour, and judge it to be the true colour of the entire wall. Rather, I judge the objective

\textsuperscript{4} This sense of ‘defeater’ has nothing to do with the sense integral to the defeasibility analysis of knowledge.
colour of the wall on the basis of its phenomenal colour, which is information carried by the visual image.

We can ask whether an undefeated *basic* visual appearance that p makes you justified in believing that p; and we can ask whether an undefeated *non-basic* visual appearance that p makes you justified in believing. The questions are distinct. James Pryor only claims that basic perceptual experiences justify belief, though he is uncommitted on how to draw the basic/non-basic distinction (Pryor 2000 pp. 538-9). Pollock and Oved argue that basic and non-basic appearances justify belief (2005 pp. 337-8). One might worry that one can’t have a belief with the same content as a basic perceptual appearance, because belief is a conceptual representation, and the content of the visual image outstrips our concepts. I reply the ‘belief’ in the relevant sense need not be conceptual. One picks up the drink without spilling it because one knows exactly where the cup is. That’s information carried by the visual image. Knowledge entails belief. So in the epistemically relevant sense, one normally believes the information carried by the visual image. We can ask when such a belief is justified.

Let’s focus on the case of basic perceptual appearances (that is, having a visual image). Intuitively, the basic perceptual beliefs of a brain in a vat are still justified. The upshot seems to be that if someone has a basic perceptual appearance that p, then (in the absence of defeaters) they are justified in believing that p. (This formulation is neutral on whether the appearance is evidence for the belief.) Internalism about epistemic justification is tailor-made to deliver this result. Externalists have been troubled by the intuition. The ‘new evil demon problem’ for reliabilism is that the theory entails that if

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we were all brains in vats, our perceptual beliefs would not be justified. Intuitively they would be; so reliabilism is false (Stewart Cohen 1984). Alvin Goldman has taken this objection seriously, modifying his view with the aim of respecting the intuition. (Goldman 1979, 1986, 1988, 1992.) Ernest Sosa has also taken the intuition seriously, distinguishing a kind of justification which brains in vats have, from a kind they don’t. (Bonjour and Sosa 2003, pp. 156-161.)

The intuition can be supported by the Perceptual Argument From Irrationality:

P1. Suppose Peter has a basic perceptual appearance that p, and has no defeating beliefs.

P2. Given this, Peter would be irrational not to believe that p.

So,

P3. Its appearing to Peter that p rationally requires him to believe that p.

So,

P4. Its appearing that p makes Peter propositionally justified in believing that p.

So,

P5. If Peter believes that p on the basis of that appearance, the belief is doxastically justified.

P2 is true. It would be crazy not to believe your eyes when you have no reason to think you are in danger of going wrong. It would be unjustified intellectual cowardice. Irrationality just means: it would be a failure of reason.
2b. Memory.

Richard Feldman (2005 pp. 282-3) considers the case of Maria, presented by John Greco (2005) as a counter-example to internalism. (Greco’s argument is similar to that of Goldman 1999 pp. 280-1.)

Maria … has a clear apparent memory that Dean Martin is Italian and no current reason against the proposition that he is Italian. However, she initially formed this belief irresponsibly and unjustifiably, relying on the testimony of someone she knew to be untrustworthy. She has, however, forgotten that this is her source. (Feldman 2005 p. 282)

Responding to Greco, Feldman floats a way of defending the view that her belief is justified. (He does not commit himself to it.) I’ll set it out, using Feldman’s terminology. You’ll see it’s the Mnemonic Argument From Irrationality. There are only three attitudes one can take towards a proposition. Feldman says that (at least) one of these attitudes must be ‘reasonable’ for Maria to take. Suspension and disbelief are not reasonable, leaving belief as the only possibility.⁶

M1. Maria believes on the basis of a clear apparent memory that Dean Martin is Italian. She has forgotten the terrible way in which she acquired that belief.

M2. Disbelief and suspension of judgment “are not reasonable options, given the situation she is in” (p. 282).

So,

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⁶ Section 6c considers the different argument that since Maria is not propositionally justified in suspending or disbelieving, she is justified in believing.
M3. The only reasonable option is for Maria to believe that Dean Martin is Italian. (Believing is what reasonableness requires.)

So,

M4. The apparent memory makes Maria propositionally justified in believing that Dean Martin is Italian.

So,

M5. Maria’s belief is doxastically justified.

The conclusion is problematic. The view that Maria’s belief is not justified is even more appealing. Memory is how we store information. If you put a sow’s ear into storage, you should not expect to find a silk purse there when you return. In a slogan: garbage in, garbage out. Maria’s belief remains trash; she just loses the ability to tell by reflection that it’s trash. What matters to the evaluation of the belief is whether it is trash, not whether she can tell that this is so. On this view, factual memory can preserve justification, but not create it.

2c. Inference.

Huemer says that PC captures the nature of inferential justification (Huemer 2001 pp. 112-3, 2007 fn. 1). If you know that p, and q appears to follow, then you are justified in believing that q. Consider the case of Ian, who is trying to construct a mathematical proof. His inferences are meant to be deductively valid. He is taking the due care over his work. He infers competently up to his deduction that p, but then goes wrong. He infers q

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7 Assume that it is no part of Maria’s basis for her belief that she normally believes truths. Thus such considerations are not relevant to whether the belief is doxastically justified.
from p, though it doesn’t follow. Huemer thinks that Ian’s fallacious inference does produce a justified belief. He claims this result is “not counterintuitive,” and he supports it with an argument (2001 p. 113; compare his 2006 pp. 10-11).

His argument is different from the AFI. Suppose two appearances are of the same strength. He argues that one is rationally required to respond to those two appearances in the same way. Hence (thinks Huemer) when one such belief is justified, so is the other. Ian’s belief that p is inferentially justified, and so his belief that q is too. What this argument has in common with the Inferential AFI is the thought that, given a certain perfectly justified previous mental state, having an appearance that q can rationally require the subject to believe that q, and so that belief is justified. For the sake of simplicity, let’s focus on the AFI.

11. Ian knows that p, q appears to him to follow from p, and that appearance is not defeated by his prior beliefs.

12. In such a situation, Ian would be irrational not to believe that q.

So,

13. The inferential appearance rationally requires Ian to believe that q.

So,

14. The appearance makes Ian propositionally justified in believing that q.

So,

15. If Ian believes that q on the basis of the appearance that q, that belief is doxastically justified.
The Inferential Argument From Irrationality is powerful. But it can’t be sound. The rest of this section shows that it has a false conclusion. (The impatient reader may read the next paragraph then skip to section 3.)

Beliefs can be held for good reasons, and for bad reasons. Actions can be performed for good reasons, and for bad reasons. Actions can be justified or not, as can beliefs. Maybe there was a good reason for you to F, though you F-ed for some other reason, which was a bad one. In this case, you were deontically justified in F-ing, but your F-ing was not evaluatively justified. In the case of belief, this is often called the distinction between propositional and doxastic justification. Comparing epistemic and practical normativity plays a significant part in this paper. Hence I will use the terminology of deontic and evaluative justification even in the case of belief. I use ‘normativity’ as an umbrella for evaluation and deontology. What is at issue in this section is whether fallacious inference produces an evaluatively justified belief. I think it never does. The Inferential AFI concludes it will whenever the subject has no defeating beliefs.

Here’s another bit of terminology. Ian reasons: “p, so q”. In the sense relevant to this paper, it seems to him that q. p was his reason for believing that q. Let’s say that Ian “took p to be a good reason” to believe that q. Don’t say that p “appeared” to him to be a good reason—Ian did not have any thoughts about what reasons he had. When the will is weak, one can act for a reason that one does not take to be a good one. However, we are interested in fallacious inferences where the subject does take their reason to be a good one.
The following two principles are extremely attractive, and together they entail that a belief held only on the basis of a fallacious inference is unjustified.

(FALLACIOUS INFERENCES) If S directly fallaciously infers q from p, then S believes q for a bad reason (namely p).

(BAD REASONS) If S Fs only for a bad reason, then S’s F-ing is evaluatively unjustified.

Intuitively, there is a normative truth about what is a good reason to believe what, independent of whether the subject takes it to be a good reason. Epistemic reasons for belief correspond to what is good evidence for what. Tommy takes the testimony of a friend to be good evidence that a miracle occurred, but that does not mean that it is good evidence. If p is a bad reason for S to F, and S’s reason for F-ing is that p, then S Fs for a bad reason. To defend the conclusion of the Inferential AFI by denying FALLACIOUS INFERENCES, one needs that if Tommy takes the testimony of a friend to be a good reason for him to believe that a miracle occurred, then it is. Such subjectivism makes a mockery of the idea of trying to proportion your belief to the evidence. For if you try, then you are successful. This position destroys the distinction between good and bad reasons for belief. It is objectionable. Once one allows that Ian believes that q for a bad reason, it seems to follow that his belief is unjustified.

8 I have heard the following odd view about what Tommy’s reason is. [That his friend testified to it, and that it seems to him (based on the testimony) that the miracle occurred] is Tommy’s reason for believing in the miracle, and is a good reason for Tommy to do so. That’s counter-intuitive and does not get round the objection in the text.
We can reinforce this by noticing that the analogous views are compelling in the case of action. Suppose Chloe is very aggressive, and attacked a man in a pub. Her reason for punching the stranger was that he looked at her pint funny. Surely that was a bad reason for doing so. There was no good reason for punching him. We cannot countenance the view that Chloe hit the man for a good reason merely because she took it to be a good one. Denying FALLACIOUS INFERENCES is to hold that in epistemic case, if the subject takes p to be a good reason to F, then it is. In the practical case, it is clear that such a view obliterates the distinction between good and bad reasons. To admit this but take the opposite view in the epistemic case is not to take epistemic deontic normativity seriously. It would be a pitiful shadow of practical deontology. That combination is objectionable. We must accept that what one takes to be a good reason for action can fail to be, and having done so, accept the analogous view for beliefs. Ian believes that q for a bad reason.

Chloe punched the stranger in the pub for a bad reason. Given this, is undeniable that Chloe was unjustified in punching the stranger. This datum about being justified is as clear as can be. Common sense does not suggest that there is a (‘subjective’) sense in which she is justified. When presented with the case, non-philosophers do not feel torn about whether Chloe is justified, resolving the tension by positing two senses of being ‘justified’. This contrasts with our attitude to certain questions about what one should do. For example, suppose Andrew ordered chicken in a restaurant. Unbeknownst to him, it is contaminated with salmonella. Should he eat the chicken? Here we do want to distinguish a sense in which he should from a sense in which he shouldn’t. Not so when we consider
whether Chloe was justified in punching the guy in the pub. BAD REASONS is true for actions.

Ian believes for a bad reason; Chloe acts for a bad reason. It is pretty bad to hold that Ian’s belief is justified. It is even worse to do so while recognizing that Chloe’s action is not justified. In other words, one cannot affirm BAD REASONS for actions but deny it for beliefs. Epistemic justification would be a pale imitation of practical justification. It would be utterly bizarre that we talk about ‘good reasons’ and ‘being justified’ in both cases.

I conclude that FALLACIOUS INFERENCES and BAD REASONS are both true. Fallacious inferences produce evaluatively unjustified beliefs. In the inferential case, undefeated appearances need not produce justified beliefs.

### 3. Blocking Beliefs, Unsound Appearances.

The Arguments From Irrationality lead to an uncomfortable view of memory, and an untenable view of inference. This section presents a theory of overall justified belief which I use in section 4 to dissolve the apparent conflict of intuitions. I hope the framework will be appealing as I introduce it. It is also supported by its theoretical unity and ability to rebut the AIF. Sections 3 and 4 are mutually reinforcing.

When you think you are in danger of forming a false belief, you can block a belief from being formed in a particular way. For example, if you know that a Muller-Lyer figure produces a perceptual illusion, you won’t form the belief that one line is longer than the other. It will still appear to be. Suppose you have been getting 5/10 in your maths homeworks so far this semester, because you’ve been making a lot of fallacious
inferences. You will still produce answers to your next homework—conclusions will still appear to you to follow from the premises, and you will write them down. But you can block the formation of a belief in the conclusion, because you know you might well have gone wrong. The (normally) belief-forming faculty still produces an appearance, or ‘verdict’. If one’s confident answers on the history tests so far this semester have often been wrong, one will not believe the answers one writes down in the next test. But one will still have the mnemonic appearance that Henry VIII became king in 1507, for example. The appearance is what’s in common between the case in which the belief is formed and the case in which it’s blocked. If one has an appearance that \( p \) and does not block, then one forms the belief that \( p \). That’s the sense of ‘appearance’ we’re concerned with here.

The official terminology is that one blocks a belief from being formed from a token appearance that \( p \). Insofar as it picks out one token appearance that \( p \), we can talk of blocking the formation of a belief that \( p \) by a particular faculty, such as perception or inference. The faculty produces an appearance or verdict, and if one does not block, it thereby produces a belief. (When I refer the belief-forming faculties, I am referring to memory as well. I sketch the special features of memory in section 4b.)

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\(^9\) Not blocking should not be confused with the mental act of trying to infer what follows from what one knows. One can choose what to think about (with varying degrees of success). One can choose to direct one's attention to a philosophical problem, and search for a solution. Trying to infer what follows is what Galen Strawson calls a "prefatory", "catalytic" or "priming" act of the mind. (Strawson 2003, esp. pp. 231-2.) There are cases where one should not attend to a matter, though one should not block, and can form knowledge. For example, I can come to know how many books there are on the shelf above my desk, even though I should instead be attending to the philosophical problem I am working on, or trying to get to sleep.
Saying that a belief is “formed from” an appearance could be mis-interpreted. I don’t think belief-formation is a two-stage process, where perception or inference produces an appearance or verdict, and then some other faculty forms a belief on the basis of the appearance. (That seems to be the view of Sosa 2007 lecture 5.) Rather, belief-formation is typically a one-stage process. When not interfered with (by blocking), perception and inference produce beliefs, not merely appearances. The status-quo is that those faculties put representations directly into the belief-box. One can intervene, diverting the representation away from the belief-box and into the trash-box instead. In that case, I say that one ‘blocks’ the formation of a belief from the perceptual or inferential appearance. Maybe it would be more accurate to say that one blocks the verdict from being a belief.

Reason is the faculty that either blocks belief-formation or doesn’t. It is the job of reason to step in and disengage a faculty when appropriate. This regulative or ‘higher-order monitoring’ function of reason is to be distinguished from the inferential function of reason. Regulative reason governs the belief-forming faculties, one of which is inferential reason. Reason is the rational faculty: a failure of reason is a failure of rationality, and vice versa.
Evaluating the blocking or not by regulative reason is one thing. Evaluating the operation of the belief-forming faculty in producing its verdict is another. Here are examples in which they come apart. Janet knows she has got 10/10 in her maths homeworks so far this semester. She believes the next thing she appears to prove, but makes a slip in her reasoning. Janet was justified in not blocking the inferential belief, but the inference was a poor one. She reasoned fallaciously, forming an unjustified belief. That she was justified in not blocking the inference is perfectly compatible with the resulting belief being unjustified because the belief-forming faculty worked improperly. Even though she did not infer properly, she would not be justified in blocking; two wrongs do not make a right. What the faculty of inference did wrong was produce that bad appearance. Her belief is unjustified because the inferential appearance is a bad one.

Here’s an example where the belief-forming faculty worked perfectly, but regulative reason did not. Belinda is taking the same maths class as Janet, but has been getting terrible grades. She should be blocking the formation of inferential beliefs when she is doing her homework. However, she is reckless and overconfident. She does not block when she starts her next assignment. Belinda is unjustified in not blocking. However, she reasons competently at every step. This time, she makes no mistakes. Her faculty of regulative reason did not work properly, but her faculty of inference did. Intuitively, Belinda’s belief is not justified either. Something went wrong in its production, namely that it wasn’t blocked. Belinda’s inference was competent. In that sense, her appearance is a good one. Her belief is unjustified because her failure to block it is unjustified.

Both Janet and Belinda have unjustified beliefs in their conclusions. The moral to draw is that overall inferentially justified belief requires both that the subject is justified
in not blocking it and that the appearance is a good one. I will argue that these two requirements ground an enlightening gloss on the distinction between prima facie and overall justification.

Call beliefs you are justified in not blocking *R-rational.* (They pass the test of *Regulative reason.*)\(^{10}\) This is not rationality *simpliciter.* The product of a fallacious inference is not normally called ‘rational’. It can be *R*-rational. Not only can you be justified in not blocking a belief, you can be unjustified in blocking it. Blocking would be a failure of reason in its regulative mode—it would be irrational. Intellectual cowardice is as much of a sin as intellectual hubris.

Any belief must be *R*-rational if it is to be overall justified, whether it is inferential, mnemonic, or perceptual. This re-casts a familiar claim. Philosophers have understood overall justification by means of the equation: a belief is overall justified iff it is prima facie justified and there are no defeaters.\(^{11}\) I claim that being justified in not blocking a belief is what it is for there to be ‘no defeaters’ for the prima facie justification. Consider perceptual, memory and inferential beliefs. We invoke the presence of ‘defeaters’ to explain why a belief is prima facie but not overall justified exactly when the believer is

\(^{10}\) It is not clear whether the justificatory status of one’s previous beliefs matters for *R*-rationality. Cheryl has a justified belief that she got bad maths results last year, and an unjustified belief that she has been getting good maths results this year. She doesn’t block her mathematical inferences. Are her new mathematical beliefs overall justified, or do we invoke the ‘defeaters’ clause? I am neutral on this issue.

\(^{11}\) The terminology of ‘prima facie’ and ‘overall’ justification is often used to draw a different distinction, within non-deductive inferential justification. Let *E* be the set of one’s evidence, and *E*\(^*\) a subset of *E*. It can be that *E*\(^*\) justifies belief that *H*, but *E* does not. In such a case, evidence *E*\(^*\) makes belief that *H* ‘prima facie justified’, but not ‘overall justified’. I will not use the words in this way.
unjustified in not blocking it. So our equation becomes: a belief is overall justified iff it is 
prima facie justified and R-rational.\textsuperscript{12}

If a belief that p is unjustified, and not because it should have been blocked, then 
things had already gone wrong by the time it appeared to the subject that p. Someone 
with an unjustified but R-rational belief had already gone astray by having that 
appearance. So we can blame the appearance whenever the belief is R-rational but not 
overall justified. Label such an appearance \textit{unsound}. In other words:

A belief is overall justified iff it is R-rational and formed from a sound appearance.

I re-label a belief’s being prima facie justified as: its being formed from a sound 
appearance. Here are two clear cases of an unsound appearance. When one infers 
fallaciously, the inferential appearance is unsound. That’s Janet’s situation. When one 
infers from an unjustified belief, the inferential appearance is unsound. Things went 
wrong before the conclusion appeared true to the subject, but the appearance inherits the 
problem.

We can evaluate appearances as sound, but not as being justified. There is nothing 
wrong with this. For example, we can evaluate an archer’s attempt to hit the bullseye.

\textsuperscript{12} The strength of counter-evidence needed to justify blocking can vary between belief- 
forming faculties. (One might say, appearances vary in their rational force.) The most 
extreme case would be that no amount of counter-evidence would make you justified in 
blocking that belief. That’s Descartes’ view of the force of some a priori insights. We 
need some terminological caution here. One might be tempted to talk about the ‘prima 
facie weight’ a belief has, to measure what it would take to make the subject justified in 
blocking it. But that concerns R-rationality, not prima facie justification. I use ‘prima 
facie justified’ in this way to preserve the idea that if prima facie justified belief is 
undefeated, i.e. R-rational, then it is overall justified.
The shot can be skilful, successful, and successful because skilful. (See Sosa 2007 lecture 4.) Maybe we can call a shot ‘justified’, but that would be a positive evaluation of the fact the archer attempted to hit the bullseye. It would not be a positive evaluation of the execution of that attempt. The natural ways of evaluating a shot as good or bad have nothing to do with whether it is ‘justified’. The evaluation of appearances is epistemically crucial, but is not a matter of their being justified.

Not all appearances are created equal. Some lead to an unjustified belief even if you are justified in not blocking it. These are the ‘unsound’ appearances. Yet blocking an unsound appearance can be failure of regulative reason, a failure of rationality.

This gives us a schema for responding to the AFI. Lines 2 and 3 are true: having the appearance that p without believing p involves blocking, and that’s irrational in the cases at hand. The AFI concludes from this that the belief formed from the appearance is justified. That does not follow. If the appearance is unsound, the belief will not be justified. One such case is Janet’s. Another is competent inference from an unjustified belief. Section 4 argues that while there are differences between inference, memory and perception, we should distinguish sound from unsound appearances in all three cases. So none of the AFI is sound. Along the way we see that not all unsoundness is grounded in a failure of rationality. Section 5 shows that this theory fits well with the understanding of ‘rational requirement’ found in the ethics literature. That line 3 of the AFI does not entail line 4 is an instance of a more general truth.

4. Responses to the AFI.

4a. Inference.
Ian’s case is the same as Janet’s. He fallaciously infers q from p, but has no reason to think he would go wrong. Line 2 in the Inferential AFI is true: it would be a failure of rationality for him to block that appearance. As I’ll explain in section 5, line 3 is a good gloss on this. But Ian’s appearance is unsound. So the belief he forms is not justified. Line 5 is false. It does not follow from line 3. The Inferential AFI assumes that any belief approved of by regulative reason is justified. This ignores the need for the appearance to be sound, for the belief-forming faculties to operate properly throughout. Not all R-rational beliefs are justified.

Ian’s evidence does not support q, it merely appears to him to do so. He is not deontically justified in believing that q. His total evidence actually supports suspending on whether q. Suspending is the deontically justified attitude. Line 4 of the Inferential AFI is false; it does not follow from line 3.

Ian’s belief is currently R-rational: he is justified in not blocking it now. But it is not currently Overall rational. His inferring q from p is an error of inferential reason. Define: a belief is *currently O-rational* iff neither regulative nor inferential reason now operates incorrectly in the subject’s holding the belief. Ian’s case shows that being R-rational does not suffice for a belief to be justified. Maria’s case will show that being currently O-rational does not suffice for being justified either.

**4b. Memory.**

Maria formed her belief that Dean Martin is Italian irrationally, but has now forgotten anything that would allow her to put that mistake right. Applying the framework of section 3 yields a satisfying description of her situation. Maria’s belief is R-rational. In
other words, she is justified in not blocking the formation of an occurrent belief from her mnemonic appearance. But her belief is not justified, because the appearance is unsound. It is unsound because it is the fruit of irrational belief-formation. The mnemonic appearance is unsound, not because of any current error, but because of Maria’s past error. (Plausibly, a mnemonic appearance is sound only if it constitutes the retrieval of a belief that was formed justifiably.) As with Ian, lines 2 and 3 are true but line 5 does not follow.

This characterization of Maria’s situation is compelling. Extending the distinction between sound and unsound appearances to the case of memory resolves the conflict of intuitions about whether Maria’s belief is justified. The intuition that her belief is justified goes away. Her belief is currently R-rational, indeed currently O-rational (inferential reason is not currently involved at all). That’s what the intuition that she is ‘justified’ gets at. The intuition is explained away as mistaking R- and O-rationality for justification. There is more to justified belief than current O-rationality, because there is more to the soundness of mnemonic appearances than that. Their soundness depends on what happened in the past.

We already discriminate between appearances, so as to deal with Ian’s case. Applying that framework to memory solves the intuitive problem with Maria. It is good to have a unified theory of the epistemic role of inferential and mnemonic appearances. These are conclusive grounds for treating Maria’s case in this way.

Recall that Ian is deontically justified only in suspending judgment on his conclusion, q. Having an inferential appearance, whether sound or not, does not affect what attitudes you are deontically justified in holding. Let’s treat memory analogously, and say that
Maria is deontically justified in suspending judgment on whether Dean Martin is Italian. That’s what her real evidence supports. Similarly, a non-inferential belief formed by wishful thinking is not part of your real evidence, does not affect what you are deontically justified in believing. (Section 6 answers worries about this.)

Maria’s belief is currently O-rational. She is not now making a mistake of reason in holding it. Define: a belief is historically O-rational iff neither inferential nor regulative reason operated incorrectly at any stage in its production. Maria’s belief is not historically O-rational. Are all historically O-rational beliefs justified? In other words, is the unsoundness of an appearance always the result of a failure of rationality? Here’s a case that suggests that it is not.

Mark had forgotten that his school never had physics prizes. If he had tried to remember whether they did, he would not have come up with either answer. However, a week passes, and Mark’s dispositions change. Now if he tried to remember, he would say that his school did have a physics prize, and Julie won it. The change in Mark’s dispositions is not the result of his thinking about the matter, or receiving any relevant evidence. Mark acquired a dispositional belief out of thin air. Surely such a belief is not justified. Some garbage got into Mark’s store of beliefs. It was not put there by a belief-forming faculty. It got there by memory-formation working improperly. That faculty is meant to store inputted beliefs. There was no input belief in Mark’s case. We can’t blame memory for storing unjustified input beliefs, like Maria’s. Things had already gone

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13 Here are two views about non-inferential deontic justification for believing. First: One is mnemonically/ perceptually deontically justified in believing that p iff one has a sound appearance that p and is deontically justified in not blocking it. Second: There is no such thing as non-inferential deontic justification for believing. I incline towards the latter. Having deontic justification to believe is a matter of having good reason to do so, having good evidence for believing, and so is inferential.
wrong for Maria before memory became involved. We can blame memory for allowing in beliefs like Mark’s, which was not inputted by a belief-forming faculty. Mark’s error was not one of rationality or reason, but of memory. (Huemer 1999 agrees.) Both Mark and Maria’s mnemonic beliefs are unjustified, but only Mark’s belief is unjustified because memory operated improperly. His belief is historically O-rational but not justified. Again, it would be weak to accept what I have said about Ian and Maria, but refuse the obvious extension to accommodate the intuitions about Mark.

Let me gesture at other ways in which a mnemonic appearance can be unsound. Memory consists of four sub-faculties, all of which can operate improperly. Memory-formation operates improperly in Mark’s case. Memory-retention operates improperly when the dispositional belief that Bert owes you $20 warps into the dispositional belief that Bert owes you $30. Memory-retrieval operates improperly when you occurrently believe that Steve won the race until someone suggests that Tom did, which prompts you to remember correctly. These three kinds of failure lead to an unsound mnemonic appearance. I am not sure the fourth does. Memory-erasure operates improperly when new evidence makes you change your mind, but what remains in storage is your old belief. Suppose Nina knew that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia, but revised her occurrent belief when her geography teacher told her it wasn’t. A month later, Nina has forgotten the misleading evidence, and her original correct mnemonic appearance has survived. I want to say that Nina knows that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia.

4c. Perception.
As noted at the beginning of section 3, we block perceptual beliefs in just the same way as inferential and mnemonic beliefs. When one knows about the Muller-Lyer illusion, one blocks the formation of a basic perceptual belief that the lines are of different lengths. When one knows that his twin brother is in town, one blocks the formation of a non-basic perceptual belief that that guy is Alvin Goldman. Let’s focus on the case of basic perceptual beliefs. Any belief is overall justified iff it is R-rational and formed from a sound appearance. Our present question is, When is a basic perceptual appearance sound?

For the AFI to be valid, basic perceptual appearances must automatically be sound. That is: the distinction between sound and unsound appearances would not apply in the basic perceptual case. That’s a very disunified view of the epistemic import of appearances. Surely perceptual appearances are not so starkly disanalogous to inferential and mnemonic appearances.¹⁴

One might find this surprising and worrying. Intuitively, the perceptual beliefs of a BIV are justified. The upshot seems to be that an undefeated perceptual appearance yields a justified belief. (That’s the ‘new evil demon problem’ for externalism, noted in section 2a.) My framework does not clash with that intuition—it removes it. A brain in a vat’s false perceptual belief is R-rational, indeed O-rational. I have no intuition that it has a further epistemic status, namely being overall justified. O-rationality captures what is to be said for the belief. It is easy to explain away the attraction of the view that basic perceptual appearances suffice for justified belief: it mistakes R-rationality and O-

¹⁴ Perceptual appearances are cognitively penetrable, i.e. affected by what you believe. Susanna Siegel (forthcoming) argues that if it appears to you that p because you already believed that p, the appearance does not make your belief that p more justified. Such appearances are unsound. The view I suggest below accommodates this point.
rationality for overall justification. We must endorse this manoeuvre, to explain away the intuition that Maria’s belief is justified.

Drawing the distinction between R-rationality and justification sharpens our intuitions. There’s nothing fishy about this. Drawing the distinction between metaphysical and epistemic possibility sharpens our intuitions about whether water could have been something other than H₂O.

The distinction between sound and unsound perceptual appearances should be analogous to that for inferential and mnemonic appearances. This rules out the view that a basic perceptual appearance is sound iff it would have been the same had the subject paid full attention, rather than just casting a quick glance. A subject can still infer fallaciously when paying full attention. However much attention Maria and Mark pay to what they now believe, they will still have their unsound mnemonic appearances. We should not treat perceptual appearances disanalogously.

I doubt that any internalist view of soundness will satisfy this test. Nor will a reliabilist view that says that if a faculty usually produces true beliefs, all the appearances it produces are sound. Memory and inference produce both sound and unsound appearances, and not just because the input beliefs were unjustified: one can misremember and mis-infer. The spirit of the position is to discriminate between proper and improper functioning of basic perception. I am inclined to the view that a basic perceptual appearance is sound iff it constitutes the subject’s seeing that p. You have to be in that factive mental state to have a justified basic perceptual belief. Hence the belief has to be true to be justified. This is a very externalist position. (There is a sense in which seeing that p requires believing that p, and a sense in which it doesn’t. Here I intend the
latter. Note also that a non-basic perceptual appearance that \( p \) can constitute the subject’s seeing that \( p \). I am only addressing the case in which the subject has a basic perceptual appearance that \( p \). I am more sympathetic to a reliabilist component in what makes non-basic perceptual appearances sound.)

This view is supported by the analogy with inference. I argue via the intermediary case of a priori foundational belief. (I’m talking about belief in necessary truths, rather than introspection or the alleged contingent a priori.) Inferences where the subject takes the premises to necessitate the conclusion produce a justified belief only if the conclusion really is necessitated (and the inference is competent). We can think of a priori non-inferential belief as the result of a zero-premised inference of this kind. To be thus believed justifiedly, the proposition must really be necessary. The zero-premised inference is competent iff the subject ‘sees a priori’ that \( p \). So one must see a priori that \( p \) to have a justified a priori foundational belief that \( p \). For instance, here are two ways to respect that being red is incompatible with being blue: inferring from the fact that the car is red that it is not blue; and forming an a priori non-inferential belief that the car is not both red and blue. Surely those two recognitions produce a justified belief under intimately related conditions. Plausibly, a priori and empirical basic justified belief work in analogous ways—by revelation of the fact. So basic perceptual justification requires the subject to see that \( p \).

Here’s a consequence of this view of when a basic perceptual appearance is sound. Perceptual beliefs can be formed from a sound appearance without being R-rational. There are cases in which one sees that \( p \), though one should be blocking, and so the belief is not overall justified. It is not the case that if \( S \) sees that \( p \) then \( S \) knows that \( p \), pace
Timothy Williamson (2000, chapter 1.4). Knowledge requires R-rationality as well as a sound appearance (and some other things). Williamson does not distinguish those two, glossing over epistemic structure we need to delineate.

This view of perceptual justification is a speculative conjecture. It strikes me as more promising than the alternatives. I do not claim to have established it, as I boldly claim for the views of inference and memory. I review the status of internalist theories of justification in section 7.

(Let me end this section by gesturing towards another consequence of the view I suggest of overall justification. Conservatism about perceptual justification says that one must have a prior justified belief that one won’t go wrong in order to form an overall justified perceptual belief. Liberalism denies this. In my framework, conservatism says that one must block unless one already has a justified belief that one won’t go wrong. Liberalism fits better with the psychology of blocking, and doesn’t raise the spectre of skepticism. Belief formation is like cycling downhill, as far as regulative reason is concerned. Stopping requires positive intervention by regulative reason; going ahead requires only the absence of intervention. The opposing view is that regulative reason must ‘pedal uphill’ if beliefs are to be formed. Trust in a faculty would be a positive act required for belief formation. It seems easier to be justified in refraining from intervening than in a positive act of trusting a faculty.)

5. Rational Requirements.

When there is no reason to block, its appearing that p rationally requires the subject to believe that p. That’s because it would be a failure of rationality to block the belief from
being formed. But having an unsound appearance constitutes already having gone wrong on whether p. Making a mistake can rationally require you to plough that mistaken furrow, doing things that are not justified. Line 3 of the AFI does not entail line 4. This response to the AFI is further supported by being subsumed under a more general truth. The ethics literature finds it widespread that a mental state rationally requires one to do something one should not, something unjustified. (See e.g. Broome 1999, 2004, 2007; Dancy 2000 chapter 3; Kolodny 2005, 2007.) Here are three kinds of example from John Broome’s 1999 paper.

The first example is of inference from an unjustified belief. Graham has an irrational belief that p. He notices that p entails q. He would be irrational to believe p, notice that q follows, but refuse to believe q. Believing p and noticing that q follows rationally requires Graham to believe q. But he is not justified in believing q. His belief that p is not justified, and inference from it does not create justification. Graham should neither believe p nor believe q, because they are not supported by his evidence. So believing p rationally requires Graham to do something unjustified, something he should not.

Secondly, suppose Heather falsely believes that she should torture Tigger the kitten right now. She has Tigger in her grasp; there are no witnesses; the thumb-screw (paw-screw?) is ready. She would be practically irrational if she believed she should torture Tigger right now but failed to do so. Believing that she should now torture Tigger rationally requires Heather to do so. But she shouldn’t. She would be unjustified in applying the thumb-screw.
Thirdly, intending an end rationally requires you to intend what you believe to be the necessary means. It is irrational to intend to open more wine, believe that you need to get the cork-screw to do so, but not intend to get the cork-screw. But if you shouldn’t open more wine, you shouldn’t get the cork-screw, and you would be unjustified in doing so.

That a belief rationally requires you to do something is different from the belief being a good reason to do so. Believing that all psychiatrists are out to kill you rationally requires you to avoid them. That you believe that all psychiatrists are out to kill you is a good reason to go and see one. (The example is from Dancy 2000 p. 65.)

The official ideology is: being in mental states \{M_i\} rationally requires S to F. That notion is three-placed: it applies to triples of \(<\{M_i\}, S, F>\). It must be distinguished from the two-placed notion: S is all-things-considered rationally required to F. Return to the example of Graham, who holds an irrational belief that p, and notices that q follows. He is not all-things-considered rationally required to believe q; for he is rationally required not to believe p and not to believe q. Yet believing that p rationally requires Graham to believe q.

One might wonder whether it is possible to reduce the three-placed notion to the two-placed notion. There are two broad proposals for how to do so, namely the wide-scope and narrow-scope analyses.

\[(\text{NARROW-SCOPE}) \{M_i\} \text{ rationally requires } S \text{ to } F \iff \text{ If } S \text{ is in } \{M_i\}, \text{ then } S \text{ is rationally required to } F.\]
(WIDE-SCOPE) \{M_i\} rationally requires S to F \iff S is rationally required to [either not be in \{M_i\}, or else F].

I am not sympathetic to either reduction. The important point is that the legitimacy of the three-placed notion does not rest on its reducing to the two-placed notion. The three-placed ideology regiments a perfectly good intuitive notion.\(^{15}\)

In Broome’s examples, beliefs and intentions rationally require some response. We have seen that another kind of mental state can rationally require something. Having an appearance that p, and no defeating beliefs that justify blocking, rationally requires the subject to believe that p. As before that does not mean that the subject is justified in believing that p. An unsound appearance constitutes having made a mistake, having messed up. That mistake rationally requires forming a belief. It rationally requires you to follow its mistaken path. When beliefs and intentions do the rational requiring, maybe they constitute ‘messing up’ iff they are unjustified. We can’t say this about appearances, which are not justified or unjustified. But as we saw in sections 3 and 4, we can identify the appearance as containing the subject’s error, as responsible for the belief’s being unjustified. Ian knows that p, fallaciously infers q, and is justified in not blocking that inference. Ian forms an unjustified belief that q. Ian did not go wrong in taking p as a premise. Ian did not make a mistake by not blocking the formation of that belief. It was in its appearing to him that q that Ian messed up. Hence that messed-up appearance will rationally require Ian to do messed-up things, like believe that q. Ian should not believe q,

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\(^{15}\) When there are no defeaters, one is rationally required to fit one’s beliefs to one’s appearances. One cannot rationally fit one’s appearances to one’s beliefs. Niko Kolodny argues more generally that rational requirement is a non-symmetric relation (Kolodny 2005 esp. pp. 528-530, 2007).
but should suspend judgment; for his evidence (namely p) does not speak to it. Believing that p does not itself rationally require Ian to believe that q.

The same principle covers Maria’s case: her unsound appearance rationally requires her to hold an unjustified belief. There is a difference with Broome’s examples. Maria’s error is not a current error of reason. It lies in her forgotten past. What it is rationally best for her to do now is believe that Dean Martin is Italian. She is now ‘all-things-considered’ rationally required to do so. In Broome’s examples, the subject does make a current error of reason. What it is rationally best for them to do now is stop and stop making that mistake, rather than following where it leads. That’s what they are now all-things-considered rationally required to do. For instance, Heather is now all-things-considered rationally required to stop believing that she should now torture Tigger. This difference between Broome’s examples and Maria’s case does not challenge subsuming them under the same explanatory generalization. Section 4b argued that Maria’s belief is not justified. Hence her mnemonic appearance is a mental state that rationally requires her to do something unjustified. That’s what’s going on in Broome’s examples too. Our view about Maria is supported by fitting nicely into a more general schema.

6. Objections and Replies.

6a.

My view entails that one can fail to be in a position to take an evaluatively justified attitude to a proposition. Maria’s mnemonic appearance that Dean Martin is Italian is the result of some long-forgotten irrational belief-formation. I say that her belief is
unjustified, though she is justified in not blocking it. Suspending belief is the deontically justified attitude, because her justified beliefs do not support an answer. But she is unable to suspend in a justified way, as long as she has the unsound appearance. If she did suspend, it would be by blocking unjustifiably. Blocking unjustifiably leads to evaluatively unjustified suspension of belief, just as unjustifiably not blocking leads to evaluatively unjustified belief. While she has the unsound appearance, she cannot have an evaluatively justified attitude. But she can’t stop having that appearance in a justified way, given her current epistemic position. Maria would not be justified in erasing her belief that Dean Martin is Italian, thereby ceasing to have the offending mnemonic appearance. So I must deny that one is always in a position to believe/act in an evaluatively justified way.\(^\text{16}\)

I don’t think this is a draw-back to my view. I deny that there is always something one can justifiedly do given that one has already gone wrong. Given a mistake, such as having an unsound appearance, there may be no way of still doing the right thing in the right way. That seems correct, and no objection to my view.

Let me give a two-stage explanation of how one can fail to be in a position to have an evaluatively justified attitude. The first stage makes use of an analogy. Derek drove to the bar, but is now over the alcohol limit for driving home. He should get a cab instead—it’s the only safe way of getting home. He’s spent all his cash, and needs $20 to pay for the taxi. He should get $20 for the cab ride home. Luckily his friend Allyson is also at the bar, and she is perfectly happy to lend him the $20. However, Derek refuses to

\(^{16}\) This also follows from my treatment of perceptual and inferential justification. A creature might not be in a position to spot that a certain kind of inference it makes systematically is fallacious.
borrow the money from a friend. The only other way of getting $20 at that time of night is to mug somebody. Given he has ruled out borrowing the money, Derek cannot act in an evaluatively justified way. Making that mistake cuts Derek off from all justified action. He must get $20 for the cab (to avoid drink-driving), but is not justified in mugging someone for it. Refusing to borrow the $20 excludes Derek’s acting in an evaluatively justified way. Having the unsound mnemonic appearance excludes Maria’s having an evaluatively justified attitude to whether Dean Martin is Italian. That’s the first stage in the explanation, partly legitimized by the analogy with Derek.

The second stage recognizes a disanalogy between the two cases. Derek is in a position to spot and justifiedly rectify his mistake. Derek is in a position to act justifiedly, by borrowing the money from his friend. But Maria is not in a position to put right the mistake she made when she formed the belief. She is not in a position to realize that her mnemonic appearance is unsound, and so justifiedly stop having the appearance that Dean Martin is Italian. But having that appearance excludes her having an evaluatively justified attitude to the proposition. Putting these last two points together, we see why Maria is not in a position to have an evaluatively justified attitude.

6b.

Ian is not justified in blocking the inferential appearance that q, but is not justified in believing q. In fact, he’s deontically justified in not believing that q (as long as his other evidence does not count in favour of it). Here’s a way of arguing that those claims are incompatible, suggested to me by Michael Huemer.
1. Ian is deontically justified in not believing that q.

2. Ian knows that, because it appears to him that q, blocking is the means necessary for not believing that q.

3. If S is deontically justified in F-ing, and S knows that G-ing is the means necessary for F-ing, then S is deontically justified in G-ing.

So,

4. Ian is deontically justified in blocking the appearance that q.

Here’s a parallel argument concerning section 6a’s belligerent drunk, Derek. Remember that Derek must find $20 to pay for a taxi home, but refuses to borrow the money from a friend. The only other way of getting the money at that time of night is to mug somebody.

1*. Derek is deontically justified in getting $20 for the cab ride home.

2*. Derek knows that, because he refuses to borrow it, mugging someone is the means necessary for getting the money.

3. If S is deontically justified in F-ing, and S knows that G-ing is the means necessary for F-ing, then S is deontically justified in G-ing.

So,

4*. Derek is deontically justified in mugging someone for the $20.

This argument has a false conclusion, and so is unsound. Here’s why. Just because Derek is justified in getting the $20, does not mean that any means to that end is acceptable. It is
only because he has wrongly ruled out the proper means for getting the $20 that mugging someone is the only means left. Principle 3 is not true of such cases. When it is because [S has excluded the proper means for F-ing] that [G-ing is the means necessary for S to F], principle 3 does not apply.

Here’s the parallel response to the objection to my view. Ian should not avoid believing q by means of blocking. Things have already gone wrong by the time that question arises. Its seeming to him that q is where things went wrong, where Ian deviated from the proper way of not believing that q. It is because [Ian has excluded the proper way of not believing that q] that [blocking is the means necessary for Ian not to believe that q]. As the case of Derek shows, principle 3 is not true of such cases.

Let me forestall a possible confusion. 2 and 2* have false as well as true readings. On the false reading of 2, Ian can cease to have the appearance that q, and so blocking the appearance is not the only way for him to avoid believing that q. For example, shutting one’s fingers in the door frees one’s mind from most inferential appearances. The true reading of 2 holds fixed Ian’s having the appearance that q. Given that appearance, blocking it is the means necessary for not believing that q. Similarly, if we allow that Derek can stop refusing to borrow the money from his friend, 2* will be false. But we can also evaluate 2* while holding his refusal fixed, rendering it true. That’s how Derek would reason about the options open to him. There is no disanalogy here that threatens my parallel treatment of Ian and Derek.

There are other arguments in the vicinity which get a similar response. Here’s one suggested by an anonymous reviewer.
1. Ian is deontically justified in not blocking the appearance that q.

2. If Ian doesn’t block then he believes that q.

3. If S is deontically justified in F-ing, and if S Fs then S Gs; then S is deontically justified in G-ing.

So,

4. Ian is deontically justified in believing that q.

If we don’t hold fixed Ian’s mistake (viz. having the appearance that q), premise 2 is false. If we do hold it fixed, 1 and 2 are true but premise 3 is false. We show this by constructing an analogous argument that, since Derek is justified in not mugging anyone, he is justified in not getting a taxi home. Given Derek’s unjustified refusal to borrow the $20, the next best option is still unjustified—sleeping in the park is a silly idea.

6c.

Nicholas Silins (2005) argues that “internal twins” possess the same evidence. One passage (pp. 392-3) suggests the following argument that perceptual appearances suffice for justified belief (when defeating beliefs are absent). Roughly: Peter is not deontically justified in suspending or disbelieving p, so he is deontically justified in believing that p.

1. Suppose it appears perceptually to Peter that p, and he has no defeating beliefs.

2. If Peter is not deontically justified in either disbelieving or suspending judgment with regard to p, then Peter is deontically justified in believing that p.

3. Peter is not deontically justified in disbelieving that p.
4. Given that it appears to him that p, Peter would be evaluatively unjustified were he to suspend judgment with regard to p.

So,

5. Peter is not deontically justified in suspending judgment with regard to p. (from 4)

So,

6. Peter is deontically justified in believing that p. (from 2, 3, 5)

Here is the passage in which Silins argues via 4.

Suppose [Peter] did suspend judgment in the proposition that [p], despite the fact that it seems [to him that p], and despite the fact that no defeating evidence is available to him. I take it to be very implausible that [Peter] would be justified in suspending judgment in the matter. (Silins 2005 p. 392)

Silins takes this to show that Peter “lacks justification” to suspend judgment, i.e. he is not deontically justified in suspending. This step from 4 to 5 is where the argument goes wrong. Given he has an unsound appearance that p, Peter would be evaluatively unjustified were he to suspend judgment on p, for he would be unjustifiably blocking. Having the appearance rules out suspending in the justified way. The appropriate way of suspending has already been lost. But he is deontically justified in suspending judgment, for his genuine evidence is silent on the matter. (This is clearest in the inferential case: Ian is deontically justified in suspending on whether q.)

Returning to the analogy with Derek might help. Derek is deontically justified in getting $20 for the cab home. Here’s the parallel to the quoted argument from Silins.
Suppose Derek did get $20 for the taxi home, despite the fact that he refused to borrow the money from a friend, and the only other way of getting the money was to mug someone. I take it to be very implausible that Derek’s getting the $20 would be evaluatively justified—he mugged someone to do so. So Derek lacks justification for getting $20 for the cab ride home.

Derek’s refusal to borrow the money excludes him from the correct way of getting it. Given that error, were he to get it, he would do so in an unjustified way. Nevertheless, he is deontically justified in getting the money, so as to avoid drink-driving and sleeping in the park. Similarly, having an unsound appearance excludes you from holding the deontically justified attitude in an evaluatively justified way.

7. The Motivations for Internalism.

Let’s wrap up by considering the upshot for of my arguments for the debate between internalism and externalism about epistemic justification. I review the standard motivations for internalism, noting problems with each. They do not look promising, given the views of inference and memory defended in this paper.

We should reject any version of internalism that gives the wrong answer about inferential cases. We must allow that there are unsound inferential appearances, and that one can be justified in not blocking them. It would be perverse to refuse to apply these distinctions to resolve the conflict of intuitions about mnemonic cases. Thus a tenable internalism will accept that the beliefs of Maria and Mark are not justified (see section 4b).

This refutes two kinds of internalism. The first identifies justified belief with rational belief. It is compelling that rationality is an ‘internal’ matter, in some sense that would need to be spelled out. Let’s look at three precisifications of ‘rational’ belief.
Firstly, justified belief is not just R-rational belief. Ian’s fallacious inference produces an R-rational belief that is not overall justified. Secondly, justified belief is not just currently O-rational belief. Our conflicting inclinations about Maria are satisfied by saying that her belief is currently O-rational, but not justified, because her mnemonic appearance is unsound. Thirdly, justified belief is not just historically O-rational belief. Mark acquired the disposition to have a particular mnemonic appearance out of thin air. Those appearances are unsound, and give rise to unjustified occurrent beliefs. Yet those beliefs are historically O-rational: reason did not go wrong in their production.

‘Access’ internalism is the second kind of view that goes wrong in mnemonic cases. It holds that one must be able to respond to whether a belief is justified, and that means that one must always have ‘access’ to whether it is. Allegedly, we could only have the right kind of access if justification is an ‘internal’ matter. Let’s distinguish two aspects to ‘access’. The first demands that when you have an unjustified belief you are in a position to realise this, and hence rectify the belief. I reject this demand. Maria is not now in a position to recognize and rectify the mistake she made when she irrationally formed the belief that Dean Martin is Italian; but her belief is still unjustified. The second aspect to ‘access’ demands that when you have a justified belief, you are in a position to justifiably believe that the belief is justified. This requirement is compatible with the position defended in this paper. It does not favour internalism. For example, suppose that a basic perceptual appearance that p is sound only if the subject sees that p. Combine this with the view that when one sees that p, one is in a position to be aware that one sees that p. That’s another factive mental state, and constitutes a sound appearance that one sees that p. Suppose that the conditions for blocking are also the
same. This view is extremely externalist, yet it entails that basic perceptual belief satisfies the second ‘access’ requirement. Only the first kind of access requirement could support internalism, and it gives the wrong answer about Maria.

The remaining kinds of internalism agree that Maria and Mark’s mnemonic appearances are unsound, but hold it is an internal matter whether a (basic or non-basic) perceptual appearance is sound. This view does not sit well with our treatment of inference and memory. There is a very strict condition on an inferential appearance’s being sound: the premise must really support the conclusion. The conclusion must thereby be conditionally likely to be true. I see no prospect of a demanding and truth-conducive internalist criterion for a perceptual appearance to be sound. Further, no straightforward intuition favours internalism. There is no intuition about when R-rational perceptual beliefs have the further status of being justified. Having explained away the intuition that Maria’s belief is justified, the same thought seems irresistible in the case of perception. The internalist intuition latches on to R-rationality, which is an internalist component in justified belief. This seems like internalism enough.

I will look at one motivation for internalism which admits that Maria and Mark are not justified. The thought is that errors of inference or memory can be attributed to the subject, but basic perceptual errors are to be attributed to the unkind environment the subject finds themselves in. Suppose Peter has an inaccurate visual image, either as the result of hallucination or a visual illusion. Ian, Maria and Mark messed up, but allegedly Peter did not—his false belief is supposedly not his fault. This is meant to motivate saying that Mark is not justified but Peter is justified. I remain unmoved. I have no intuition that Mark is more responsible for his false mnemonic belief than Peter is for his
false perceptual belief. But even if there were such an intuition, there is independent reason to think that justification and blame come apart. Suppose it is morally wrong to beat your children, but everyone in Fred’s society thinks it is morally permissible. We might not blame Fred for beating his children, because it is not the case that he should have known better. But it is wrong for him to beat his children; he is not justified in doing so; the weight of reasons is against it. In the case of action, blamelessness and justification come apart. So an externalist about epistemic justification can accept that we blame the subject more when we locate the error in their processing rather than in a hostile environment. Internalism about blame provides no grounds for internalism about epistemic justification. (This does not mean that epistemic blame is uninteresting.)

This paper has argued that appearances do not suffice for prima facie justified belief, and explained away the attraction of the Arguments From Irrationality. I presented a framework that resolves the conflict of intuitions about inference and memory. It undermines the view that perceptual appearances suffice for prima facie justified belief. A more promising view is that one must see that $p$ to have a justified basic perceptual belief that $p$. 
Chapter 2: Easy Knowledge and Perceptual Recognition

1. Introduction

Here’s a paradigmatic argument from ‘easy knowledge’, made by Stewart Cohen (2002, 2005). Suppose Stu goes to buy his son a red table. Stu sees a table in the shop, and comes to know by perception that it is red. Intuitively, he can’t come to know that he is not making an error about the colour of the table by reasoning as follows:

The table is red

So, It is not the case that: the table is white with red lights shining on it.

Such knowledge is intuitively ‘too easy’. But allegedly some epistemological views have the consequence that Stu can come to know the conclusion by such reasoning. So we should reject those views. For example, Cohen alleges that given foundationalism about Stu’s perceptual knowledge that the table is red, Stu could get ‘easy knowledge’ that he is not mistaken. Cohen concludes that we must reject that kind of foundationalism.

I think that something like an argument from easy knowledge shows something important about some ways of knowing (such as predictions about the future), but not about others (such as deductive inference and introspection). In this paper, I identify the best kind of argument from easy knowledge, and sketch a view it supports in the case of knowledge by perceptual recognition. (I outline in chapter 1 of this dissertation how to think of the kinds of knowledge for which the argument from easy knowledge is unsound.) I won’t consider another issue that sometimes goes under the name of ‘easy
knowledge’, namely whether one can ‘bootstrap’ to knowledge that one’s faculties are reliable, by relying on the outputs of the faculty in an inductive track-record argument.

Sections 2-5 clarify the ‘standard’ argument from easy knowledge that appears in the literature. The argument is meant to establish ‘Conservatism’ about a way of knowing, roughly the view that the subject must be able to rule out all skeptical alternatives epistemically prior to knowing in that way. ‘Liberalism’ is the denial of Conservatism about a way of knowing. Section 6 argues that the standard argument is invalid, and section 7 outlines a replacement—the ‘new’ argument from easy knowledge.

Sections 8-10 outline a plausible Conservative theory of knowledge by perceptual recognition (such as recognizing something as a hand, or as a zebra). That view is supported by the new argument from easy knowledge. The view is compatible with Liberalism about ‘basic’ perceptual knowledge. Section 11 sketches a Moorean-type response to Brain-In-a-Vat skepticism, given Conservatism about perceptual recognition and Liberalism about basic perceptual knowledge.

2. Epistemic Priority, Temporal Priority, and Closure

Let’s have two other cases of easy knowledge on the table. Suppose that Fred is at the zoo, and looks over to the zebra enclosure from 50 yards. He sees some stripey animals in there. He comes to know that they are zebras. Intuitively, he can’t come to know that he is not making an error about the kind of animal they are by reasoning as follows:

That’s a zebra

So, It is not a cunningly disguised mule.
Here’s the other case. Suppose Janet lives in New York, and knows that she will be in Long Island tomorrow. She drives there twice a week to teach a course. Intuitively, she can’t come to know that her journey won’t be interrupted by reasoning as follows:

I’ll teach in Long Island tomorrow

So, My car won’t break down on the way there.

I think it’s pretty clear that Fred and Janet cannot reason in those ways. And I think it is pretty clear why: in both cases, the conclusion is epistemically prior to the premise. The reasoning is bad because it inverts the epistemic order. In some sense, Fred has to settle the question of whether the thing is a cunningly disguised mule first, before he can settle whether it is a zebra. Similarly, Janet has to settle first whether her car will break down, before settling whether she’ll teach in Long Island tomorrow.

Some caution is in order. For Janet to know that she’ll teach in Long Island tomorrow, it is not necessary that she has actually formed the belief that her car won’t break down on the way. Knowing she won’t break down need not be temporally prior to her knowing that she’ll teach in Long Island. Similarly, Fred can know the thing is a zebra without actually having formed the belief that it is not a cunningly disguised mule. In both cases, the reasoning is bad because the conclusion is epistemically prior to the premise; that does not entail that knowing the conclusion must be temporally prior to knowing the premise. There is no objection to Fred and Janet coming to believe the conclusion at a time later than their coming to believe the premise. Janet can ignore the
question of whether her car will break down, and know that she will teach in Long Island tomorrow. She can’t know it if she adopts the attitude of agnosticism towards whether her car will break down (as opposed to having no attitude at all). (Because Janet need not actually believe that her car won’t break down, let’s not say that such a belief is part of her basis for believing she will teach in Long Island tomorrow.)

Note that epistemic priority is not an abstract relationship between propositions. [Knowing that Q] is epistemically prior to [knowing that P] in a particular way, for a subject at a time. I will illustrate this with the following pair of cases (adapted from Cohen 1999 pp. 74-6). Suppose Tanya already knows that Albany is the capital of New York. She opens an atlas, and sees that it contains that information. She can reason as follows:

Albany is the capital of New York

So, The sentence in the atlas that says so is not a misprint.

Now Tim knows that atlases are very reliable, but doesn’t already know that Albany is the capital of New York. He comes to know that Albany is the capital by reading it in the atlas. Tim would violate the epistemic order if he used that knowledge to infer that the sentence in the atlas that says so is not a misprint. He can’t reason in the way Tanya can. Whether knowing <The sentence in the atlas that says so is not a misprint> is epistemically prior to knowing <Albany is the capital of New York> depends on how the subject knows the latter proposition, and thus varies with the subject and time.
Crispin Wright says that Janet and Fred’s reasoning ‘fails to transmit warrant’ from the premises to the conclusion (even if there is some other warrant for the conclusion). (See Wright 1985, 2002, 2003a, 2004.) A closely related idea is that there is no ‘flow of evidential support’ from Janet’s belief that she’ll teach in Long Island tomorrow, to her belief that her car won’t break down; evidential support flows only in the opposite direction. It is plausible that Janet’s reasoning is not cogent because it violates the direction of evidential support. Let’s start with a vague sense of these notions, and make them precise as we go on. (I will argue in section 6 that we must distinguish transmission-failure from epistemic priority: some arguments fail to transmit warrant, yet the conclusion is not epistemically prior to the premise.)

Call the following the ‘standard argument’ from easy knowledge. The repugnance of ‘easy knowledge’ allegedly shows that the conclusion is epistemically prior to the premise. Epistemological theories that deny that must be wrong. For example, in Cohen’s case from section 1, knowing that <It is not the case that: the table is white with red lights shining on it> is allegedly epistemically prior for Stu to knowing that <the table is red>. Allegedly, that’s incompatible with foundationalism about Stu’s perceptual knowledge. Here are two paradigmatic such foundationalist theories, one internalist and one externalist. According to Earl Conee & Richard Feldman (1985), and Jim Pryor (2000, 2004), having a visual experience with the content that <the table is red> makes you prima facie justified in believing that the table is red. You don’t need to know that such an experience is a reliable indicator of a red table. On that view, it seems that Stu can start off agnostic as to whether the table is white and illuminated by a red light, have the visual experience, and thereby know that the table is red. It seems irresistible that Stu
could then come to know, by competent deduction, that the table is not white and illuminated by a red light. The same goes for a reliabilist theory that says that since Stu’s visual experiences are in fact reliable indicators of the colour of a thing, he is justified in believing that the table is red, even if he rightly started off agnostic as to whether it is white and illuminated by a red light.

Of course one can bite the bullet, and deny the intuition that Stu cannot have such ‘easy knowledge’. But it would be a brave philosopher who also said that Janet can form ‘easy knowledge’ that her car won’t break down, and Tim can form ‘easy knowledge’ that the atlas does not contain a misprint about the capital of New York. Throwing out the whole idea of epistemic priority, and ‘easy knowledge’ considerations as a diagnostic tool, is very implausible. But then we would need to see some principled reason to take the repugnance of ‘easy knowledge’ seriously in the cases of Janet and Tim, but not in the perceptual cases of Stu and Fred. In the absence of such principled grounds, we should take the intuition seriously in the cases of Stu and Fred too.

Let me dismiss one kind of response to the standard argument from easy knowledge against foundationalism. Martin Davies (2004) says that one can’t have easy knowledge when one is trying to ‘settle the question’ of whether the conclusion is true. If Stu assumes he does know the table is not white and illuminated by red lights, and only wonders how he does, then Davies’ view is that he can deploy the repugnant reasoning. Similarly, Michael Bergmann’s remarks about ‘bootstrapping’ (2004 pp. 717-720) suggest the view that when the conclusion is not in doubt, only how we know it is, easy knowledge is legitimate.
Let me make two points about this proposal. Firstly, the intuitive repugnance of the original cases remains just as strong if we imagine Fred assuming he does know the thing is not a cunningly disguised mule and merely wondering how he knows it. It is still wildly implausible that he can answer that epistemological question by saying, “The thing is a zebra, from which I can deduce that it is not a cunningly disguised mule.” Similarly, the intuitive situation is not altered if we imagine Stu merely considering how he knows that the table is not white and illuminated by red lights. The suggestion made by Davis and Bergmann is just as counter-intuitive as flatly biting the bullet.

Secondly, the cases Davies and Bergmann get wrong seem perfect for diagnosing epistemic priority. Suppose Janet takes for granted (and so do we) that she does know her car won’t break down on the way to teach in Long Island tomorrow, but she wonders how she knows it won’t. It is still wildly implausible that she can answer the epistemological question by saying, “I can deduce that the car won’t break down on the way from the fact that I will teach in Long Island tomorrow.” Everyone should conclude that such reasoning inverts the epistemic order. It would be mysterious to accept that diagnosis in the case of Janet, but not in the perceptual cases. I conclude that the Davies-Bergmann suggestion is unsatisfactory.

Cohen (2005 but not 2002) sets out the argument from easy knowledge using the principle DC (for ‘Deductive Closure’).

(DC) If S knows that P, comes to believe Q by competently deducing it from P, while retaining knowledge of P throughout, then S thereby comes to know that Q.
The rest of this section explains why that is unhelpful.

Cohen’s idea is that if foundationalism about such knowledge is true, then Stu can come to know that the table is red without already knowing that the table is not white and illuminated by red lights. But given DC, it is then difficult to see why Stu could not come to know that the table is not white and illuminated by red lights by competent deduction. Thus DC allegedly allows a neat characterization of the argument from easy knowledge, without appealing to the notion of epistemic priority.

I don’t think this is a helpful way of understanding things. Janet has not considered whether her car will break down on the way, yet knows that she will teach in Long Island tomorrow. Suppose she comes to believe that her car won’t break down, by competent deduction from her knowledge that she’ll teach in Long Island. On the face of it, DC says that Janet thereby comes to know that her car won’t break down on the way. But we should all agree she can’t come to know in that way—because her conclusion is epistemic prior to her premise. The case is a prima facie counterexample to DC.

I don’t want to insist that DC is false. DC can be defended in a number of ways. Maybe one has a bold theory of dispositional belief, according to which whenever p is epistemically prior to q for S, and S knows that q, then S already believes p. Then DC does not apply in the case of Janet, because she does not “come to believe” her car won’t break down by deducing it—she already believed it. Or maybe one says that engaging in reasoning that violates epistemic priority destroys knowledge of the premise. Then DC does not apply in the case of Janet, because she does not “retain knowledge of the premise throughout” her deduction. Or maybe one says that reasoning that violates the epistemic priority of the conclusion cannot be “competent deduction.” All of these
strategies for defending DC say that reasoning that violates the epistemic priority of the conclusion does not produce knowledge. Thus the case of Janet is not a counterexample to DC properly interpreted. But then whether DC applies in the case of Stu turns on whether his reasoning violates epistemic priority. If Stu’s reasoning violates epistemic priority, it does not produce knowledge. If his reasoning doesn’t violate epistemic priority, it does produce knowledge. So appeal to DC obscures the fact that arguments from easy knowledge show something about epistemic priority. For example, the case of Stu is a problem for theories that say that knowing his conclusion is not epistemically prior to his perceptual knowledge.

Interpreted naively, DC says that competent deduction from a known premise fails to produce knowledge of the conclusion only if the conclusion was already believed. (In that case, S did not “come to believe Q” by deduction from P.) In other words, it assumes that all epistemic priority is temporal priority. As we saw in section 2, there are plenty of counterexamples to that claim. There is no problem here for CK, a different kind of ‘closure principle’ for knowledge.\(^\text{17}\)

CK says that when the subject knows the premise, they are *in a position* to know the conclusion, but it is silent on *how* the subject can know the conclusion, or on the basis of what evidence.

The next section gives a general characterization of arguments from easy knowledge, and appeals to CK and the notion of epistemic priority. Cohen (2002, 2005) does not think we should understand arguments from easy knowledge in terms of epistemic priority. I criticize his understanding of the matter in the appendix to this chapter.

3. The General Structure of an Argument from Easy Knowledge

In this section, I give an abstract general characterization of arguments from easy knowledge, and then examples for a variety of ways of knowing. We shouldn’t automatically take the same attitude to all such arguments. We have to proceed on a case-by-case basis.

Here’s a useful definition.

*A ‘skeptical alternative’ sk to S’s knowing that p in way W is a proposition according to which everything appears to S as it actually does, yet p is false.*

We can say that coming to know that an alternative does not obtain is ‘ruling it out’.

In debates about easy knowledge, both sides accept CK.
(CK) If S knows that P, and S is in a position to know that P entails Q, then S is in a position to know that Q.

According to any skeptical alternative sk to S’s knowing that p, p is false. Thus p entails not-sk. Given CK, if S knows that p, and sk is any skeptical alternative, then S is in a position to know that not-sk. Both sides in disagreements about easy knowledge accept this. What they disagree about is how S can know that not-sk. Is knowing that not-sk epistemically prior to knowing that p? Or can S come to know that not-sk by inferring it from S’s knowledge that p? An argument from easy knowledge asserts that S cannot infer that not-sk from p, and concludes that S must be in a position to know that not-sk epistemically prior to knowing that p.

An argument from easy knowledge is meant to establish a general conclusion: for a whole category cases, one must rule out all skeptical alternatives epistemically prior to forming such knowledge. The argument is meant to establish Conservatism about a way of knowing:

Conservatism about a way W of knowing says that: for all p, if S knows that p in way W, and sk is a skeptical alternative, then knowing that not-sk is epistemically prior for S to knowing that p.\(^{18}\)

Liberalism about a way W of knowing says that: Conservatism about W is false.

\(^{18}\) Unfortunately, Huemer’s “Phenomenal Conservatism” (2001, 2007) is a species of Liberalism. I follow the terminology as used by Pryor and Wright.
Liberalism about W doesn’t say that ruling out a given skeptical alternative is never epistemically prior to knowing that p in way W. Liberalism says that sometimes knowing that not-sk isn’t epistemically prior to knowing that p in way W. Conservatism is a universal claim, and the argument from easy knowledge is meant to establish it by considering a single case. So to establish Conservatism, one must consider a case that is a counter-example to Conservatism if anything is, and show that it isn’t. The argument requires that: if one can ever know that p in way W without knowing epistemically prior that some alternative sk doesn’t obtain, then the subject does so in the case under consideration. I’ll come back to this in section 5.

In the rest of this section, I’ll consider a variety of ways of knowing. In some cases Conservatism seems more plausible; in others, Liberalism does. Stewart Cohen (2002, 2005) and Crispin Wright (2002, 2004, 2007) use arguments from easy knowledge to support completely general views about knowledge and justified belief. We should be extremely careful about drawing such consequences. To illustrate the point, let me say a few words about perception, memory, deductive inference, introspection, other minds, and testimony.

Arguments from easy knowledge are most commonly run for perceptual knowledge. For example, Cohen concentrates on the case of Stu’s perceptual knowledge that the table is red. He suggests that similar issues will arise for memory and inductive inference (2002 p. 309). We have to be careful about drawing conclusions about all perceptual knowledge on the basis of an example. Consider Fred’s perceptual knowledge that the thing in the zoo is a zebra. It is very plausible that Fred recognizes it as a zebra on the basis of its directly perceptible features, such as its shape and colour pattern. If
that’s right, there are two kinds of perceptual knowledge. Firstly, we have ‘basic’ perceptual knowledge, which is of the directly perceptible features of the object. Then there is non-basic perceptual knowledge, such as Fred’s knowledge that the thing in the zoo in a zebra, which we have on the basis of our basic perceptual knowledge. This distinction raises the possibility that Liberalism is true of basic perceptual knowledge, and Conservatism is true of non-basic perceptual knowledge. Indeed, James Pryor defends Liberalism only for basic perceptual knowledge. His official view (2000 pp. 538-9) is that “we have immediate prima facie justification for believing those propositions that our experiences basically represent to us,” i.e., “those propositions we seem to perceive to be so, but not in virtue of seeming to perceive that other propositions are so” (p. 539). I will argue in section 8 that Pryor draws the basic/non-basic distinction in the wrong way. On my view, even Stu’s knowledge that the table is red is non-basic. If that’s right, none of the standard arguments from easy knowledge even purport to count against Liberalism about basic perceptual knowledge. I’ll defend Conservatism about non-basic perceptual knowledge in sections 9-10. The resulting view will fit well with Liberalism about basic perceptual knowledge.

Now consider the case of factual memory. I just know that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia. By CK, I am in a position to know that I am not misremembering on that matter. It is not obvious that I could know I am not misremembering epistemically prior to that memory knowledge. It is plausible enough that my confidence that I am not misremembering derives from my confidence that Ulan Bator is the capital on Mongolia. Liberalism about factual memory should be taken seriously. The argument from easy knowledge for Conservatism about memory runs as follows. Allegedly, one can’t reason:
Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia

So, It is not the case that: it isn’t and I am misremembering.

That’s meant to show that one must know one is not misremembering epistemically prior to knowing that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia. I find the easy knowledge reasoning less repugnant in this case than in the cases of Fred and Stu’s non-basic perceptual knowledge. Further, I will argue in section 6 that this argument from easy knowledge is invalid.

Here are a couple of ways of knowing for which Liberalism is very appealing. Does knowledge by deductive inference rest on epistemically prior knowledge that one is not inferring fallaciously? It strikes me as implausible that the a priori component of deductive knowledge is entirely dependent on epistemically prior inductive knowledge that one is not making a mistaken inference on this occasion. Again, it is not plausible that introspective knowledge that I am in pain rests on epistemically prior knowledge that I am not mistaken about that matter. It is often simply directly evident that one is in excruciating pain.

Here are a couple of ways of knowing for which Conservatism is very appealing. When one recognizes that someone else is in pain, on the basis of their stubbing their toe and subsequent behaviour, it seems that one is relying on epistemically prior knowledge of human psychology. When one trusts the testimony of a stranger, it is plausible that one does so on the basis of an assessment of whether they would assert something they didn’t know. Here’s an argument from easy knowledge for Conservatism about knowledge by
testimony. Suppose a tourist in New York doesn’t know the way to the Empire State Building, and asks a stranger for directions. Intuitively, the tourist cannot accept the testimony and then reason:

The Empire State is that way
So, It is not the case that: it is the other way and the stranger lied.

Though they are initially appealing, there are deep theoretical difficulties with Conservative theories about those ways of knowing. Sections 9-10 start to resolve those difficulties.

4. The Lottery Puzzle and the Probability of Error
According to the characterization I proposed in the last section, an argument from easy knowledge must proceed from a case in which we intuitively agree that the subject does know that p, and is in a position to know that not-sk. We need to exercise caution in this regard. Considering whether the subject knows that not-sk can change our verdict about whether the subject knows that p. For example, one can get into the mood of saying that Fred doesn’t know that the animals in the zoo aren’t cunningly disguised mules, and hence he doesn’t know that they are zebras. One might think that Janet doesn’t know her car won’t break down on the way to Long Island, and hence she doesn’t know that she will teach there tomorrow. (Notice that such reasoning assumes that CK is true.)

Considering a skeptical alternative often makes us reverse an initial attribution of knowledge. This phenomenon arises for all sorts of knowledge, as first pointed out by
Jonathan Vogel (1990). The ‘lottery puzzle’ concerns what theoretical view to take about the shifts in verdict. Do people know very little, and we come closer to realizing this when we consider more skeptical alternatives? Do people know a lot, and we make a mistake in reversing our verdict? Is there a third way, according to which the initial attribution and the subsequent reversal are both ‘correct’? For the purpose of this paper, I will try to stay as neutral as possible on the lottery puzzle. We will assume that a general skepticism is not the right response. (I propose a relativistic solution in chapter 5.) The relevant point is that to run an argument from easy knowledge, we must pick an example for which we are happy to say that the subject knows the premise, and is in a position to know the skeptical alternative does not obtain.

It does not respect this point to focus on the probability of the skeptical alternative obtaining. Roger White (2006) argues against Liberalism about perceptual knowledge that a certain object is a hand. (I don’t defend Liberalism about such knowledge, as I think it is perceptually non-basic.) Suppose Hannah comes to know by looking that a stranger has hands coming out of the arm-holes of her coat. Thus Hannah is in a position to know that the stranger does not have fake-hands, i.e. cosmetically convincing replicas of hands. White claims that Hannah should not become more confident that the stranger does not have fake-hands on the basis of a casual glance. He offers two arguments for that claim.

White’s first argument assumes that Hannah’s evidence is merely that the things appear to be hands. If Hannah conditionalizes merely on that evidence, the probability of the stranger having fake-hands should go up rather than down. Hannah learns that the stranger does not have mere stumps, or hooks, etc. Ruling out those possibilities increases
the probability that the stranger has fake-hands. (See White 2006 pp. 531-4. Compare Schiffer 2004 pp. 175-6; Hawthorne 2004 pp. 73-7; Wright 2007 p. 20.) As White concedes (p. 534), the Liberal can respond that if Hannah forms perceptual knowledge that the stranger has hands, then her perceptual evidence includes the fact that those things are hands. Conditionalizing on that evidence would make one more confident that those things are not fake-hands. White’s first argument begs the question.

White’s second argument proceeds as follows (pp. 536-7). Suppose Harry knows that 1% of the population has fake-hands, 1% has mere stumps, and the other 98% have hands. When he sees a stranger with the ends of her sleeves buried in her coat pockets, his credence that she has fake-hands should be 1%, as should his credence that she has mere stumps. When she pulls her hands out of her pockets and Harry glances the things from 20 yards, he learns she doesn’t have stumps. His credence that she has fake-hands should go up to 1.01%. If his credence that the stranger had fake-hands should go up, then seeing the stranger’s hands can’t be how Harry knows she does not have fake-hands. White then claims that the verdict about Harry generalizes.

If this is the appropriate response to the experience when we happen to know these statistics [about the frequency of fake-hands and stumps], I can’t see why it should be any different in an ordinary case. Our judgments should be governed largely by our best estimate of these statistics. (White 2006 pp. 536-7)

This line of argument is flawed. White has created a lottery-puzzle situation, in which we feel obliged to say the subject doesn’t know. Intuitively, Harry does not know that the stranger does not have fake-hands. So intuitively (as captured by CK), Harry does not know that the stranger has hands (it’s merely very likely given his evidence). That
already yields the result that there is not ‘easy knowledge’—the reasoning proceeds from an unknown premise. As long as it allows that Harry doesn’t know the stranger has hands, a theory of perceptual knowledge explains why he can’t have ‘easy knowledge’. That is, we can’t appeal to this case to give an argument from easy knowledge.

White complains that he can’t see why the case of Harry is different from any case of putative perceptual knowledge. But that is exactly to press the lottery puzzle for the case of perceptual knowledge. That restricted version of the lottery puzzle takes any putative case of perceptual knowledge, and induces the verdict that the subject doesn’t know. Yet our grounds for the skeptical verdict do not rest on any special feature of the case. So “we can’t see why things would be different” in any other putative case of perceptual knowledge. So it looks like no-body knows anything by perception.

The lottery puzzle is a deep philosophical problem. As I argue chapter 5, I think it forces us to a kind of relativism about knowledge. But the lottery puzzle arises for all kinds of knowledge. One learns nothing about perceptual knowledge in particular by pressing the lottery.

One might try to reply that the lottery puzzle arises only for ways of knowing for which Conservatism is true, and thus Conservatism is true about perception. But there is no reason to accept that response. Liberals about a way of knowing will admit that when one has reason to think one is in danger of going wrong, one can’t form knowledge in that way. For example, James Pryor (2000) says that when it appears to one that something is a hand, then one is prima facie justified in believing that it is a hand; but prima facie justification can be ‘defeated’. When there is a shift in our willingness to say that a subject has perceptual knowledge that something is a hand, Pryor will say that there
is a shift in whether we take the subject’s prima facie justification to be defeated. So it seems that the lottery puzzle arises regardless of whether Conservatism or Liberalism is true of a kind of knowledge. Thus how to respond to the puzzle is orthogonal to the concerns of this paper.

If we are not to assume a particular theoretical response to the lottery, an argument from easy knowledge needs to start from a case taken at face value. Taken at face value, the case of Harry is one in which he does not know (by perception or otherwise) that the stranger has hands; it’s merely very likely given what he knows. Everyone admits Harry is not in a position to know that the stranger does not have fake-hands; so the question of how he could know it does not arise. The central disagreement between Liberals and Conservatives does not arise here, so the case can’t be used to adjudicate it.

5. An Argument from Easy Knowledge Generalises From One Case

I pointed out in section 3 that Liberalism does not say that alternatives never need to be eliminated epistemically prior to forming knowledge in the relevant way. An argument from easy knowledge must consider a case from which we can generalize to the truth of Conservatism.

This point is not idle. Consider the view that perceptual knowledge of the colour of objects is foundational. Such views hold that one can’t form such knowledge if one has good reason to think one is in danger of forming a false belief. For example, if one has reason to think the object is illuminated by a red light, one can’t come to know that it is red on the basis of its appearing to be. James Pryor would say that one’s prima facie justification for believing that the object is red is defeated by one’s evidence that the
object is illuminated by a red light. Now consider the following case. One is about to go into Danielle’s basement. Just outside the basement door, one sees empty packaging for red light-bulbs. One goes into the basement, and the far wall looks red. One can’t know that the wall is red, because one has evidence that defeats the prima facie justification for such a belief. But now suppose Danielle shouts down that the red light-bulbs were for her attic, and the lighting in her basement mimics daylight. Now one does know that the far wall in the basement is red. Danielle’s testimony *defeats the defeat* for your prima facie justification. Because of the evidence provided by the empty packaging outside, one’s perceptual knowledge that the far wall is red depends essentially on Danielle’s testimony that she didn’t use red light-bulbs in her basement. So the foundationalist can say that in this case, knowing that <*>the wall is not illuminated by red lights*> is epistemically prior for you to knowing that <*>the wall is red*. Even the foundationalist, a paradigmatic Liberal, can accept that in this case, one cannot have easy knowledge that the wall isn’t white and illuminated by red lights.

To form an argument for Conservatism, we need a case in which easy knowledge is repugnant, and the Liberal has no principled story about why. The above Liberal story is that when the subject has evidence that they are in danger of forming a false belief, then ruling out such a mistake becomes epistemically prior. An argument from easy knowledge must use a case where that story can’t be told. For example, in arguing for Conservatism about perceptual knowledge of the colour of objects, we can’t focus on a case in which the subject has real reason to worry about there being red lighting. We can’t use the case of the red wall in the basement. Cohen’s case is under-described. Is the
red table in the shop window and illuminated by daylight, or is it in an underground showroom?

I suggest we consider Stu looking for a red table in a flea-market that is being held outside, in broad daylight. Stu knows that the table is red. By CK, he is in a position to know that it is not white and illuminated by a red light. But he can’t know that by reasoning: The table is red, so it is not white and illuminated by a red light. That ‘easy knowledge’ reasoning is repugnant. The Liberal can’t plausibly respond that Stu has real reason to worry about red lighting, which makes that worry something that needs to be ruled out epistemically prior to forming the perceptual knowledge. (The Liberal about memory should think it is quite hard for something to be a real worry, for we know we misremember all the time.) In the absence of a special explanation for why the skeptical alternative needs to be ruled out epistemically prior, the natural view seems to be that such alternatives always need to be ruled out prior. The argument from easy knowledge concludes that Conservatism is true for perceptual knowledge of the colour of an object.

6. Epistemically Parallel Beliefs

In this section I argue that all instances of the ‘standard’ argument from easy knowledge are invalid. The next section salvages a new argument from easy knowledge.

It can be controversial whether the relevant instance of ‘easy knowledge’ really is that repugnant. But let’s grant for the sake of argument that the reasoning is unacceptable in the case at hand. For example, Fred cannot reason: That thing is a zebra, so it is not a cunningly disguised mule. The Conservative diagnosis is that the reasoning violates the epistemic order, because knowing the conclusion is epistemically prior for Fred to
knowing the premise. I will explain how the Liberal can reject Fred’s reasoning, on the grounds that it violates the epistemic order, without concluding that Fred’s conclusion is epistemically prior to his premise.

We have seen that some arguments are bad because they violate epistemic priority: evidential support flows only in the other direction. For example, Tim learns that Albany is the capital of New York by reading it in an atlas. Evidential support flows from his belief that the atlas says Albany is the capital, to his belief that Albany is the capital of New York. No evidential support flows back down from that belief to his belief that the report in the atlas is not a misprint. Evidential support flows in only one direction: from the epistemically prior knowledge to the epistemically posterior knowledge.

Putting things this way raises a natural question: Are there cases in which evidential support flows in *neither* direction? There seems no impediment. I suggest that there are plenty of such cases: all pairs of the form <p> and <I know that p>. For example, suppose I know by perception that Brian is sitting. Reasoning in either direction is repugnant:

Do I know that Brian’s sitting?—Well, Brian is sitting; and I believe it; and I’m justified in believing it because of how things appear to me; and surely I’m not in a weird Gettier case; so I know that Brian is sitting.

Is Brian sitting?—Well, I know that Brian is sitting; and knowledge is factive; therefore Brian is sitting.
The belief that Brian is sitting, and the belief that I know that he is sitting, are ‘epistemically parallel’ for me. That means that neither can be good evidence for the other. Yet believing that you know that p commits you to believing that p. You just can’t respect that commitment by reasoning from <I know that p> to <p>. (Arguably, believing that p commits you to believing that you know that p.) When [knowing that p in way W1] is epistemically parallel for S to [knowing that q in way W2], then knowing that p is not epistemically prior for S to knowing that q, nor vice versa.

Grant the premise that (for example) Fred cannot reason from <it’s a zebra> to <it’s not a cunningly disguised mule>, because that reasoning violates the epistemic order. It simply does not follow that knowing the conclusion is epistemically prior for Fred to knowing his premise. Drawing that conclusion ignores the possibility that the two items of knowledge are epistemically parallel for him. If they are epistemically parallel, then neither is epistemically prior to the other, and the case is a counter-example to Conservatism about the relevant kind of knowledge.

For this response to work, we need to show that it is plausible about the cases under dispute, and that it preserves the spirit of Liberalism. I will do so for a case where I am sympathetic to Liberalism, namely factual memory. I cannot reason in either direction between <Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia> and <I know that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia>. My knowledge of those two propositions is epistemically parallel. We’re granting the impermissibility of ‘easy knowledge’: I cannot reason from <Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia> to <It’s not the case that: I’m wrong and am misremembering>. At the first pass, the proposal is that I also cannot reason from <I’m not misremembering> to <Ulan Bator is the capital>, and so they are epistemically
parallel. (For the time being, just consider a case in which I did not have prior inductive knowledge that I won’t misremember.)

On this view, it is my remembering that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia that puts me in a position to know that I am not misremembering on that score. I know that I am not misremembering because I know that Ulan Bator is the capital. My knowing that I am not misremembering is depends on my knowing that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia; but is not evidentially dependent on it. That is, evidential support does not flow from my knowledge that Ulan Bator is the capital to my belief that I am not misremembering. Let us say that having mnemonic knowledge that Ulan Bator is the capital puts me in a position to have ‘memory-dependent’ knowledge that I am not misremembering on that score. (That’s just meant to be label.)

Believing that Ulan Bator is the capital commits me to believing that I am not misremembering that. That doesn’t mean that I can infer from the former to the latter. The uncontroversial cases of epistemic priority and epistemic parallelism show that one can’t always infer from something one knows to the beliefs you are thereby committed to having.

Let me state the position a bit more carefully. If I know by induction that I won’t misremember, and know by introspection that I have an apparent memory that Ulan Bator is the capital, those will provide evidential support for my belief that Ulan Bator is the capital. This is compatible with the view I am suggesting. Whether evidential support flows from one belief to another depends on one’s grounds for those beliefs. We already saw this in the case of epistemic priority. Tanya already knew that Albany is the capital of New York, and evidential support flows from that memory knowledge to her belief
that the sentence in the atlas that says so is not a misprint. Tim did not already know that
Albany is the capital of New York, but learns it from the atlas. Evidential support does
not flow from that belief to his belief that the sentence in the atlas that says so is not a
misprint.

Crispin Wright’s terminology is useful here. Mnemonic warrant for the belief that
Albany is the capital does transmit to the belief that the report in the atlas is not a
misprint. Testimonial warrant gained from the atlas, for the belief that Albany is the
capital, does not transmit to the belief that the report is not a misprint. Here’s the position
I am suggesting, stated in Wright’s terminology. Inductive warrant for the belief that I am
not misremembering does transmit to the belief that Ulan Bator is the capital of
Mongolia, yielding an inferential warrant for the latter belief. ‘Memory-dependent’
warrant for the belief that I am not misremembering does not transmit to the belief that
Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia. We can state the position in terms of ways of
knowing, rather than kinds of warrant. Knowing inductively that I am not
misremembering isn’t epistemically parallel to knowing inferentially that Ulan Bator is
the capital of Mongolia. But knowing ‘memory-dependently’ that I am not
misremembering is epistemically parallel to knowing by remembering that Ulan Bator is
the capital.

To keep things simple, let’s stick to assuming that I do not have inductive knowledge
that I won’t misremember the capital of Mongolia. I can’t reason in either direction
between <Ulan Bator is the capital> and <I am not misremembering that>. Can I reason
between <I know that Ulan Bator is the capital> and <I am not misremembering>? I want
to remain officially neutral on this. Let me set out the two possible views. On the first, I
know that <I know that Ulan Bator is the capital>, and can infer that <I am not misremembering that>, and that <I didn’t acquire that belief from a misprint in a long-forgotten atlas>. On the second view, believing that <I know> commits me to believing <I am not misremembering>, but I can’t reason from the former to the latter. Those two beliefs are epistemically parallel for me. I don’t know that <I am not misremembering> on the basis of evidence, but neither do I know now that <Ulan Bator is the capital> on the basis of evidence. More interestingly, this second view challenges the standard foundationalist conception of knowledge, as I explain in the following paragraph.

I know that <I know that Ulan Bator is the capital>, and see that this commits me to believing that <I am not misremembering on that score>. On this second view, I believe that I am not misremembering because it is a commitment of my belief that <I know that Ulan Bator is the capital>, though I do not infer that I am not misremembering. I know that I am not misremembering because I know that Ulan Bator is the capital, and that belief commits me to believing that I am not misremembering. That’s the explanation for the epistemic status of my belief that I am not misremembering. It does not seem right to say that belief is foundationally justified: it derives its status from its relation to another belief. But it is not inferentially justified. So this view rejects the traditional foundationalist picture on which the foundations do not derive their status from that of other beliefs, and the rest of our beliefs are evidentially, inferentially supported by the foundations. Rather, there are beliefs that are justified because they are a commitment of some foundational belief, though they are no evidentially supported by it. Those beliefs constitute knowledge because they cohere with some other piece of knowledge. Neither does the view sketched here have much in common with traditional coherentism.
According to coherentism, evidential support flows in both directions between mutually supporting beliefs, and there is not epistemic asymmetry between them. I have proposed cases in which evidential support flows in neither direction between two beliefs, yet one constitutes knowledge because the other does.

Let me contrast the view sketched in the last paragraph with a more controversial one. The controversial view suggests that one can form foundational knowledge that p, which commits you to believing that you know that p, which commits you to believing that you are generally pretty reliable when forming beliefs in that kind of way about matters like p. The controversial view holds that, in the right environment, one can thereby know that one is reliable about matters like p. One might baulk at the claim that knowing by remembering that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia is enough for one to know that one’s memory is generally reliable. The view I introduced above makes no such claim. It does not suppose that believing that p commits you to believing that you know that p; and it does not suppose that (it is a priori obvious that) if you know that p, then you are generally reliable on such matters. The only claim about commitment is that believing that p commits you to believing things obviously entailed by p. The view sketched in the preceeding paragraph says that knowing by remembering that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia is enough for one to know that one is not misremembering on this particular occasion. That strikes me as entirely palatable.

I have sketched a Liberal position about memory, according to which memory knowledge that p puts you in a position to know that you are not misremembering that p, but it violates the epistemic order to reason from <p> to <I am not misremembering that p>. Knowing that <Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia> is epistemically parallel to
knowing <I am not misremembering that fact>. This Liberal position accepts the premise of the standard argument from easy knowledge, but denies the conclusion that Conservatism is true. The argument from easy knowledge has no force against this Liberalism about memory. In general, the standard argument from easy knowledge merely assumes that knowing that <p> in way W is not epistemically parallel to knowing that <I am not mistaken about p>. The standard argument from easy knowledge is invalid. The next section examines whether there is a cogent argument in the vicinity. After all, we want some argument to show that knowing <her car will not break down on the way> is epistemically prior for Janet to knowing that <she will teach in Long Island tomorrow>. At this point, we are sticking to evaluating arguments from easy knowledge for Conservatism about a way of knowing. My full view about how one knows one is not misremembering will wait until section 11, and the discussion of ‘Moore’s Argument’.

7. The New Argument From Easy Knowledge.

Janet cannot infer from her knowledge that <she will teach in Long Island tomorrow> that <her car won’t break down on the way>. As I argued in section 6, it does not follow that Janet’s conclusion is epistemically prior to her premise. What argument can we give for that attractive conclusion?

We should expect such an argument not to go through in cases where Liberalism is particularly attractive. I hope it would not go through in the case of memory, because I like the account suggested in the previous section. A clearer case might be that of a priori knowledge. One cannot gain ‘easy knowledge’ by reasoning: nothing can be blue all over and red all over at the same time, so it is not the case that [I’m wrong and something
could be. But it is not plausible that I can establish that I’m not wrong, epistemically prior to forming the a priori knowledge.

The simplest strategy for distinguishing epistemic priority from epistemic parallelism is to consider directly whether evidential support flows in one direction. The matter is delicate. Consider the case of memory, and whether the following monologue represents legitimate reasoning.

Is Ulan Bator the capital of Mongolia? Well, it seems to me that it is the capital. And it’s not the case that: it seems to me to be the capital but it isn’t. So Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia.

Recall from the previous section that the Liberal does not say that such reasoning is never available and legitimate. Such reasoning can yield inferential justification for a belief that also has mnemonic justification. The Liberal claim is that there are cases in which someone knows that Ulan Bator is the capital by remembering it, and the above monologue is not available. Those will be cases in which the subject was not in a position to know that they wouldn’t have a false mnemonic appearance about p, but then remembered that p, and thereby knows that p. The Conservative says that there are no such cases. So the matter turns on whether there are cases in which the subject is agnostic as to whether they would have an inaccurate appearance, but then forms knowledge in the relevant way. Equivalently, can one properly become more confident that one does not have a misleading appearance that p, by coming to know that p?
The new test considers whether there are cases in which a certain kind of monologue is legitimate. Here are four examples: Rene’s basic a priori knowledge, my memory knowledge, Fred’s non-basic perceptual knowledge, and Janet’s knowledge about the future. The monologues are arranged in increasing order of vexatiousness.

Rene: I’ve got no idea whether I would have an inaccurate a priori appearance. Hang on, it is clear and distinct to me—nothing could be red all over and blue all over at the same time. I am not having an inaccurate appearance about that.

Me: I’ve no idea whether I would have a fairly confident but inaccurate mnemonic appearance about which city is the capital of Mongolia. Hang on, I remember now—the capital’s Ulan Bator. I’m not mistaken about that.

Fred: I’ve no idea whether the animal in the enclosure is a cunningly disguised mule. Hang on, I see now—it’s a zebra. It isn’t a cunningly disguised mule.

Janet: I’ve no idea whether my car will break down on the way to Long Island. Hang on—I will teach in Long Island tomorrow. I won’t break down on the way.

If there are cases of the relevant kind of knowledge in which the monologue is legitimate, then Liberalism is true for that way of knowing. If the monologue is always illegitimate, then Conservatism is true for that way of knowing. This test need not settle every case in order to be useful. Janet and Fred’s monologues are repellent, so Conservatism is true of
knowledge of the future and non-basic perceptual knowledge. I think that Rene’s
monologue is fine, and more tentatively, I think that my mnemonic monologue is fine. So
there is some support for Liberalism about a priori knowledge and memory.

The new test is similar to that used by the standard argument from easy
knowledge. In both cases, we consider a subject allegedly coming to know that a
skeptical alternative does not obtain. There are two differences. Firstly, the new test does
not assume that the subject infers that the skeptical alternative does not obtain. Secondly,
the new test stipulates that the subject was not already in a position to know that the
skeptical alternative won’t obtain.

In applying the test, we have to be careful not to create a lottery-puzzle situation.
As I suggested in section 4, we can always get in the mood of thinking that the subject
doesn’t know. For example, one can attack my mnemonic knowledge as follows. As we
all know, it happens from time to time that I have a fairly confident memory with a false
content. I have no special grounds for thinking that my memory that Ulan Bator is the
capital of Mongolia is not such a case. So I don’t know that I am not mistaken in this
case, and so I don’t know that Ulan Bator is the capital. (I think the strongest way to push
this line of thought is to create a preface-puzzle situation. See chapter 5.) One should not
consider the test-monologue, use the lottery paradox to induce the verdict that I can’t
know that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia in that case, infer that the test-monologue
is bad, and conclude that Liberalism about memory is false. We can induce the verdict
that the subject doesn’t know, even if we consider a monologue in which the subject
starts by asserting that the skeptical alternative won’t obtain, as Conservatism requires.
Whether Liberalism or Conservatism is true, one can create a lottery-puzzle situation,
inducing the verdict that the subject doesn’t know. So to decide between the two theories about how we know, we need to avoid creating a lottery-puzzle situation. We need to try to evaluate the monologues while remaining our usual generous selves when it comes to attributing knowledge. For example, if we judge that in the above monologue, I can’t know that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia, we need to check that we are still in the mood to attribute knowledge of such facts to people in the normal generous way.

The new argument from easy knowledge is useful in deciding between Liberalism and Conservatism about a kind of knowledge. It is not the only relevant argument. One might worry that Conservatism leads to skepticism. In particular, one might worry that Conservatism about memory leads to vicious circularity. Surely one relies on one’s memory in knowing that one’s memory is reliable. So if knowing that one’s memory is reliable is epistemically prior to knowing anything by remembering it, then one needs to know that one’s memory is reliable epistemically prior to knowing that one’s memory is reliable. That’s impossible. So it seems that Conservatism about memory leads to skepticism. Careful evaluation of this argument is a task for another occasion.

Here’s another kind of argument. It seems that memory and non-basic perception function differently. If Fred believes that the world is full of cunningly disguised mules, then Fred can’t know that the thing over there is a zebra, just on the basis of a glance from 50 yards. By contrast, everyone believes that the world is full of people with false stored beliefs. Yet it seems that people still know many things when they recall them. One has a lot more reason to suspect a memory belief of being false than to suspect a stripey animal in a zoo of being a cunningly disguised mule; yet the skeptical alternatives are less of a threat to memory knowledge than to perceptual knowledge that the thing is a
zebra. This is an argument for treating those ways of knowing differently. It suggests that Liberalism is true for memory and Conservatism is true for non-basic perceptual knowledge like Fred’s. I find this argument powerful.

8. Basic Perceptual Knowledge and the Visual Image

From now on, let’s suppose that Conservatism is true for Fred’s perceptual knowledge that the thing in the zebra enclosure is a zebra. On this view, Fred is in a position to have epistemically prior knowledge that the thing is not a cunningly disguised mule. In the next three sections, I want to sketch a plausible story about how Fred can know such a thing. Roughly, my answer is that Fred knows ‘by being experienced in such matters’ that the stripey thing in the zebra enclosure of that size and shape is a zebra and not anything else. Fred’s perceptual knowledge that the thing is a zebra draws on his basic perceptual knowledge together with his implicit understanding of zoos and zebras. This section sets out the view of basic perceptual knowledge. Section 9 sketches an account of perceptual recognition on the basis of one’s basic perceptual knowledge. On that account of Fred’s knowledge that the thing is a zebra, he can know epistemically prior that it is not a cunningly disguised mule. In Fred’s case, that ability to know is acquired by learning. Section 10 discusses a case in which that’s not plausible, namely the ability to know that someone else is in pain. I argue that it doesn’t make a difference to the epistemology how the ability to recognize was acquired.

Here’s a natural view of visual belief-formation, expressed in the terminology of John Pollock and Iris Oved (2005). One applies a concept on the basis of a map-like representation of the 3-dimensional layout of the scene in front of one. Let’s call the map-
like representation the visual image. It identifies objects within the scene, and attributes to them a very limited range of features of the environment, which we may term the ‘directly perceptible’ ones. They include the distribution of edges and surfaces in three dimensions, properties of those surfaces such as texture and what we may term ‘phenomenal colour’, and motion within the scene. (I discuss the case of colour below.) Then in response to the visual image, and one’s beliefs about the situation, one applies concepts to things represented by the visual image. For example, Fred’s visual image carries the information that there is a thing over there, of a certain size and shape, with black and white stripes. Fred believes that he is at the zoo, and that the thing is in the zebra enclosure. Based on those beliefs and his visual image, Fred applies the concept ZEBRA to the thing represented by his visual image. Other examples include applying the concepts BARACK OBAMA and HAPPY on the basis of a visual image.

We can express that picture by saying that the information carried by the visual image constitutes our ‘basic’ perceptual knowledge (of the visual kind). Concept-application on the basis of the visual image constitutes our ‘non-basic’ perceptual knowledge. Recall that Pryor says he defends Liberalism only about basic perceptual knowledge, but doesn’t say much about what falls into that category—he raises the possibility that classification of a thing as a hand is perceptually basic. I will argue that it is epistemologically helpful to identify basic perceptual knowledge with the information carried by the visual image. I will then defend the classification from worries that it does not fit with our best cognitive science.

The new argument from easy knowledge supports Conservatism about perceptual knowledge that something is a zebra, or is a hand, or is red. There is something distinctly
fishy with Fred’s being agnostic as to whether the zoo will have a cunningly disguised mule in the zebra enclosure, then ruling that out on the basis of a quick glance from 50 yards. There is something fishy with Stu’s being agnostic as to whether the table is white and illuminated by red lights, opening his eyes outside and knowing by perception that the table is red, and thereby knowing that the skeptical alternative does not obtain. So if Liberalism about basic perceptual knowledge is to remain attractive, perceptual knowledge that something is a zebra, is a hand, or is red, had all better be non-basic. For example, Pryor explicitly leaves it open that knowledge that something is a hand is basic. That unnecessarily lays his Liberalism open to an argument from easy knowledge. White (2006) makes much play of this feature, that’s tangential to Pryor’s theory of perceptual justification. The proposal for distinguishing basic perception knowledge clearly has the right result for knowledge that something is a zebra, or a hand. I will now argue that it also has the right result in the case of perceptual knowledge that something is red. That is, that a surface is red is not part of the information carried by the visual image. The claim is not merely that bringing the exact shade of the thing under the concept RED is done on the basis of the visual image. The claim is that the visual image does not represent properties that stand in the determinate–determinable relation to the properties represented by our concepts. The visual image and the concepts associated with our colour words do not represent the same kind of property. Rather, the visual image represents the ‘phenomenal colour’ of a surface, and our concepts represent its ‘objective colour’.

Pollock and Oved (2005) give some interesting arguments for this claim (esp. pp. 329-331). Let me state the most basic and arm-chair of their points (p. 330). More light
hits a wall near the window and near the lamp. The visual image represents this
difference. The visual image represents the wall as varying in colour. Yet I judge that the
wall is of uniform colour. It is not plausible that the visual image accurately represents
the colour of the wall in a few isolated patches, and elsewhere represents it inaccurately.
Rather, the visual image represents the wall’s distribution of ‘phenomenal colour’
(relative to me now from this perspective). On the basis of that distribution, I judge that
the wall has a certain uniform ‘objective colour’. I do not thereby single out one of the
phenomenal colours and spread it over the whole wall. The wall has a varied phenomenal
colour and a uniform objective colour, and I represent both accurately; the former by
means of my visual image, and the latter by means of my concept-application.
If that’s right, then Stu’s knowledge that the table is objectively red is perceptually non-
basic. His visual image carries the information that the table has a certain distribution of
phenomenal colour. That information is not inaccurate even if the table is objectively
white but illuminated by a red light. Stu applies the concept RED on the basis of the
distribution of phenomenal colour represented by his visual image, and his beliefs about
his situation. Perceptual recognition of the objective colour of a thing works in the same
way as perceptual recognition of a zebra, a hand, or of Barack Obama. I think we should
be Conservative about all of these cases.

One might worry that the visual image can’t represent phenomenal colour,
because it can’t represent phenomenal colour inaccurately. That is, the visual image does
not have accuracy-conditions for the representation of phenomenal colour. Let’s grant
that the representation of phenomenal colour can’t be inaccurate. (I set aside cases in
which phenomenal colour is attributed to surfaces that do not exist.) Still, the colour-
value assigned to the point on the surface is information about the surface. Indeed it is the information on the basis of which the objective colour of the surface is judged. One can insist on saying that the assigned phenomenal colour-value is information about the surface, but does not represent a property of the surface; that does not undermine any of my claims.

Distinguished in the suggested way, Liberalism about basic perceptual knowledge is not subject to any of the standard examples of objectionable easy knowledge. To argue for the proposed distinction, we need to show that by contrast, the easy knowledge it licences is tolerable. I’ll argue that in section 11, after proposing an account of non-basic perceptual knowledge.

It is intuitively plausible that we apply concepts on the basis of information about the scene that’s carried in a map-like way. In the rest of this section, I will argue that this intuitive picture is compatible with what is known in cognitive science. (Pollock and Iris (2005) sketch a picture of mental processing in tune with the above. I should note that they do not use their psychology to draw the epistemological distinction I do. They are Liberal about both basic and non-basic perceptual knowledge, and their theory of justification is internalist (pp. 337-8). I am Conservative about non-basic perceptual knowledge (section 9) and externalist about both (sections 9-10, chapter 1).)

The first worry stems from the implication that the visual image is a non-conceptual representation. Jerry Fodor (2007) identifies a distinction in the way representations are structured. Maps, pictures, and graphs are iconic representations. The representational content of an iconic representation is determined by the semantics and syntax of its parts as follows.
Picture Principle: if P is a picture of X, then parts of P are pictures of parts of X.

By contrast, only certain parts of a discursive representation are semantically evaluable. For example, “John loves” is an un-evaluable part of the sentence “John loves Mary.” Fodor says that “John loves” is a mere part, and not a constituent, of the sentence. Discursive representations have a ‘canonical decomposition’ into its constituents, and iconic representations do not. All the parts of an iconic representation contribute to the meaning of the whole in the same way. Not so for discursive representations: some words refer to objects, some denote predicates. Leaving to one side the use Fodor (2007) makes of the distinction, it is plausible that the visual image is an iconic representation. (See Heck 2007, Balog 2009.) That’s what I’ve been gesturing at by saying the visual image is ‘map-like’. But conceptual representation is discursive. Therefore the visual image is a non-conceptual representation.

Now one might worry that having a visual image cannot constitute one’s knowing the information it carries. Only a belief can constitute knowledge, and allegedly, only concept-application constitutes belief. Thus only non-basic perceptual information can be perceptual knowledge.

I think we should resist that conclusion, and deny that only concept-application constitutes belief in the ordinary sense. Suppose one endorses one’s visual image (i.e. one isn’t worried that it is the result of hallucination or illusion). One thereby represents the spatial distribution of things in the scene in a highly determinate way. One represents the exact way the coffee cup is shaped, though one does not have a concept for it. One uses
that information when one reaches to pick up the cup. The natural thing to say is that one picks up the cup without spilling any coffee because one knows where the handle is. I suggest that both the visual image and concept-application make information consciously available to one, and that such information-possession constitutes knowledge. The ordinary notion of knowledge is tied to the ordinary notion of belief. Thus in the sense that’s relevant to this objection, the visual image is not a conceptual representation is a belief (when one uses it to guide action and concept-application). Of course, that’s perfectly compatible with there being a narrower technical sense of ‘belief’. Knowledge in the ordinary sense does not require belief in the technical sense.

Let’s consider another worry from cognitive science. My suggestion is that concept-application is based on the visual image. One might worry that sometimes, it’s the other way round: the visual image is based on the application of a concept. The visual image represents the scene as being 3-dimensional. In particular, it carries information about depth. (It need not do so determinately, as allowed by Peacocke’s notion of ‘positioned-scenario’ content (Peacocke 1992 chapter 3). In the limiting case, the visual image might not contain any depth information at all, such as when one looks into an impenetrable fog.) But in many cases, depth seems to be computed on the basis of recognizing what the object is. For example, the ‘hollow face’ illusion shows that we interpret stimuli as convex faces rather than concave hollow masks, for reasons that can’t be accounted for using general depth cues (see the response of Bruce et al. in Pylyshyn 1999). For example, the effect are a lot weaker when the stimulus is up-side down, suggesting that recognizing the object as a face is partly responsible. In another experiment, a small number of dots on a screen suddenly take on depth information when
they start moving because the subject can see them as someone walking. The depth
information seems to be computed on the basis of recognizing the movement as walking.

Let me sketch two responses. Firstly, I don’t think it is clear that concept-
application isn’t ‘based on’ the visual image if there is feedback in the computation of the
two representations. Let’s adopt Fodor’s (1983) lingo of input systems delivering
information to the central cognitive system. Applying concepts in perceptual recognition
is not performed by the central system: you don’t want to think too hard about whether
that thing is a panther (Fodor 1983 p. 70). Sub-personal, inaccessible processing delivers
to central systems a visual image and concept-applications on the basis of it. The fact that
there is feedback in visual processing is not accessible to the central cognitive system; it’s
opaque to one’s reasoning. As far as the central processor is concerned, the information
carried by the visual image is not supported by other information, but supports the
concept-application. We are concerned with the sense of ‘basing’ that’s relevant to ‘easy
knowledge’, that is: how to reason. So we are concerned with how information is
presented to central systems, not with how that information was computed. That concept-
application is ‘based on’ the visual image relates to the former; that concept-application
feeds back to the computation of the visual image relates to the latter.

(A note on terminology: that concept-application feeds back into the computation
of the visual image is not ‘cognitive penetration’ of the visual image, in the sense of
Zenon Pylyshyn (1999). Cognitive penetration occurs if a prior belief plays into the
computation of the visual image. The ‘hollow face’ illusion is evidence for feedback in
visual processing. It is evidence against the cognitive penetration of the representation of
depth in the visual image; for the object looks convex even though one knows it to be
concave. That knowledge is not available to the computation of the visual image, so the latter is ‘informationally encapsulated’ in the sense of Fodor (1983).

The above strikes me as a promising line of response to the worry that the visual image is computed partly in response to concept-application, so the latter is not ‘based on’ the former. Here’s a second line of response. This line admits that one computes the depth information carried by the visual image partly in response to ‘recognizing’ a face, or a person walking. However, there is experimental reason to think that the relevant sense of ‘recognizing’ is not that one applies the concept FACE or WALKING. This is suggested by the way people with visual agnosia distinguish between figure and ground. (Mary Peterson et al. (2000).) Consider a piece of paper, roughly divided down the middle by a curve, with one half black and the other white. Sometimes, one half will pop out as the ‘object’ (i.e. the figure), and the other half will recede as the background. Often this will be the result of recognizing the dividing line as drawing the silhouette of a familiar object. For example, its drawing the silhouette of a woman makes the white half of the paper pop out as the figure. If the same stimulus is presented upside-down, the white half is less likely to be seen as the figure, presumably because it is not recognized as the silhouette of a woman. This data might seem to support the view that the application of the concept WOMAN feeds back into the computation of depth as represented by the visual image. But Peterson et al. found that patients with agnosia had the normal effects on what half of the stimulus they took to be the figure; and yet they could not consciously recognize what the figure was. They could not apply the concept WOMAN, and yet their representation of figure and ground was sensitive to their ‘recognizing’ the object in the normal way. This suggests that the kind of ‘object
recognition’ that affects the computation of the depth in the visual image is not the application of a concept (in the sense we are interested in). (I admit the case is suggestive rather than conclusive.) If that’s right, then there is no challenge here for the thesis that one applies concepts on the basis of the visual image.

To summarize: it is not empirically obvious that concept-application sometimes feeds back to the computation of the visual image; and it is not philosophically obvious that if it does, then concept-application is not ‘on the basis of’ the visual image (in the epistemologically relevant sense).

9. Perceptual Recognition and Knowledge “Just By Experience”

Perceptual recognition is the application of a concept on the basis of one’s visual image and one’s beliefs about the situation. This section sketches a Conservative epistemology of perceptual recognition. We want to show that when concept-application produces knowledge, the subject is in a position to have epistemically prior knowledge that a given skeptical alternative does not obtain. For example, if Fred knows that the thing in the zebra enclosure is a zebra, then he is in a position to have epistemically prior knowledge that the thing is not a cunningly disguised mule.

I said that concept-application is a response to the subject’s beliefs about the situation, as well as the visual image. One might recognize a student when one walks into the classroom, though one wouldn’t recognize him if one saw him at the grocery store. Thus one of the inputs for the process of perceptual recognition is one’s belief that one is in the classroom, or at the grocery store (Pollock & Oved 2005 p. 334). In particular, Fred recognizes the thing as a zebra partly because he knows he is at the zoo, and that the
thing is in the zebra enclosure. For the sake of brevity, I will suppress reference to such beliefs in much of what follows.

Fred knows the thing is in the zebra enclosure, and his visual image carries the information that the thing is black-and-white stripey, and of a certain size and shape. On that basis he comes to believe that the thing is a zebra. Let’s label the information carried by his visual image ‘I_V’. Modulo a further refinement, I will argue that Fred can know that (I_V ⊃ it’s a zebra) epistemically prior to knowing I_V. But Fred can know that (I_V ⊃ it’s a zebra) because he can know that the thing is a zebra on the basis of I_V, not vice versa. That is, the ability to recognize zebras is fundamental; knowledge of the associated material conditional derives from it. Given I_V, Fred knows “by experience” that the thing is a zebra. He can know “just by experience” that (I_V ⊃ it’s a zebra), epistemically prior to knowing I_V.

I will approach the case of perceptual recognition by considering a slightly simpler case, that of non-perceptual recognition. Suppose a doctor is told that the patient, Paul, has complicated symptoms S. She infers that Paul is suffering from disease D. She thereby comes to know that Paul has disease D. In the case I am interested in, the doctor doesn’t remember that a patient with symptoms S* has D, where S* is a subset of Paul’s symptoms S. Rather, she knows “by experience” that Paul has D, on the basis of his symptoms S. She infers D directly from S; she does not recall another premise and reason by modus ponens. The doctor can know that (if S then D), but that’s because she can infer D from S, not vice versa. She can know that (if S then D) because she can suppose that Paul has S, whether or not she believes he does. Under the scope of that supposition,
she infers that Paul has D. So she can know that (if S then D), and (S ⊃ D), and ¬(S & ¬D), because she can infer D from S.

The doctor knows Paul has D by means of a posteriori reasoning from Paul’s symptoms. This is very similar to perceptual recognition. Fred knows that the thing is a zebra on the basis of information I_V; the doctor knows that Fred has D on the basis of information S. In both cases, the ability to know on that basis is not to be explained in terms of an ability to reason by modus ponens from knowledge that if the basis obtains then so does the conclusion. The only difference between the two cases is that Fred’s information I_V is carried by a visual image, and the doctor’s information S is carried by a belief. I reserve the terms ‘inference’ and ‘reasoning’ for the case where the bases are all beliefs. The doctor infers, and Fred doesn’t. But on the view I’ll sketch, the difference between perceptual recognition and a posteriori reasoning is not epistemically very significant. Pollock and Oved (see pp. 338, 339-340) take such a stance, giving the following suggestive example.

Just as you may recognize the composer of a piece of music, you can recognize the author of a literary work without having previously read it. There is nothing perceptual about this case at all; but it does not seem to work differently from other more perceptual varieties of recognition. (Pollock and Oved 2005 pp. 339-340)

The doctor is in a position to know that (S ⊃ D), epistemically prior to knowing S and knowing D. For she can suppose that S, conditionally infer that D, and conclude unconditionally that ¬(S & ¬D). For example, she can know that (S ⊃ D) even if she doesn’t trust the report that Paul has symptoms S. She knows the material conditional without relying on a belief that S. A skeptical alternative to the doctor’s knowing that
Paul has D is a situation in which Paul has S but doesn’t have D. Here are two examples. The first situation is that Paul has symptoms S and the Flu rather than disease D (symbolically, (S & F)). The second is that Paul has symptoms S and a very rare disease R that the doctor has never heard of (symbolically, (S & R)). I think the doctor can know that neither of these alternatives obtains, epistemically prior to knowing that Paul has S (and thus to knowing that Paul has D). But I think she knows in different ways that the two alternatives don’t obtain.

The doctor supposes for conditional proof that Paul has S. The doctor infers that Paul has D. The doctor can also directly infer from S that Paul does not have the Flu. The doctor is sufficiently experienced with the flu to know on the basis of S that it is not a case of the flu. So she can know that \(\neg(S & F)\) independently of knowing \(\neg(S & \neg D)\), and independently of being able to recognize cases of D. She can just recognize cases of someone’s not having the flu.

The more interesting case is how the doctor knows that it is not the case that: Paul has S but he has some disease R she hasn’t heard of, rather than D (symbolically, \(\neg(S & R)\)). Under the scope of the supposition that S, she must affirm that Paul does not have R rather than D, if she is to (conditionally) affirm Paul has D. Unlike the case of the flu, the doctor is not so experienced with diseases she hasn’t heard of, that she can directly recognize symptoms S as a case of the absence of such a disease. Rather, she is conditionally confident that Paul does not have a disease she has never heard of (and not D) because she is conditionally confident that Paul has D. Here I draw on section 6. I suggested there that knowing that p (by remembering it), and knowing that one is not misremembering that p, are epistemically parallel: warrant does not transmit in either
direction. Still, one knows that one is not misremembering that \( p \) because one knows that \( p \). One knows that one is not misremembering that \( p \) because that belief is required by coherence with one’s knowledge that \( p \). The analogous view of the doctor is that her conditionally believing Paul doesn’t have such a disease \( R \) is epistemically parallel to her conditionally believing that Paul has D. She does not infer that Paul has D, and infer from that that he doesn’t have some other disease she has never heard of. Neither does she have an independent route to believing Paul doesn’t have such a disease \( R \). Rather, she recognizes the case as (hypothetically) one of disease D, and coherence requires her to believe that Paul does not (hypothetically) have some unknown \( R \) and not D. Her (hypothetical) belief that Paul doesn’t have an unknown \( R \) (and not D) depends on, but is not epistemically posterior to, her belief that Paul has D.

Conditionalizing out, we have that the doctor knows “just by experience with D” that Paul doesn’t have S and lack D. She knows, by coherence with that knowledge, that Paul doesn’t have S and an unknown disease \( R \) and not D. She knows just by experience with the flu that Paul doesn’t have S and have the flu. None of that knowledge rests on her learning that Paul has symptoms S. Note that the doctor does rely on her knowledge that Paul has S to know that he doesn’t have a disease \( R \) she hasn’t heard of. (More complicated, and theoretically tangential, is the question of how she knows Paul doesn’t have an unheard of disease that produces symptoms similar to D’s.)

I will now set out the analogous story about Fred’s recognitional knowledge that the animal is a zebra, on the basis of his possessing the perceptual information \( I_V \). Here’s a disanalogy we need to work round. The doctor can suppose that Paul has S whenever she feels like it. One cannot suppose that \( I_V \) whenever one wants to. One cannot form a
belief-like representation with that content, to form hypothetical beliefs from. The content of the visual image is far too detailed for that. Nor can one imagine a visual image that carries exactly that information. Imagining being at the zoo is a very pale imitation of the real thing. There is no reason to think that if having a certain visual image causes Fred to apply to concept ZEBRA, then so does his attempt to imagine having that visual image.

Recall that we are trying to show that Fred can know that the thing is not a cunningly disguised mule epistemically prior to knowing that it is a zebra. We are not trying to show that Fred can form such a belief temporally prior to knowing it is a zebra. Maybe having a certain visual image is psychologically necessary for Fred to form the belief that the thing is not a cunningly disguised mule. Still, his knowing that the thing is not a cunningly disguised mule does not rest epistemically on his having the information I_v. Here’s why. Fred can treat the information carried by his visual image hypothetically, rather than endorse it. If one has strong reason to think that one is the victim of a visual illusion or hallucination, one should not endorse the information carried by one’s visual image. Accepting information is not a matter of forming a conceptual representation with the same content; for one does not have concepts fine-grained enough to capture all the visual information. Rather, one treats the visual image in a certain way: one uses it to guide action and belief-formation. I suggest that one can treat one’s visual image hypothetically, forming beliefs under the scope of a supposition that the visual image is accurate. For example, that’s often how one decides not to endorse a visual image: one forms the hypothetical belief that there is a pink cat in front of one, one knows there can’t be such a thing, and infers that one has a problem with one’s eyes. Conditionalizing out
from the hypothetical endorsement of the visual image does not lead to a conceptual representation with the content (Iv ⊃ it’s a zebra), because one does not have concepts that can carry the information Iv. But one can think: (if the thing looks like that, then it’s a zebra). While having a visual image, one can pick out the information it conveys demonstratively. Those conditional beliefs do not rest epistemically on actually endorsing Iv, nor on actually knowing that the thing is a zebra (say).

Fred looks at the zebra and has a certain visual image. Treating his visual image merely hypothetically, he (hypothetically) believes that the thing is a zebra. Conditionalizing out, Fred knows “just by experience with zebras and zoos” that the thing doesn’t look like that without being a zebra. That knowledge does not rest on his basic perceptual knowledge, that the thing is black-and-white stripey, and of such-and-such a size and shape. So that knowledge does not rest on his knowing that it is a zebra; it rests on his hypothetically accepting it is a zebra.

Treating his visual image merely hypothetically, Fred can directly apply the concept NOT A DOG. Conditionalizing out, Fred knows “just by experience with dogs and zoos” that the thing doesn’t look like that while being a dog. That knowledge does not rest on his ability to recognize zebras. (This is analogous to the doctor knowing directly that Paul does not have symptoms S and the flu rather than D.)

Treating his visual image merely hypothetically, Fred will apply the concept NOT A CUNNINGLY DISGUISED MULE. Otherwise he wouldn’t hypothetically apply the concept ZEBRA. There are two stories about how he applies the concept NOT A CUNNINGLY DISGUISED MULE, which describe slightly different cases. In the first case, Fred applies that concept directly. Fred is experienced enough with human affairs to
rule out the zoo-keepers’ trying to pass off a cunningly disguised mule as a zebra. (This is analogous to the doctor’s being sufficiently experienced with the flu to recognize that if Paul has S, he doesn’t have the flu.) The second story is analogous to the doctor’s knowing that Paul does not have symptoms S and not D but a disease she has never heard of. Fred hypothetically applies the concept ZEBRA, and then coherence requires him to apply the concept NOT A CUNNILINGLY DISGUISED MULE. He does not infer that from (hypothetically) its being a zebra; those hypothetical beliefs are epistemically parallel.

Conditionalizing out, Fred knows that it’s not the case that: the thing looks like that and is a cunningly disguised mule. That knowledge does not rest on his knowing that the thing looks like that, i.e. his basic perceptual knowledge, nor on his knowledge that the thing is a zebra. I gave two stories about how he might know that this skeptical alternative does not obtain. On the first, he knows “just by experience with social institutions like zoos” that it would not look like that and be a cunningly disguised mule. On the second story, he knows that by coherence with his knowledge that: it does not look like that without being a zebra.

I have explained how Fred can know that <if it looks like that, it is not a cunningly disguised mule> epistemically prior to knowing that the thing is a zebra. Thus I have defended Conservatism about knowledge by perceptual recognition. But I deny that Fred can know that <if it looks like that, it is not a cunningly disguised mule> epistemically prior to knowing that <if it looks like that, it is a zebra>. Fred can know the former because he can know the latter (though on one view warrant does not transmit from the latter to the former). That is, I deny Conservatism about knowledge “just by
experience”. Knowledge “just by experience” is the explicit version of the information possessed implicitly by being able to recognize zebras on the basis of basic perceptual knowledge. If we are Liberal about factual memory, it should not be a surprise that we should be Liberal about another kind of stored information, namely that implicit in the recognitional capacity.

A skeptical alternative to Fred’s knowing that the thing is a zebra is a situation in which the thing looks exactly the way it does. The alternative under discussion is: the thing looks exactly like that and is a cunningly disguised mule. I’ve explained how Fred can know that alternative does not obtain, epistemically prior to knowing that the thing is a zebra. That’s sufficient for Conservatism. It is also what’s relevant to the skeptical doubt about Fred’s knowing that the thing is a zebra, namely whether the thing looks like that yet is something else.

I am committed to one way for Fred to know it is not a cunningly disguised mule: by recognizing it is a zebra, and then believing as coherence requires. (That’s compatible with knowing it’s a zebra being epistemically parallel to knowing it’s not a cunningly disguised mule in that way.) One might hope that there is also another way for Fred to know the thing is not a cunningly disguised mule. For plausibly, Fred doesn’t need to know the exact look of the thing to know that. It is plausible that Fred is in a position to know it is not a cunningly disguise mule even before he looks at it. I think we can get close to that result as follows. Assume that by definition, a cunningly disguised mule would look exactly like a zebra (at least from this distance). So Fred knows that if it doesn’t look exactly like a zebra, it isn’t a cunningly disguised mule. We need to show that Fred can know that if it does look exactly like a zebra, it isn’t a cunningly disguised
mule. It would follow that Fred can know that either way it isn’t a cunningly disguised mule. At the moment, we have only seen that when he looks, Fred can know that: if it looks like a zebra in exactly this way then it is not a cunningly disguised mule. How are we to generalize to other ways for a thing to look exactly like a zebra? Imagining having different visual images won’t have the same effect as Fred’s having them (and treating them hypothetically). So Fred might not be psychologically able to take that route to the desired conclusion. But the relevant modality is not what’s psychologically possible for Fred, but rather what he is in an epistemic position to know. Epistemically speaking, Fred is in a position to knowledgeably token the concepts ZEBRA and NOT A CUNNINGLY DISGUISED MULE in response to any exact zebra-like visual image. If that’s right, the barrier to Fred knowing that it isn’t a cunningly disguised mule is not epistemic, but merely a psychological difficulty in really conceiving of the various ways a zebra looks. Fred possesses the relevant information, but can’t access it, because of his limited powers of imagination. It seems reasonable to say that even before he looks, Fred is in an *epistemic position* to know the thing is not a cunningly disguised mule.

10. Recognising Another’s Pain

I said that it is ‘experience’ that allows Fred to know that the thing is a zebra on the basis of the information carried by his visual image. This suggests that the ability to recognize is acquired by learning. That is a reasonable characterization of Fred’s coming to be able to recognize zebras. In this section, I consider the case of perceptual recognition that someone else is in pain. It is not plausible that that capacity is acquired by learning. I argue that the epistemology sketched in the previous section still applies.
When he was very little, Fred could not recognize zebras. He learned what zebras look like by coming into contact with them, or more likely, by seeing their picture in a book or on the television. He knew independently that they were zebras, e.g. by being told. After this happened a few times, Fred was familiar with zebras, and could recognize them visually. Don’t over-rationalize this kind of learning: at no stage is Fred able to reconstruct it as an inductive inference.

Adults have the ability to perceptually recognize the mental states of others. A subtle facial gesture shows that one’s companion is sad. An unsubtle stream of curses shows that stubbing her toe was painful. We need to be careful in asking how a child acquires the ability to recognize that someone is in pain. The purely historical question is: How did the child go from not being able to recognize that someone is in pain, to being able to do so? That’s a question for developmental psychology. There is no need for the process whereby the child becomes able to recognize the mental states of others to be a rational one. Maybe hitting the age of 18 months triggers the development of an innate capacity for attributing mental states for others (this endowment can be refined as it is used). That hypothesis lends no support to skepticism about what adults can know.

The epistemological question is: In virtue of what does a subject now have the capacity to know by perceptual recognition that someone else is pain? That capacity is part of the subject’s implicit understanding of human psychology. They can recognize pain on the basis of something that just happened, such as someone’s suffering a sharp blow to the toe. They can recognize pain on the basis of someone’s behaviour, such as grimacing and cursing. They understand the mental processes that lead to action, for example that people try to avoid pain.
There are lots of factors that go into a subject’s knowing that someone is in pain on the basis of perceptual information. Firstly, their disposition to apply the concept PAIN on such evidence is counterfactually reliable or ‘safe’. Secondly, it has been tried and tested in the field as part of the subject’s understanding of human psychology. Thirdly, it is no fluke that the subject’s capacity is a reliable one—it is the product of millennia of evolution by natural selection. These factors all have analogues in Fred. Firstly, Fred’s disposition to apply the concept ZEBRA on the basis of a visual image is counterfactually reliable. Secondly, he has confirmed many of his recognitional verdicts about something’s being a zebra, e.g. by comparing his verdict with that of the experts. (This point about the past does not entail that Fred can recall any of those episodes, or even that he now knows that he is a reliable identifier of zebras. I am suggesting that certain facts about the past contribute directly to the epistemic standing of Fred’s current recognitional beliefs.) Thirdly, he has an innate reliable ability to form the capacity to recognize kinds on the basis of a visual image, and he used that ability in forming the capacity to recognize zebras.

Further, neither recognizing pain nor recognizing zebras requires the subject to be able to say much to defend their application of the relevant concept on the basis of their visual image. If the question comes up, one should simply insist that one knows. The main difference between the two cases is that there is a specific innate capacity for understanding human psychology, and not for thinking about zebras. It is natural to say that the ability to recognize zebras is learned, but not so the ability to recognize pain. I don’t think that difference is epistemically very important. One could insist on it, and say that Fred knows “by experience” that the thing is a zebra, but one knows “by a refined
innate capacity” that the grimacing person is in pain. I think it is simpler to say that both
cases are knowledge “by experience”, where the ability to recognize on the basis of
perceptual information is not grounded in the subject’s representing that the directly
perceptible properties indicate the presence of a zebra or someone in pain.

One might worry about the historical factors I suggested in whether Fred knows
that the thing is a zebra, and whether one knows that someone is in pain. I suggested that
Fred’s interactions with zebra-experts, and the evolutionary history of his capacity to
recognize pain, are relevant to the concept-application’s constituting knowledge. But
consider swamp-Fred, an intrinsic duplicate of Fred created from the slime by a freak blot
of lightning. He has not interacted with zebra-experts, and he has no evolutionary history.
The first thing Swamp-Fred ever sees is a zebra, and he tokens a concept he associates
with the word “zebra”, in the same way as Fred would. Does swamp-Fred thereby know
that the animal is a zebra? If there is a historical condition on recognitional knowledge,
then he doesn’t. The second thing swamp-Fred ever sees is a person who stubs their toe
and grimaces. Were he in that situation, Fred would token the concept PAIN in response
and thereby know that the person is in pain. Swamp-Fred tokens a concept in an
internally identical way. Does swamp-Fred thereby know that the person is in pain?
Again, the historical conditions on recognitional knowledge entail he doesn’t.

I think that we can get in either mood concerning whether swamp-Fred knows. If
we focus on how easily the lightning could have struck slightly differently, making
swamp-Fred such as to ‘believe’ that the person is happy, we think he doesn’t know that
the person who stubs their toe is in pain. If we focus on what swamp-Fred should do, we
think that he should try to help or to offer comfort, because he knows the person is in
pain. (Compare Hawthorne 2002, esp. pp. 252-3, 262-9; and Gendler & Hawthorne 2005.) I don’t think that one of these verdicts about whether swamp-Fred knows is simply correct and the other simply incorrect. Both are perfectly adequate takes on swamp-Fred’s epistemic situation, though one may be more appropriate than the other given the concerns of the ascriber. Elsewhere I defend a version of anti-realism about knowledge that makes sense of that claim (chapter 5). For present purposes, I note that whether there is a historical condition on recognitional knowledge does not affect any central claim of this paper. The issue does not affect the claims about epistemic priority I argued for in section 9.

The view presented in this section undermines the traditional problem of other minds. How do you know that other people are not zombies who don’t feel pain? I say: in the same way that Fred knows that the thing is not a cunningly disguised mule. Roughly, you have a system of dispositions in place that produce knowledge because they are reliable (and so on). On the basis of your visual image, you recognize the thing in front of you as a person in pain. Coherence requires you to believe that they are not a zombie who isn’t in pain. You thereby know that they are not such a zombie. Without endorsing your visual image, you can know that if the thing grimaces like that, then it is in pain and is not a zombie. You know that “just by experience”, i.e. by drawing on your implicit understanding of what kinds of creatures there are on earth, and their psychology. Anyway, when someone stubs their toe and grimaces, you know on that basis that they are in pain and are not a zombie. One need not say much in defence of that belief. One simply insists that one knows, just as I simply insist that I know that Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia.
Suppose the skeptic does not take this answer to be satisfactory. The skeptic can’t be asking in virtue of what people know that others aren’t zombies, as we have given an adequate answer to that question. The skeptical question must be something else. One might ask: How could someone come to know that others aren’t zombies without relying on their innate understanding of human psychology? But this question has no skeptical force. Suppose there is no way for one to know that others aren’t zombies, if one does not use one’s innate understanding. That is perfectly compatible with our view that one can come to know that others aren’t zombies if one does use one’s innate understanding.

Maybe the skeptical challenge is that one should not rely on one’s innate understanding unless and until one has independent reason to think that it is reliable. In other words, one should not rely on one’s recognitional capacity unless one has independent reason to think that the thing in front of one isn’t a painless zombie. In particular, the skeptical challenge assumes that Conservatism is true for knowledge “just by experience”. Conservatism about knowledge “just by experience” says that one must know that <if the thing looks exactly like that, it is not a painless zombie> epistemically prior to knowing that <if the thing looks like that, then it is a person in pain> in that way. Conservatism about knowledge by perceptual recognition says that one must know that <if the thing looks exactly like that, it is not a painless zombie> epistemically prior to knowing that <the thing is a person in pain> in that way. I endorse Conservatism about perceptual recognition, and deny Conservatism about knowledge “just by experience”. I think the latter view does lead to skepticism; but that’s no advertisement for it. The view is not intuitively attractive. As in the case of memory, I think that one’s confidence that one is not going wrong derives from one’s confidence in the answer one is giving.
Liberalism about knowing “just by experience” avoids skepticism about other minds and is independently attractive.

Notice that on this view, Conservatism about perceptual recognition rests on Liberalism about stored information. (The information is stored ‘implicitly’, as the disposition to apply a concept on the basis of certain perceptual information.) The position counts against generalizing Conservatism, not for it.

How far can we extend the Conservatism about recognitional knowledge? I think that the tourist also knows “by experience” that the stranger who gave directions did not have a false belief and was not lying. By contrast, I suspect that Liberalism is true of basic perceptual knowledge. (Maybe most people “know by experience” that they are not currently misperceiving; but our question is whether that’s essential for having perceptual knowledge.) In the cases of inference, memory, and introspection, one does not base one’s knowledge that p on the information that it appears to one that p. We have only seen cases in which that template is mistaken. One would need strong special reason to think basic perception is an exception. Otherwise, one’s epistemology is objectionably disunified.

11. The Moorean Response to Skepticism

When discussing easy knowledge, there is an elephant in the room: the Moorean response to skepticism. Liberalism about basic perceptual knowledge lends itself to something like the Moorean account of how I know I am not a Brain-In-a-Vat (BIV). I will describe how a Moorean response would go, given the views defended in the earlier parts of this chapter. Then I will come back to the question of whether that approach is vulnerable to a
new argument from easy knowledge. For given the way I distinguish basic from non-
basic perceptual knowledge, all extant examples of illegitimate "easy knowledge" by
perception are non-basic.

On my view, one does not have basic perceptual knowledge that something is a
hand. Basic perceptual knowledge is restricted to the information carried by the visual
image, such as the spatial arrangement of the scene in front of one, and the distribution of
'perspectival' colour. Suppose one is looking at the yellow house across the street, and
not at one's hands. The classical Moorean argument goes as follows.

There is a material thing over there of such-and-such size and shape; therefore it
is not the case that: [I am a BIV and there is no such material thing over there].

Notice that the information carried by that visual image does not allow one to rule out
that one is a BIV. It allows one to rule out that one is a BIV with an inaccurate visual
image. It does not allow one to rule out that one is a BIV subject to a veridical illusion,
i.e. that one is a BIV in front of a material object of such-and-such appearance (namely a
yellow house). That is very strange. There is a deep incoherence in assenting to the
information carried by the visual image, yet remaining agnostic as to whether one is a
BIV. Given the restricted content of the visual image, it is hard to think of any basic
perceptual knowledge that would entail that one is not a BIV.

I think a Moorean response to skepticism should allow me to know I am not a
BIV, in virtue of my having basic perceptual knowledge, whether I am looking at my
body or the yellow house across the street. Recall from section 6 that <p> and <I know
that p> are epistemically parallel. Traditional Mooreanism uses the former to attack skepticism; let’s try using the latter. More precisely, basic perceptual knowledge of the scene in front of you is epistemically parallel to knowing that you see that things are that way. It is the latter that ‘answers the question’ of whether one is a BIV. The following monologue can reflect the structure of someone’s knowledge.

Moore: Am I a BIV? [Opens eyes.] Hang on—I see that material objects are arranged thus and so in front of me. I am not a BIV.

It is incoherent to have a basic perceptual belief that p while refusing to believe that one sees that p. So it can’t be harder to know <I see that p> than to know <p>. I suggest that one can take a reflective perceptive on one’s perceiving, and when one does so, one learns that one sees that p. That ‘reflective perceptual knowledge’ has an epistemology similar to that of unreflective perceptual knowledge that p. That is, Liberalism is true of basic reflective perceptual knowledge. Whenever one has unreflective perceptual knowledge that <p>, one is in a position to have reflective perceptual knowledge that <I see that p>. Thus the Moorean monologue is always available when one has basic perceptual knowledge. (Sosa think reflective endorsement must be based on general knowledge of the world. It seems that he is a Conservative about what I labeled reflective perceptual knowledge. I hop to explore the comparison at some other time.)

On this Moorean view, <I see that p> ‘answers the question’ of whether I am a BIV. An attractive suggestion is that it is <I see that p> that answers whether <I am a
BIV and not-p>, rather than <p> answering it. Plausibly, the difference is not one of warrant transmission: warrant does not transmit from either <I see that p>, nor from <p>, to <It is not the case that: I am a BIV and not-p>. Here’s the story I want to tell.

Judging that <I see that p> is to take a reflective perspective on my perceptual knowledge. Raising any doubt about the deliverances of perception is also to take a reflective perceptive on that faculty. Judging that <p> is to take a un-reflective perspective on my perceptual knowledge. That is a perspective from which one is not even considering doubts about the deliverances of one’s faculty. Judging that p ignores rather than rebuts doubts about one’s ability to know p. A doubt must be considered to be rebutted, so it must be rebutted from the reflective perspective, thus by affirming that one sees that p. It is illegitimate to infer from <p>, unreflective and hence not under scrutiny, to <It’s not the case that: I’m a BIV and not-p>, a skeptical alternative to knowledge of p.

In the rest of this section, I want to consider whether this version of Liberalism about basic perceptual knowledge is subject to a new problem of easy knowledge. Does it legitimize a monologue that’s intuitively repugnant? The test is whether the following speech can sometimes be OK.

I’ve got no idea whether if I have a visual image it will be accurate. Hang on—I see that the scene is thus and so.

- It is not the case that I’m on drugs and hallucinating.
- It is not the case that my eyeball went a funny shape over night and I’m misperceiving the spatial relations.
- It is not the case that there is a mirror between me and where I take those things to be.
- It is not the case that the objects in the scene form a visual illusion or trompe l’oeil.
- I’m not dreaming this scene.

The Liberal proposal is that sometimes, one knows that one is not deceived just because that belief is required by coherence with the basic perceptual knowledge. Remember that for a case to pose an intuitive problem for the Liberal, it must be one in which there is no special reason to worry that the skeptical alternative obtains. Otherwise, the Liberal can say that one won’t form perceptual knowledge unless one has prior knowledge that the alternative doesn’t obtain (see section 5). And remember that one must not be swayed by the lottery paradox into denying knowledge in this case, and in ordinary cases too. (This is a particular danger in the case of wondering whether there is a mirror between me and the place I take those objects to be.) And remember that most adult humans do know “by experience” that they won’t be hallucinating on drugs without noticing it, and that this scene does not produce a visual illusion, etc.

Taking those caveats into consideration, I think the case against Liberalism and Mooreanism is not clear. (The case of dreaming merits special attention.) It remains plausible that in basic perception the layout of the scene is directly evident to one; just as in introspection certain aspects of one’s mental state are directly evident to one; and just as when deducing, it is directly evident to one that the conclusion follows.
12. Conclusion

It is actually quite tricky than to argue against Liberalism from ‘easy knowledge’. I have tried to make Conservatism about perceptual recognition plausible. The attempt rested on Liberalism about knowledge “just by experience”. We need to take a case-by-case approach to figuring out whether Conservatism is true of a certain way of knowing.

Appendix: Cohen’s Problem of Easy Knowledge By Deduction.

Stewart Cohen (2002, 2005) says his paradox revolves around KR.

(KR) A potential knowledge source K can yield knowledge for S [at time t], only if [at t] S knows K is reliable. (Cohen 2002, p. 309)

His dilemma is that acceptance of KR entails skepticism, yet that rejection of KR leads to knowledge that is ‘too easy’. This appendix objects that accepting KR does not prevent objectionable ‘easy knowledge’. So KR is not the crux. I also describe Cohen’s solution to his puzzle, laying bare its unattractiveness.

If one denies KR, then one admits that there can be ‘basic knowledge’, which is defined thus:

S has basic knowledge of P just in case S knows P prior to knowing that the cognitive source of S’s knowing that P is reliable. (Cohen 2005, p. 417)

A theory which denies KR has a ‘Basic Knowledge Structure’; it is a ‘BKS’ theory. All foundational knowledge is basic knowledge (Cohen 2002 p. 310 n. 4).
Cohen follows Ernest Sosa in distinguishing ‘animal knowledge’ from ‘reflective knowledge’.

We can generally distinguish between animal knowledge which requires only that one track reality, on the one hand, and reflective knowledge, on the other, which in addition requires awareness of how one knows, in a way that precludes the unreliability of one’s faculties. (Sosa and Bonjour 2003, quoted by Cohen 2002 p. 326)

Cohen’s solution is that there is basic animal knowledge, but not basic reflective knowledge. KR holds for reflective knowledge, so it requires already knowing that one is reliable. Cohen thinks this prevents easy reflective knowledge. On the other hand, DC does not hold universally for animal knowledge.

(DC) If S knows that P, comes to believe Q by competently deducing it from P, while retaining knowledge of P throughout, then S thereby comes to know that Q.

Cohen thinks DC fails for animal knowledge in a way that prevents easy knowledge, but not much else.

Consider a case of putative easy knowledge. If the premise is mere animal knowledge, then closure fails. If the premise is reflective knowledge, then you must already know the conclusion. So easy knowledge cannot be derived from either animal or reflective knowledge, but for different reasons. (Cohen 2002, p. 326-7; 2005, p. 428.)

Cohen then appeals to Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE) to explain how we get animal knowledge that we are reliable. The idea is that one can infer that one is not a deceived BIV from one’s animal knowledge by IBE, but not by deduction. (I read 2002 p. 324 as softening us up for the centrality of IBE.) Cohen admits that this theory is ad hoc
(2002 p. 327, 2005 p. 429). Why think that inferring from one’s perceptual animal knowledge that one is not a BIV is objectionably circular if one reasons by deduction, but not if one reasons by IBE? Fortunately, I don’t think we are forced to accept his story.

Accepting KR does not prevent objectionable easy knowledge. It is not the cure we are looking for. Suppose Jonny knows that his vision is reliable. He knows he is outside in good natural light, and looking at a table. Jonny could have come to know that the table is not white and illuminated by red lights, on the basis of his knowledge that the table is outside and illuminated by natural light. But he didn't. Instead, he comes to know that the table is red (while satisfying KR), and deduces on that basis that it is not white and illuminated by red lights. DC finds no fault with this reasoning; yet it has the same repugnance Cohen finds intolerable. (Cohen’s contextualism is silent about this case, because we are happy that Jonny is in a position to know that the table isn’t white but illuminated by red lights.) Accepting KR does not prevent objectionable ‘easy knowledge’. The only way to do so is to hold that knowing the conclusion is epistemically prior to knowing the premise, resulting in a failure of DC interpreted naively. The issue is whether we should generalize from this to the truth of Conservatism about perceptual knowledge of the colour of things, and whether such Conservatism leads to skepticism.
Chapter 3: Aiming to Know (and Falling Short)

1. Introduction

Influential recent work defends the importance of knowing, For example, Timothy Williamson argues that Knowledge is the Norm ofAssertion (KNA).

(KNA) One must: assert that $p$ only if one knows that $p$. (Williamson 2000 p. 243)

Williamson suggests that occurred belief is the inner analogue of assertion. So he thinks it is plausible that Knowledge is the Norm of Belief (KNB).

(KNB) One should: believe $p$ only if one knows $p$. (Williamson 2000 pp. 255-6).


(PR C) One ought only to use that which one knows as a premise in practical reasoning. (Hawthorne 2004 p. 30)

Jason Stanley holds,

One should act only on what one knows. (Stanley 2005 p. 9)

(AKP) Treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting only if you know that p.

(Hawthorne & Stanley 2008 p. 577)

I am sympathetic to these ‘knowledge norms’, in particular the knowledge norm of belief. I start this chapter by rebutting the objection that knowledge norms collapse the distinction between knowledge and justified belief. That’s been alleged by Jessica Brown (2008) and Jeremy Fantl & Matthew McGrath (2009), and accepted by Jonathan Sutton (2005). I will argue that we avoid the objection if we interpret the knowledge norms as setting the epistemic standard we aim to meet in asserting, taking something as a premise, and so-forth. Thus KNA, PRC, and AKP set the standard for epistemic success. Being successful is not the same thing as being justified, nor as being rational.

Then I’ll examine the connection between knowledge and rationality posited by Hawthorne & Stanley (2008), and the connection between knowledge and justified belief posited by Williamson (2000 chapter 9). In both cases, the alleged connection has counter-intuitive results. The attraction of the claimed connections seems to be that they ground the importance of knowledge. I argue that motivation is incompatible with the knowledge norm of belief. The value of succeeding does not derive from the value of pursuing the end rationally or in a justified manner. The knowledge-lover can and should reject some counter-intuitive claims made in the literature.

2. Knowledge Norms and Justified Belief
The most obvious objection to KNB is that it allegedly entails that only knowledge constitutes justified belief; for a belief one shouldn’t have is an unjustified belief. But intuitively, abductive reasoning can produce a belief that is justified even though it is false and so not knowledge.

Jeremy Fantl & Matthew McGrath (2009) dismiss AKP on the following grounds.

It can be perfectly appropriate to treat p as a reason for acting even though one fails to know p, provided that one is justified in believing p. (Fantl & McGrath 2009 p. 124)

The analogous objection to KNB seems to be: if a belief is justified then it is appropriate to have; according to KNB one shouldn’t have a belief—and it is thus inappropriate—unless it constitutes knowledge; so according to KNB, if a belief is justified then it constitutes knowledge.

Jonathan Sutton (2005) agrees that KNB has the alleged consequence, and embraces it. He concludes:

A subject’s belief that p is justified if and only if he knows that p: justification is knowledge. (Sutton 2005, p. 359)

The first of Sutton’s four arguments starts by rehearsing the case for the knowledge norm of assertion (2005 pp. 374-8). Sutton then argues that KNA only makes sense if knowledge is also the norm of belief. All of the discussion goes towards establishing KNB: “One must: believe p only if one knows p” (Sutton 2005 p. 374). He gives no argument for the further step to his unpalatable conclusion, that to be justified is to know. I will argue that this is where Sutton goes wrong.
Jessica Brown (2008) presses a variation on the objection to knowledge norms.

The difference is that her objection turns on what knowledge norms say about beliefs that are *true* and justified but aren’t knowledge, i.e. Gettier cases. Here’s the case she considers.

S leaves the office at 12.00pm in order to meet her partner for lunch at 1pm. S believes truly that there is an express train at 12.20pm which would allow her to arrive in time to make lunch. Further, this belief is justified: S checked the train timetable on the internet just before leaving the office. In fact, unbeknownst to S, she is in a Gettier situation: a hacker has got into the train website and for a joke has replaced all of the current timetables with last season’s timetables. Luckily for S, according to both the old and new timetables, there is an express at 12.20pm. (Brown 2008 pp. 171-2)

She claims that it is “appropriate” for S to act on her belief that there is an express train at 12:20pm. Presumably, she would also claim it is “appropriate” for S to believe that there’s an express at 12:20, and to assert it. She alleges that’s incompatible with the truth of the knowledge norms.

It seems, then, that [AKP] is false. According to [AKP], if it is appropriate for S to rely on p in her practical reasoning then she knows that p. But we have seen that it may be appropriate for a subject to rely on a proposition in her practical reasoning even if she is in a Gettier case in which she has a justified true belief that p which does not amount to knowledge. (Brown 2008 pp. 173-4)

My response is that these objections rest on an equivocation between two senses of what one ‘ought’ to believe. We can see this by considering a case of action, then drawing an analogy with the case of belief.

Consider how we evaluate actions. Some miners are trapped underground. They are either all in tunnel A, or all in tunnel B, but the rescuers don’t know which. There is
only enough time for them to look in one of the tunnels before the miners die of asphyxiation. The rescuers’ aim is to save the miners. They have to decide whether to open a passage into tunnel A, or into tunnel B. The success of the rescuers’ course of action is a matter of whether they actually save the miners. Their success is not a matter of what their evidence suggests will save the miners. By contrast, whether their choice of tunnel is justified is a matter of what the rescuers’ evidence suggests is the miners’ location. If the rescuers and miners are unlucky, the rescuers will have misleading evidence that justifies a course of action that will be unsuccessful. For example, suppose the miners are in tunnel A, but the rescuers find the miners’ lunch-boxes outside tunnel B. In this kind of case, the point of saying that the rescuers are justified in looking in tunnel B is to capture what was right about their unsuccessful choice. In general: if one acts with the aim of q-ing, then one is successful iff one q-s. Whether one acts justifiedly is another thing.

There is a perfectly good sense in which the rescuers ‘should’ do what their evidence indicates is the most promising strategy (looking in tunnel B). But there is also a perfectly good sense in which the rescuers ‘should’ do what actually saves the most miners (looking in tunnel A). So we can’t assume that what one ‘should’ do always goes with what one is justified in doing. Sometimes it goes with success instead. (There are other perfectly good senses of what the rescuers ‘should’ do, e.g. where we assess what they should do given what we know about the situation, which can be more than the rescuers, but not everything.) The same goes for what the rescuers ‘ought’ to do, and what they ‘must’ do, and what it is ‘permissible’ for them to do.
We distinguish successful action from justified action, so we should be prepared
to distinguish epistemically successful belief from epistemically justified belief. We
should be prepared to find (amongst others) two senses of what one ‘should’ believe:
what one is justified in believing, and what one would successfully believe. I suggest that
we aim to believe only what we know. Thus knowledge is epistemically successful belief;
it is the standard for epistemically successful assertion, and epistemic success in taking
something as a premise. KNA, PRC and AKP are to be interpreted as concerning the
‘should’ of epistemic success, not the ‘should’ of epistemic justification. Properly
interpreted, one should only believe what one knows. But it would equivocate between
two senses of ‘should’ to conclude that one is only justified in believing what one knows.

This defence of the knowledge norms is in the same spirit as that of Timothy
Williamson (2000) and Keith DeRose (2002). All three versions distinguish two
normative notions in the case of action, and identify it with the distinction between
epistemically justified belief and knowledge. I say that the relevant distinction is between
justified and successful action. I think this improves on the formulations given by
Williamson and DeRose. That their formulations need to be improved upon is suggested
by the fact that Sutton (2005), Brown (2008), and Fantl & McGrath (2009) were not
dissuaded from pressing the objection to knowledge norms.

Recall that the miners are in tunnel A, but the rescuers find their lunch-boxes
outside tunnel B. In Williamson’s terminology (2000 pp. 255-7), the only ‘permissible’
thing for the rescuers to do is look in tunnel A, but the only ‘reasonable’ thing for them to
do is look in tunnel B. I don’t think that’s the best way of putting things. ‘Permissibility’
can be used in either the sense of justification or the sense of success, just like ‘ought’
can; so it can’t be used to eliminate the ambiguity in what the rescuers ‘ought’ to do.
There is a perfectly good sense in which the rescuers ought to look in tunnel B, and in
that sense, it is permissible for them to do so. I do not object to Williamson’s other term:
‘reasonableness’ does seem to latch on to the sense in which the miners ought to look in
tunnel B. However, the objection to knowledge norms we are responding to stems from
failing to identify the other sense of ‘ought’. The task is to clue people into the sense in
which the miners ought to look in tunnel A, and one ought to believe only what one
knows. Williamson’s term ‘reasonableness’ does a good job at distinguishing a sense of
‘ought’ that is not intended here; his term ‘permissibility’ does not do a good job at
clueing us into the sense of ‘ought’ that is intended.

DeRose says that the rescuers’ looking in tunnel A has “primary propriety”, and
their looking in tunnel B has “secondary propriety” (2002 p. 180). Those labels are a little
colourless. It hardly evokes the distinction being made to say that the knowledge norm
specifies when a belief has primary propriety, whereas justified belief is a matter of
secondary propriety. By contrast, it is evocative to say that the knowledge norm specifies
what it is for a belief to be epistemically successful, which is different from a belief’s
being epistemically justified.

Having said that, DeRose’s labels do bring out the point that the notion of
justification is dependent on that of success, and not vice-versa. Christopher Peacocke
(2004) makes the analogous point in terms of ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ rules, rather
than ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ propriety.

In the domain of rules in general—not just epistemic rules—we can distinguish
between an objective rule and its subjective counterpart. The objective rule for
making a chicken casserole has the form: obtain chicken and vegetables, then prepare them and cook them in a certain way. The subjective counterpart of this rule is: obtain what you believe to be chicken and vegetables, then do what seems to you to be preparing them and cooking them in the specified way. Someone who aims to follow the objective rule will also be conforming to its subjective counterpart, since doing so is the best he can do by way of trying to obey the objective rule. But the only rationale he would have for following a subjectively formulated counterpart rule is precisely that it would be a way he could hope to follow the objective rule. The subjective rule has no relevant rationale independently of that fact. … For these reasons, the objective rule is explanatorily more fundamental than its subjective counterpart. (Peacocke 2004 p. 116)

The knowledge norm of belief is the ‘objective rule’, so beliefs that constitute knowledge have ‘primary propriety’ in DeRose’s terminology. Justified belief conforms to a more subjective rule, and is a kind of ‘secondary propriety’. (Don’t assume there is only one kind of derived propriety.) What’s good about justified belief is explained in terms of what’s good about knowing, and not vice-versa. DeRose’s terminology has the virtue of suggesting this point.

Now let’s consider Brown’s variation on the worry about knowledge norms. Brown’s subject S has a justified true belief that there is an express train at 12:20pm, which falls short of knowledge. I think it is very plausible that S’s belief falls short of the epistemic standing she aims for it to meet. For she is very lucky that the hacker’s replacement timetable doesn’t misreport the time of the express train. She should be significantly unhappy about the fact that she was subject to a big risk of believing falsely. Taking such risks is something we aim not to do. Even if everything turns out for the best, there is something inherently objectionable about taking a big risk. Thus we fail to meet the standard we aim at when we take a big risk in believing, even if we get lucky and the belief is true. My proposal for interpreting the knowledge norm of belief undermines the appeal of Brown’s objection.
Support against Brown comes from a surprising source, namely Fantl & McGrath (2009 pp. 173-8). They argue that knowledge is important by considering emotions based on Gettiered justified true beliefs. For example, suppose that you have a justified false belief that Jones owns a Ford, and infer the true conclusion that someone in your office owns a Ford. That makes you feel sad—such a purchasing decision could only be based on xenophobia, given the superior quality of Japanese and German cars. Your reason for feeling sad is that someone in your office owns a Ford. But then suppose you find out that Jones doesn’t own a Ford, but someone else in your office does, namely Smith. You realize the belief that was your basis for feeling sad was true and justified but not knowledge.

You will regard your previous sadness as somehow misaligned with the facts. … Your sadness wasn’t really responsive to the facts, to the reasons there were. … You are chagrined at your sadness. (Fantl & McGrath 2009 pp. 176-7)

I take it that you are chagrined that your reason for feeling sad was something you didn’t know. It was—in some important sense—*inappropriate* to feel sad for that reason, even though it was something true you were justified in believing. This rebuts Brown’s objection to AKP: there is something wrong with acting on beliefs that are justified and true but aren’t knowledge. The point also rebuts Fantl & McGrath’s earlier objection to AKP.

I have argued that we should interpret the knowledge norms as setting the standard we aim to meet. To defend this response to the objection under consideration, we need to check that the proposal is fully compatible with the arguments for the knowledge norms. For example, I need to make it plausible that Williamson’s arguments
only show that knowledge is the standard for epistemically successful assertion, rather than for justified assertion. Let’s just look at one such argument. Williamson claims that KNA provides the best explanation for why one cannot assert things of the form: “p and I don’t know that p” (Williamson 2000 pp. 253-4). I think we can explain this on the basis that knowledge is the standard for successful assertion. For it is obvious a priori that the asserter cannot know such a conjunction. (If the asserter knew the conjunction, she would know the first conjunct; so the second conjunct would be false; and so the conjunction would be false and hence not known.) If it should be obvious to the agent (and everyone else) that a course of action will result in failure, then we criticize the course of action harshly. So given that knowledge is the standard for successful assertion, we will criticize harshly assertions of the form “p and I don’t know that p”.

In summary: I have suggested that there is a sense in which you ‘should’ only believe what you know. But that doesn’t show that justified belief is knowledge. For there is also a sense in which you ‘should’ believe what your evidence supports, even if you are unlucky and that does not amount to knowledge. I suggested that the knowledge norm of belief is explanatorily more fundamental than that of justified belief.

3. Knowledge Norms and Rational Belief

This section argues that we should not interpret the knowledge norms as setting the standard for rational belief and action. Failing to meet the knowledge norm need not involve any failure of rationality. To defend the knowledge norms in this way, we must give up Williamson’s claim that rationality requires us to respect our evidence. (I turn to Williamson’s claim that “only knowledge justifies belief” in section 4.)
Hawthorne & Stanley (2008) defend AKP.

(AKP) Treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting only if you know that p.

I argued that we should interpret AKP as giving the epistemic standard we aim to meet in taking p as a premise, i.e. as setting the standard for epistemic success. Sometimes Hawthorne & Stanley gloss AKP by saying that one must know that p for it to be ‘appropriate’ to take it as a reason for acting (2008 p. 578). I think ‘appropriateness’ is unhelpfully ambiguous between success and justification. Worse, Hawthorne & Stanley sometimes conflate epistemic success and epistemic rationality. Here is how they introduce the AKP at the start of their paper.

According to one standard picture, … rational action is a matter of maximizing expected utility. … On this picture, having knowledge that p is independent of whether it is rational to act on one’s belief that p. … In contrast to the picture just sketched, our ordinary folk appraisals of the behavior of others suggest that the concept of knowledge is intimately intertwined with the rationality of action. (Hawthorne & Stanley 2008, p. 571)

This passage suggests that if one does not know that p, acting on one’s belief that p is not rational. It suggests AKP-R.

(AKP-R) Rationality requires you to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting only if you know that p.
But AKP-R is very implausible. A false belief can be rational, and rationally acted on. Suppose a tourist asks the way to the Met, and heads off in the direction their informant confidently indicates. Unfortunately, the informant is having a bad day, and has responded maliciously by giving faulty directions. The tourist acts on the false belief that the Met is five blocks south. The tourist’s actions involve no failure of rationality. Contra AKP-R, rationality does not require the tourist not to act on the basis that the Met is five blocks to the south. Intuitively, rationality requires the tourist to act on that basis, not to avoid acting on that basis.

AKP-R is false. We should gloss AKP as setting the standard for being epistemically successful, not the standard for being rational. This is perfectly compatible with the following principle.

(AKP-R-Aim) Rationality requires you to aim to treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting only if you know that p.

Similarly, I think we should reject Williamson’s claim that “rationality requires one to conform one’s beliefs to one’s evidence.” (Williamson 2000 p. 12; also p. 179.) Suppose with Williamson that one’s evidence consists of things one knows (i.e. E⊆K). A Brain-In-a-Vat does not have knowledge that could function as evidence for its empirical beliefs. So the BIV’s empirical beliefs do not conform to its evidence. But intuitively, the BIV’s empirical beliefs are rational. So rationality does not require that one’s beliefs conform to one’s evidence.
This does not yet cast doubt on Williamson’s more central claim that “only knowledge justifies belief” (2000 p. 185 and chapter 9 passim). We can distinguish justified belief from belief that rationality now requires the subject to have. On this view, rationality requires the BIV to form perceptual beliefs, but those beliefs are not justified. I think this distinction is very plausible in the case of memory. Suppose Maria irrationally formed the belief that Dean Martin is Italian—she believed what she read in a trashy gossip magazine (Feldman 2005). But now Maria has forgotten everything about how she formed that belief, and just has a strong apparent memory that Dean Martin is Italian. I suggest that believing is the rationally best attitude for her to have now on that matter; yet her belief is not justified, because of its awful provenance. (I defend this diagnosis in chapter 1.) Analogously, Williamson can say that believing is the rationally best attitude for the BIV to have to various empirical matters; yet those beliefs are not justified, because they neither are knowledge nor based on knowledge.

4. Knowledge and the Justification of Belief

In fact, I don’t think Williamson is right that “only knowledge justifies belief.” Consider someone who forms a false but justified belief, then forgets its provenance. Intuitively, the recalled belief is justified. Williamson’s view says it isn’t, because it neither is knowledge nor is based on the subject’s current knowledge. I think we should say that the recalled belief is justified though it is not based on evidence the subject currently possesses. We retain Williamson’s view that someone’s evidence consists in things they know (i.e. E≤K). (As well as having counter-intuitive consequences, the view that only
knowledge justifies belief is structurally strange. It collapses the distinction between non-
inferentially justified belief and non-inferential knowledge.)

It is worth reviewing Williamson’s motivations for holding that justified belief
either is knowledge or is based on knowledge. At the start of the relevant chapter,
Williamson presents the thesis as a way of defending the importance of knowledge. He
quotes Crispin Wright’s claim that the proper target of “epistemologico-sceptical
enquiry” is justified belief and not knowledge (p. 184). He quotes John Earman’s claim
that what’s relevant in the philosophy of science is what theories a scientist is justified in
believing, not what they know (p. 184). Williamson offers the following defence of the
importance of knowledge.

Grant, for the sake of argument, that knowledge is important now only if it is
somehow essential to the present justification of belief. … Suppose that
knowledge, and only knowledge, justifies belief. … On that supposition, if
justified belief is central to epistemologico-sceptical inquiry and the philosophy of
science, then so too is knowledge. (Williamson 2000 pp. 184-5)

Such a defence is otiose if the importance of knowledge doesn’t rest on its role in the
present justification of belief. If the knowledge norm of belief is true, then knowledge is
the standard we aim to meet in believing. Knowledge is our end. That seems enough to
secure the importance of knowing. That thought is bolstered by the following point from
section 2. If the knowledge is the standard we aim to meet, then justified belief is a more
‘subjective’ standard, the force of which is to be explained by appeal to the knowledge
norm, not vice-versa. If the knowledge norm of belief is true, the importance of
knowledge is established, and is more fundamental than the importance of justified belief.
The knowledge-chooser should reject Williamson’s reason for thinking that only knowledge justifies belief.

Another motivation for thinking that only knowledge justifies belief is the assumption that “what justifies belief is evidence” (Williamson 2000 p. 185). Given that one’s evidence consists of things one knows (which I grant), it follows that what justifies belief is knowledge. But it is merely superficially plausible that what makes a belief justified in the subject’s current evidence. That plausibility evaporates once we notice that one can recall a false but justified belief, for which one no longer has any evidence. Williamson is brief in defending the thesis that what justifies belief is evidence (2000 pp. 207-8). His first idea is that no alternative retains the distinction between epistemic and pragmatic justification of belief.

It is far from obvious that any belief is justified in the truth-directed sense without being justified by evidence. (Williamson 2000, p. 207)

This bare accusation is unconvincing. Are reliabilist theories of perceptual justification so easily refuted? Here’s Williamson’s second idea.

An epistemically justified belief which falls short of knowledge must be epistemically justified by something; whatever justifies it is evidence. (Williamson 2000, p. 208)

This argument also ignores the externalist tradition. Everyone agrees that when a belief is justified, it is justified because of certain features it has. Not everyone agrees that those features “justify” the belief, in the sense of counting in favour of it. (This is an old point from William Alston, e.g. 1980.) For example, one might think that perceptual beliefs are
because they are caused by a reliable process, or because they are counterfactually ‘safe’. The fact that the belief is caused by a reliable process, or is ‘safe’, is not evidence the subject has that counts in favour of the belief. Williamson has not given any reason to be suspicious of such an approach to epistemic justification.

In summary: Williamson introduces the view that only knowledge justifies belief as a way of safeguarding the importance of knowledge. But that motivation makes no sense if knowledge is the standard we aim to meet in believing. What’s good about some beliefs that are epistemic failures does not ground the importance of epistemic success. Looking back to section 4, we may offer the same diagnosis of Hawthorne & Stanley’s linking knowledge to rationality. They sometimes suggest that only knowledge grounds rational belief and action, whereas Williamson argues that only knowledge grounds justified belief. The implication seems to be that the importance of rationality is a given, and the importance of knowledge needs to be derived. But if knowledge is the norm of belief, the situation is if anything the opposite.

5. Conclusion
We should interpret the knowledge norms as setting the standard we aim to meet, and thus the standard for epistemic success. As I explained in section 2, this gloss shows what’s wrong with the most obvious objection to knowledge norms. I examined how knowledge relates to two other epistemic evaluations: justified belief and currently rational belief. I argued that Hawthorne & Stanley tie knowledge too closely to rationality, and Williamson ties knowledge too closely to justified belief. Their rationale seems to be that knowledge is important because of how it relates to rationality and/or
justification. I argued that’s incompatible with knowledge being the standard we aim to meet in believing. The importance of justified belief and rational belief derives from that of knowledge, not vice-versa.
Chapter 4: Partial Belief, Hedged Assertion, and the Importance of Knowing

1. Introduction

Influential recent work defends the central normative significance of knowing. For example, Timothy Williamson argues that Knowledge is the Norm of Assertion (KNA).

(KNA) One must: assert that p only if one knows that p. (Williamson 2000 p. 243)

Williamson suggests that occurrent belief is the inner analogue of assertion. (As Ernest Sosa (2010) says, occurrent belief is ‘assent’ to a proposition.) So he thinks it is plausible that Knowledge is the Norm of Belief (KNB).

(KNB) One should: believe p only if one knows p. (Williamson 2000 pp. 255-6).


(PR) One ought only to use that which one knows as a premise in practical reasoning. (Hawthorne 2004 p. 30)

Jason Stanley holds,

One should act only on what one knows. (Stanley 2005 p. 9)

(AKP) Treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting only if you know that p.

(Hawthorne & Stanley 2008 p. 577)

Hawthorne & Stanley suggest a way to convert the AKP into a biconditional (called RKP, on p. 578). The following is a variation on their proposal.

(AKP*) Take p to be available as a reason for acting if only if you know that p.

I am sympathetic to these ‘knowledge norms’, particularly KNB. (See chapters 3 and 5, and my MS.) In this chapter, I defend that family of principles from a particular challenge. Prima facie, we often act on the basis of partial beliefs rather than full beliefs. For example, Betty has a degree of belief of 0.6 that the burger place she likes is on 5th street, and that makes it rational for her to look there first. Our challenge is to explain why these cases are not counterexamples to AKP, without undermining the importance of the knowledge norm. Stephen Schiffer (2007, pp. 189-90) presses this challenge against AKP, as I explain in section 2. John Hawthorne & Jason Stanley (2008) reply that Betty is acting on the basis of something she knows, namely that it is likely that the burger place is on 5th street. Section 3 argues against their way of defending AKP. Rather, the defender of AKP should admit that there are many cases of rational action about which AKP is silent. Section 4 discusses analogous concerns about whether hedged assertions
are governed by KNA, arguing that they aren’t. For example, Betty is not subject to KNA if she says, “I think the burger place is on 5th street.” Section 5 defends the resulting view from the accusation that it undermines the normative significance of knowing. Knowledge is the norm of full belief; knowing is the standard we aim to meet. This importance of knowing is not undermined by the existence of other ways of evaluating beliefs, e.g. as being rational. Even though acting on partial belief can be rational, it is automatically epistemically second-best to acting on knowledge. It is central to Betty’s practical situation that (regrettably) she does not know that the burger place is on 5th street.

2. Schiffer’s Objection to AKP

This section describes Schiffer’s objection to AKP, and introduces two kinds of response. Section 3 argues against the first kind of reply, which is that given by Hawthorne & Stanley. Sections 4 and 5 defends the second kind of response.

Schiffer (2007) responds to Stanley’s claim (2005 p. 9) that, “One should act only on what one knows.” Hawthorne & Stanley (2008) refine this claim into AKP. Let’s see whether Schiffer’s objections hit AKP. He claims that very often, we act on partial beliefs. Having a partial belief is a matter of having a certain degree of belief, also called one’s credence in the proposition. Suppose that Jane believes to degree 0.4 that it will rain tonight. Schiffer observes that Jane is “completely justified in carrying an umbrella even though [she doesn’t] know that it will rain” (2007 p. 189). Schiffer complains:

Not only is this a prima facie counterexample to [the knowledge norm], insofar as it appears to be an example in which one is justified in acting as one does on the basis
not of knowledge but of a justified partial belief, but there is a familiar and widely-
accepted Bayesian account of why one’s action is justified, even though one isn’t
acting on knowledge: one is performing that action which has the greatest expected
desirability. (Schiffer 2007 p. 189)

There are two objections here. The first is that the case of Jane is a counterexample to the
knowledge norm. The second is that AKP does not explain why Jane is justified in
carrying an umbrella, but the rival Bayesian account does. Both objections need
unpacking.

The first objection is weak. Maybe Jane ‘acts on’ her partial belief that it will
rain. But she does not ‘act on’ the basis that it will rain. So there is not counterexample to
Stanley’s original claim that one should act on p only if one knows that p. This is clearer
once we consider whether the case is a counterexample to AKP. Roughly, to treat p as a
reason for action is to have a full belief that p. Jane’s reason for carrying an umbrella is
not that it will rain. It may well be that if Jane did take that proposition to be available as
a reason for action, i.e. if she believed that it will rain, she would decide not to leave the
house, rather than go out but take an umbrella. (Hawthorne & Stanley 2008 p. 14.) AKP
gets things exactly right: Jane does not know that it will rain, and should not take it as a
reason for action that it will rain.

Consider the analogous objection to the Knowledge Norm of Belief. It is true that
Jane’s attitude is epistemically proper, and it does not constitute knowledge that it will
rain. But that’s no counterexample to KNB, because Jane does not fully believe that it
will rain; she has a merely partial belief that it will. A full belief is a candidate to
constitute knowledge; a merely partial belief isn’t. By fully believing, one takes oneself
to know; by having a merely partial belief, one takes oneself not to know. The
Knowledge Norm should be interpreted as governing full belief. KNB gets things exactly right: Jane should not fully believe that it will rain.

Schiffer’s second worry is the important one. Jane is justified in carrying an umbrella. Schiffer gestures at the subjective Bayesian explanation of that normative standing: given her degrees of belief and her desires, carrying an umbrella maximizes Jane’s expected utility. What explanation can one give if one accepts AKP?

There are two kinds of response to this challenge. The first is that AKP does explain why Jane is justified in carrying an umbrella. On this view, Jane knows something that is a good reason for her to act in that way. Hawthorne & Stanley take this position, claiming that Jane knows that it is fairly likely it will rain, and that knowledge is good reason for her to carry an umbrella. I will evaluate this response in section 3, finding it unsatisfactory. The second kind of response to Schiffer’s challenge says that AKP does not explain why Jane is justified in carrying an umbrella. On this view, justified action is not always a matter of something you know being your reason for action. I will defend this response in section 5, arguing that it does not undermine the central importance of knowing.

3. Hawthorne & Stanley’s response to Schiffer

In this section, I consider the response to Schiffer’s challenge favoured by Hawthorne & Stanley (2008). On their view, AKP does explain why Jane’s action is appropriate. Hence she is acting on the basis of something she knows.

Hawthorne & Stanley have a specific proposal about what that knowledge is. But let’s get a couple of other proposals out of the way first. Jane’s reason for carrying the
umbrella is not *that she has degree of belief 0.4 in its raining this afternoon*. That introspective knowledge does not make Jane justified in carrying an umbrella. For if Jane’s degree of belief were merely the result of a melancholy turn of mind, she would still know she has that degree of belief, but would not be justified in carrying the umbrella. Nor is Jane’s reason for carrying the umbrella is *that there is an objective likelihood of 0.4 that it will rain*. Suppose the local professional weather-forecasters know that there is no significant objective likelihood of rain, because the clouds will blow away in the next half hour. Jane does not have that information. In that case, Jane does not know that there is a significant objective chance of rain, because there isn’t one; yet she would still be justified in taking her umbrella. So this proposal fails to explain her being justified.

Rather, Hawthorne & Stanley propose that Jane’s reason for carrying the umbrella is that *it is epistemically fairly likely that it will rain* (p. 13). The epistemic probability of a given proposition for a subject is determined by the subject’s total body of knowledge (p. 14). For example, if one knows that a coin is symmetrical, that determines that the epistemic probability for one of it landing heads when tossed is 0.5.

Schiffer objects that Jane need not have the relevant concept of likelihood to act rationally on her partial belief (2007 p. 180). More generally, children and some animals act rationally on degrees of belief, while lacking the concept of epistemic probability.

Hawthorne & Stanley make two points in reply. Firstly, they observe that one can have the relevant concept without having words for it, and without clearly distinguishing it from other notions of chance (p. 18). While that’s true, I don’t think that disarms
Schiffer’s worry. It still seems true that some children act on partial beliefs and lack the concept of epistemic chance.

Secondly, Hawthorne & Stanley claim that the epistemic probability of a proposition is determined by one’s total body of knowledge. So Jane need not believe that it is epistemically fairly likely that it will rain. Instead, she can act on the things she knows that make it epistemically fairly likely that it will rain. (pp. 16-7.)

Whenever someone appropriately uses [a proposition about epistemic chance] as a reason for acting, there are propositions they know that are not about chances that they could instead have appropriately used as reasons for acting. (Hawthorne & Stanley 2008 p. 17)

That is a not a plausible general account of (what is intuitively) acting on the basis of partial belief. Suppose Betty and Brian are on Avenue A, and they want to go to the good burger place. Is it down 5th street or 6th street? Betty isn’t sure, but she has a hunch that it is down 5th street. Betty says to Brian, “I don’t know whether the burger place is down 5th street, or one of the other streets nearby. My hunch is that it is on 5th.” So Betty and Brian head down 5th street. Betty has degree of belief 0.6 that the burger place is on 5th street. Hawthorne & Stanley claim that Betty has knowledge that makes it epistemically probable to degree 0.6 that her hunch is correct. But she has no such knowledge. Betty remembers going to the burger place before, but no more about its location than her hunch supplies. The only candidate to be the relevant knowledge is: that she has a hunch it is on 5th street. Presumably, that’s only good reason for her to believe it is on 5th street if Betty also knows her hunches are somewhat reliable. But Betty need not have any information about how reliable her geographical hunches are. Maybe she just moved to
the city from a village where she was certain of the locations of every landmark. Still, it is rational for her to look on 5\textsuperscript{th} street, and given that she is hungry, it would be irrational for her to look on 6\textsuperscript{th} street. That’s because she has degree of belief 0.6 the burger place is on 5\textsuperscript{th} street, and degree of belief 0.3 it is on 6\textsuperscript{th}.

If that’s right, then Hawthorne & Stanley can’t defend themselves by claiming one can always act on the knowledge that determines the epistemic probability of a proposition. So the worry that children act rationally on degrees of belief, but lack the concept of epistemic chance, has force.

But the situation is a lot worse. For Betty does not have knowledge that makes it epistemically likely that the burger place is on 5\textsuperscript{th} street. So on the conception of epistemic probability Hawthorne & Stanley appeal to, it is not true that it epistemically likely for her that the burger place is on 5\textsuperscript{th}. So Betty can’t know it is epistemically likely. So by AKP, she should not take that proposition as a reason for action. I see no alternative conception of epistemic probability that gets round this problem, and is in the spirit of Hawthorne & Stanley’s defence of AKP.

For example, it is not open to Hawthorne & Stanley to say that epistemic probability is determined by one’s evidence, and deny that one’s evidence consists in things one knows. (For example, Conee & Feldman (1985) say that one’s evidence consists in the appearances one has.) Such a view will allow that it is epistemically likely for Betty that the burger place is on 5\textsuperscript{th} street. (Maybe that’s because Betty’s weak memory appearance [that the burger place is on 5\textsuperscript{th}] is part of her evidence.) But according to that view, one believes justifiably on the basis of one’s evidence, which is not part of one’s knowledge. Thus AKP would not explain why our beliefs are justified. The spirit of Hawthorne &
Stanley’s reply to Schiffer is that AKP explains what makes any act justified or not (hence their insistence that AKP explains why Jane and Betty’s actions are justified). Their claim that AKP also explains what makes beliefs justified (p. 8) is incompatible with the approach under consideration. Further, it is natural to suppose that one can act justifiedly on the basis of justified beliefs. Given the present conception of evidence, there will be beliefs whose justification does not derive from things one knows, and hence acts that are justified but not because AKP says they are. In summary, Hawthorne & Stanley cannot appeal to the conception of evidence under consideration in order to defend the claim that it is epistemically likely for Betty that the burger place is on 5th street. In the absence of a suitable notion of epistemic likelihood, the only sense in which it is likely for Betty that the burger place is on 5th street is that she has degree of belief 0.6 that that’s the case. As we saw at the beginning of this section, knowledge of such a psychological fact does not make Betty justified in going to 5th street (e.g. if she thinks that the burger place is there only because she really likes the number 5).

4. The Norm of Hedged Assertion

The previous section argued against Hawthorne & Stanley’s response to Schiffer. I favour the other response, according to which AKP is silent on the epistemic standing of partial beliefs, and actions performed on such a basis. Jane is rational to carry her umbrella, and Betty is rational to look down 5th street, and the AKP does not explain why that’s so. There is another norm governing what degrees of belief it is epistemically proper to act on. The implausibility of Hawthorne and Stanley’s position is clearer if we consider a Schiffer-style objection to the knowledge norm of belief (KNB), rather than to
AKP. If Betty has a partial belief and not a full belief, how can KNB explain why that attitude is epistemically proper? My view is that KNB can’t explain why Betty’s attitude is epistemically proper; I’ll explain in section 5 why that doesn’t undermine the central importance of knowing. The Hawthorne-&-Stanley style response is that Betty’s attitude is one of full belief, which is epistemically proper because it constitutes knowledge, namely knowledge that it is epistemically likely that the burger place is on 5th street. But it is psychologically implausible that partial belief turns out to be that kind of full belief.

In this section I consider a Schiffer-style worry about the knowledge norm of assertion (KNA). I argue that hedged assertions are not flat-out assertions, and KNA only applies to the latter. Some other epistemic norm governs hedged assertions. If that’s right, we should expect full belief to be governed by a knowledge norm, and some other epistemic norm to govern partial belief.

Suppose Betty says to Brian, “I think the burger place is on 5th street”, or, “I believe it is on 5th street.” Let’s take these as our paradigms of ‘hedged assertion’. Betty does not know that the burger place is on 5th street, even if her hunch is correct. That does not make her hedged assertion epistemically inappropriate. So knowing that p is not the standard for hedged assertion that p.

There are two ways to make this compatible with knowing that p being the standard for flat-out assertion that p (i.e. KNA). On the first view, hedged assertion that p flat-out asserts some other proposition q, and the speaker must know q. For example, maybe Betty’s hedged assertion is a flat-out assertion that it is epistemically likely that the burger place is on 5th. (That’s analogous to Hawthorne & Stanley’s response to Schiffer.) On the second view, hedged assertions are not a species of flat-out assertion. For
example, the content of Betty’s hedged assertion is *that the burger place is on 5th*, but she
does not flat-out assert that content. Hedged assertion is a different speech-act from flat-
out assertion, and is governed by a different epistemic norm. (That’s analogous to the
response to Schiffer that I propose.)

Let’s survey arguments against holding that hedged assertion is flat-out assertion of
some related proposition. I’ll look at two proposals about what is flat-out asserted. The
first proposal is that in saying “I believe it is on 5th street,” Betty flat-out asserts that *she
partially believes that* the burger place is on 5th. (Of course Betty does not fully believe
that the burger place is on 5th. Otherwise, she would flat-out assert that it is.) In other
contexts, Betty could use that sentence to report her psychological state in that way. But
that’s not the right analysis of hedged assertion, assuming KNA is correct. For one thing,
Betty need not have formed the introspective knowledge that she has a partial belief that
the burger place is on 5th. Knowing she partially believes p is not necessary for Betty to
properly make the hedged assertion that p. Nor is such knowledge sufficient. Suppose
Brian partially believes that the burger place in on 5th, but not because of a hunch, but
because his magic 8-ball answered ‘yes’ to that question. Then his hedged assertion, “I
believe it is on 5th street,” is epistemically out of order. That’s so, even though he knows
he partially believes it is on 5th. Knowing that one partially believes p is neither necessary
nor sufficient for epistemically proper hedged assertion that p. So if KNA is right, hedged
assertion that p is not flat-out assertion that one partially believes that p.

Now consider the view that a hedged assertion that p is a flat-out assertion that it is
epistemically likely for one that p. On this proposal, hedged assertions satisfy KNA
because one knows what one is flat-out asserting, namely that it is epistemically likely
that p. This proposal is analogous to Hawthorne & Stanley’s view that acting on a partial belief that p is acting on knowledge that it is epistemically likely that p. Schiffer’s objection is weaker in the case of hedged assertion than in the case of partial belief. For it is plausible enough that a child who makes a hedged assertion must have the concept of epistemic likelihood. But the other worry I presented for partial belief is just as pressing. Betty does not have knowledge that makes it epistemically likely that the burger place is on 5th street. So it is not true that it is epistemically likely; so she can’t know it is; so by KNA she should not assert that it is epistemically likely. But she is in an epistemic position to make the hedged assertion, “I think it’s on 5th street.” So a hedged assertion that p is not a flat-out assertion that it is epistemically likely that p.

The foregoing is an argument that hedged assertions are not a species of flat-out assertion, and hence are not subject to KNA. They are subject to a different epistemic norm. Setting arguments aside, that conclusion has the ring of truth. Betty is well aware that she doesn’t know whether the burger place is on 5th street. She just has her hunch. It is no accident there is a kind of speech-act Betty can make to share her epistemic situation with Brian. It seems perverse to try to reduce that kind of speech-act to flat-out assertion.

As we saw in the case of Brian’s irrational faith in the verdict of his magic-8 ball, we can evaluate the epistemic standing of a hedged assertion, and the partial belief it expresses. What standard do hedged assertions aim to meet? While nothing in this paper hangs on the answer, here’s my two-pence worth. Betty’s hedged assertion is unsuccessful if the burger place is not on 5th street. She would not be happy with her utterance if they walk down 5th street without finding the intended restaurant, and the
problem would be partly epistemic. Brian has an unjustified partial belief that the place is on 5th street, and even if he’s right, his hedged assertion of the location is not epistemically acceptable. Similarly, a hedged assertion based on a sheer guess is not epistemically acceptable. So the epistemic norm governing hedged assertion requires truth, and truth properly arrived at, as does the norm governing flat-out assertion. The norm for hedged assertion is merely more forgiving concerning the subject’s connection to the truth.

5. The Importance of Knowing

I have argued that the best defence of AKP and KNB holds them to be silent on the epistemic status of partial beliefs. This section defends that view from a series of worries that it undermines the normative significance of knowing.

On my view, there are many actions for which AKP plays no part in explaining why they are rational. Allegedly, the subjective Bayesian story is the right one to give for those actions. According to the Bayesian, the subject’s degrees of belief and utility function (roughly, their desires) determine what action would maximize expected utility, and that’s the rational thing for the subject to do. The worry is that this story will crowd out the normative significance of knowing in the other cases too. For suppose Katie knows that the burger place is on 5th street, and that’s her reason for going to that location. Katie has some high degree of belief that the burger place is on 5th street. She wants a burger quite quickly. So the subjective Bayesian can explain why it is rational for Katie to go to 5th street, without appealing to any facts about what she knows. Allegedly,
that’s all that’s of normative significance. Thus knowing is not important, and AKP does not concern any interesting sense of the bases on which one ‘should’ act.

This objection fails, but brings out an important point. Grant for the sake of argument that subjective Bayesianism is the right account of what one rationally ought to do. (I’d like to see the account of evidence; and I’d like to know whether all credence functions are fit to be updated on the evidence, or whether only some partial beliefs are ‘justified’.) And grant for the sake of argument that Bayesianism can explain why it’s wrong to take it as a reason for not buying car insurance that your car won’t get stolen, even if not buying car insurance maximizes expected utility. (Good luck with that. But see Weatherson 2005 for a serious attempt.) The objector grants that we do often act on full beliefs. Katie acts on her full belief that the burger place is on 5th street. (Presumably it’s also true that she acts on her high degree of belief that that’s where it is.) But the objection merely assumes that rationality is the only important normative notion. Of course a belief can be false but rationally held, and rationally acted on. But such a belief falls short of the standard we aim to meet, namely knowing.

Suppose the aim of one’s trip to the airport is to pick up the visiting speaker, Professor Jones. The norm governing the trip is: I must pick up Professor Jones. The norm governing the trip defines the conditions for its success, not the conditions for acting rationally or justifiedly. What’s really important, what one really cares about, is whether one succeeds. It is cold comfort, upon realizing that one has driven an impostor into the city leaving the professor stranded, that one acted rationally in so doing. Whether one acted rationally is of limited interest, and certainly is not the only important thing.
Similarly, in believing we aim to know. Beliefs can be evaluated for rationality, but what we aim for, and what we principally care about, is knowing. That’s why the ordinary person talks a lot about knowledge, and not so much about justified or rational belief. The norm governing belief is: I must believe p only if I know that p. As with the norm governing the trip to the airport, this norm defines the standard for success: knowledge is epistemically successful belief. Whether a belief is justified or rational is another matter. When one acts on the basis of a full belief, it is important that the belief constitutes knowledge, though that’s not required for the action to be rational. Even if knowledge plays no role in explaining why any action, reasoning or assertion is rational, the importance of knowing is not threatened.

So AKP and KNB define the nature of epistemic success, not of rationality. (I develop this line in chapter 3.) Unfortunately, Hawthorne & Stanley (2008) say things like the following.

[AKP is] the norm of practical rationality. (p. 8)

The Action-Knowledge Principle is a norm of rational action. (p. 21)

They start the paper by setting Bayesianism and AKP in competition, interpreting both as setting the standard for an action’s being rational.

According to one standard picture, … rational action is a matter of maximizing expected utility. … It is subjective degrees of belief that matter for rational action, not knowledge. On this picture, having knowledge that p is independent of whether it is rational to act on one’s belief that p. … In contrast to the picture just sketched, our ordinary folk appraisals of the behavior of others suggest that the concept of knowledge is intimately intertwined with the rationality of action. (p. 571)
It is compelling that there are false but rational beliefs, and it is rational to act on them. So it is vastly implausible that AKP sets the standard for an action’s being rational. Further, that gloss on AKP commits Hawthorne & Stanley to rejecting subjective Bayesianism. That is a very controversial theoretical commitment of their view. My way of glossing AKP does not appear to have that burdensome consequence.

(Hawthorne & Stanley are sympathetic to an alternative decision theory, according to which expected utilities are a function of the subject’s epistemic probabilities, not their degrees of belief (pp. 11, 13). Hawthorne & Stanley claim that AKP can do something even this decision theory can’t, namely explain what is wrong with doing the right thing for the wrong reasons (p. 12). I don’t see how AKP does so. AKP says when p is available to be your reason; it does not say whether p is a good reason for Φ-ing. So it won’t say whether the subject’s reason for Φ-ing was a good one. Let me suggest a different line. Hawthorne & Stanley claim that epistemic probabilities are determined by the subject’s total knowledge (pp. 13-4). So according to this decision theory, expected utilities are determined by one’s utility function and one’s knowledge, rather than one’s utility function and one’s degrees of belief. Such a decision theory is grounded in the importance of knowledge, so can’t undermine it.)

Let’s move on to a different objection to AKP. I admit that many actions are performed on the basis of merely partial beliefs, and acting on such a basis does not fall under the purview of AKP. One might allege that this means that there are lots of cases in which it is not important whether one knows. Doesn’t my position make AKP a lot less significant?
This objection fails, but brings out an important point. Betty’s walking to 5th street is epistemically distinctly sub-optimal, because she doesn’t know that’s where the burger place is, even if her hunch turns out to be right. Acting on a partial belief is a fall-back; it is automatically epistemically inferior to having knowledge to act on.\(^\text{19}\) Betty wishes she knew, and is rightly upset she doesn’t. Crucial to Betty’s normative position is that she doesn’t know where the burger place is. So one cannot use such a case to argue against the normative significance of knowledge. Analogously, a hedged assertion can be epistemically in order, but is automatically sub-optimal compared with flat-out asserting on the basis of knowledge. As we saw above, rationality is not the central way to evaluate beliefs. Evaluating partial beliefs and hedged assertions in the more central way involves seeing them as second-best to knowing. Thus the importance of knowing permeates even the cases in which one respects AKP and KNA by not believing or asserting the thing one doesn’t know.

Here’s a related objection to my view. Suppose we grant for the sake of argument that subjective Bayesianism tells the right story about which actions are rational. That story applies to all cases of action, and AKP only applies in the special case in which someone acts on a full belief. One might worry that the Bayesian norm of rationality is deeper, because it is more general. AKP does not govern all action per se, and the Bayesian norm does. As above, I reply that the importance of knowledge and ignorance permeates all cases of action, even those where one acts rationally on a partial belief. For acting on a partial belief is importantly inferior to acting on knowledge.

\(^{19}\) Ernest Sosa (2010) remarks that it is epistemically better to know p but have a non-ideal degree of belief in it, than to suspend judgment on q by having an ideal degree of belief in that.
Here’s the next objection. One might think that the facts about what full beliefs a subject has reduce to facts about what degrees of belief they have, plus some other stuff (e.g. what their utility function is, what practical questions they face, etc.). One might then allege that the norms governing full belief must derive from those governing degrees of belief. No new knowledge norm can emerge.

Let’s grant for the sake of argument that full belief is a matter of high degree of belief and some other stuff. (I’m dubious.) This objection still fails: norms governing constituted things need not derive from norms governing the constituting things. Suppose physicalism is true: the facts about people hold in virtue of the facts about particles. There are moral norms governing the treatment of people. There are no moral norms governing the treatment of particles, or at least none that does not derive from the norms about people. Thus:

[The effect one has on people] is just a matter of <the effect one has on certain particles>. It does not follow that any norm governing [the effect one has on people] must derive from more general norms governing <the effect one has on particles>.

But the following is the analogous observation about norms of belief.

[Full belief] is just a matter of <one’s degrees of belief>. It does not follow that any norm governing [full belief] must derive from more general norms governing <one’s degrees of belief>.
It is not true that the norms governing grounded things must derive from norms governing the grounding things. So there is no objection to the emergence of the knowledge norm governing full belief.

Let’s consider a final objection. On that view, full belief is a confused folk notion. Allegedly, the real psychological facts concern degrees of belief, and not outright belief. A serious scientific psychology never talks about someone’s treating a proposition as a reason for acting; so from that perspective, AKP never applies. On that view, the real psychological facts, and hence the real norms, concern acting on degrees of belief.

Let’s grant for the sake of argument that a scientific psychology will not attribute full beliefs to people. (It’s the objector’s lucky day.) I say that this objection rests on a metaphysical mistake. Identifying AKP is part of the philosophical project of understanding our non-scientific folk notions. We understand each other, un-scientifically perhaps, by attributing full beliefs, and evaluating the reasons for which a person acted. It is to this kind of understanding that the notion of assertion belongs: we take others to be telling us something they know. AKP helps us understand how ‘our conceptual scheme’ works. Folk psychological notions are intimately tied up with how we evaluate each other. For example, talk of what someone’s reason for acting was is tied up with talk about whether it was a good reason. That web of folk notions does not aim to line up with the psychological joints in nature, in the way scientific psychology tries to. Those folk notions try to carve pragmatically useful distinctions, not scientifically respectable ones. AKP helps us understand ‘our conceptual scheme’, which is a web of notions that is not impugned by its lack of scientific respectability. (Explaining why some notions are
impugned by a lack of scientific respectability, and others aren’t, is a task for
metaphysics. I offer an account in chapters 5 and 6.)

It may be helpful to consider a related case. Joshua Knobe (2006) has discovered that
our common-sense attributions of intentional action depend on our moral evaluations. In
his first case, an executive is told that a profitable business plan will harm the
environment. The executive replies that she doesn’t give environmental considerations
any weight in business decisions, and approves the plan. Intuitively, the executive
harmed the environment intentionally. In Knobe’s second case, the executive is told that
the business plan will help the environment. As before, she replies that she doesn’t care,
and she approves the plan merely because it will be profitable. Intuitively, the executive
did not help the environment intentionally. The difference in reactions to the two cases is
statistically robust (Knobe 2006). So it seems that our ordinary thinking about intentional
action is sensitive to our moral evaluations. (Pettit & Knobe (forthcoming) extend the
result to other folk psychological notions.) One reaction to this news is that our ordinary
thinking is unscientific, and must be given up. I recommend a different reaction: our
ordinary thinking is not trying to be scientifically respectable, so it is no problem that it
isn’t. We are social creatures, and our ordinary ways of understanding each other are tied
up with how we relate to each other socially, in particular how we evaluate others. What
others fully believe and know plays a central role in that kind of human understanding.

6. Conclusion

Knowledge is the norm of belief. As Aristotle says, and Williamson quotes:

This is compatible with there being other ways of evaluating beliefs, such as for justification and rationality. When we are aware of our ignorance, we have to fall back on acting on partial beliefs. Even when the partial belief is epistemically proper, it is automatically second-best to knowing. Acting on a partial belief can be rational, but it is normatively central that one thereby acts in ignorance.
Chapter 5: A Case For Anti-Realism About Knowledge

1. Introduction.

I will argue that the lottery and preface puzzles motivate a relativist metaphysics of knowledge. Truth-relativism can’t do the required work; so I will propose a new way of being a relativist.

The first half of this paper describes the lottery and preface puzzles, and presents constraints on a solution (sections 2-4). I sketch the dialectic played out in the literature, though some of the details and my argument against truth-relativism are novel. I conclude that we must preserve multiple-item closure while resisting skepticism. That’s because the point of our concept KNOWLEDGE is to designate the beliefs that are fit to be acted upon and reasoned from—in concert.

The second half of the paper addresses my main goal: showing how to satisfy the familiar constraints on a solution to our puzzles (sections 5-8). I do so by outlining a new conception of relativism and objectivity. I place the view of knowledge within a general conception of metaphysics and its relation to linguistics. On the view I propose, it is exactly right that we go back and forth about our knowledge-attributions. The appendix to this chapter extends this theory to deal with puzzles arising from ‘pragmatic encroachment’ into our knowledge-attributions. Chapter 6 shows that this metaphysics is not an overreaction to the isolated case of knowledge, by using it to give a promising theory of vagueness.

2. The Lottery and Preface Puzzles.
This section gives working examples of the lottery and preface puzzles. I describe the
common-sense reactions, and formulate principles that capture how they generalize. This
section and the next introduce and briefly motivate intuitive constraints on our theory
familiar from the work of Timothy Williamson (2000), John Hawthorne (2004) and
others.\textsuperscript{20} My goal is not to give an exhaustive defence of those constraints. My main goal
is to show how to respect them. The unsympathetic reader can construe my main claim as
conditional: given that the intuitions are as I describe, my theory is the best way to
accommodate them. Many epistemologists end up rejecting some of those intuitions
because they think they can’t all be respected. It should not be controversial that we
should try to accommodate all the intuitions. This paper shows how to do so.

We normally think people know lots of things. For example, if Sally drove to work
this morning, we think that at 5pm she knows that her car is parked round the corner from
her office. But when we consider it, it is natural to think that Sally doesn’t know that her
car hasn’t been stolen since she parked it. As a result, we judge that Sally doesn’t know
that her car is parked round the corner. Take this change in judgment about whether Sally
knows as our working example of the lottery puzzle. (The lottery puzzle is so-called
because of the instance where you give up the claim that Irene knows she won’t be able
to afford a vacation in Barbados next year, on the grounds that she doesn’t know she
won’t win the lottery in the meantime. Sally’s example makes it more obvious that the
template generalizes.)

Plausibly, the retraction manifests our commitment to Single Item Closure (SIC).

\textsuperscript{20} As will be obvious, my understanding of the puzzle bears a special debt to John
(SIC) If S knows that P, and S knows that if P then Q, then S is in a position to know that Q.²¹

We accept that Sally can’t know her car hasn’t been stolen, and it’s obvious that if it is parked round the corner then it hasn’t been stolen. We react by judging that Sally doesn’t know her car is round the corner. Think of SIC as labeling that intuitive response. It does so more directly than DC, the formulation favoured by Williamson (2000 p. 117) and Hawthorne (2004 p. 34).

(DC) If S knows that P, comes to believe Q by competently deducing it from P, while retaining knowledge of P throughout, then S thereby comes to know that Q.

I don’t think we judge that Sally doesn’t know her car is round the corner because we judge she can’t deduce from it that her car hasn’t been stolen (and DC is true). I don’t think it is psychologically plausible that we change our minds because we imagine Sally performing such a deduction, judge it not to produce knowledge, and infer by DC that Sally doesn’t know her premise, namely that her car is round the corner. Further, the case at hand at least appears to be a counter-example to DC. That is, Sally couldn’t deduce that her car hasn’t been stolen even if she did know it is still round the corner (say it is in a very safe neighbourhood). Such an inference does not ‘transmit warrant’ from the premise to the conclusion (Crispin Wright (2002)); it runs contrary to the ‘epistemic priority’ of the conclusion to the premise. If that’s right, DC can’t explain why we form

²¹ SIC does not say that [P] and [if P then Q] are premises from which S can come to know that Q. Hence I do not call it Single Premise Closure.
the new verdict that Sally doesn’t know her car is round the corner. DC is a questionable principle about the means by which one can extend one’s knowledge. SIC only concerns what one is in a position to know, which is more plausible the consideration that grounds the revised judgment that Sally doesn’t know her car is round the corner. (See chapter 2 for more discussion of DC and warrant transmission.)

Suppose I resist the conclusion by insisting that Sally does know that her car hasn’t been stolen. The following manoeuvre forces me to change my mind. I can’t accept that: there’s a chance the train will be late and I know it won’t be. Admitting that there’s a chance the train will be late forces me to accept I don’t know it will be on time. An analogous argument can be run in the third-person case. How likely is it, given Sally’s evidence, that her car has been stolen? We can’t say that there is zero chance that her car has been stolen, given her evidence. After all, Sally knows that cars are stolen in such circumstances from time to time. But if there is a chance that her car has been stolen, given her evidence, then she does not know that her car hasn’t been stolen. And so she doesn’t know that it is parked round the corner.

The Epistemic Possibility Contraint (EPC) labels our acceptance of the first inference in this kind of argument.

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22 Jennifer Nagel (forthcoming) formulates the lottery puzzle in terms of DC. Her strategy is to claim that if Sally tries to infer her car hasn’t been stolen, she will (as a matter of psychological fact) cease to believe that her car is parked round the corner. Thus DC is compatible with saying Sally knows her car is parked round the corner, and she can’t know her car hasn’t been stolen. This strategy is a non-starter once we see that the puzzle really involves SIC and rather than DC.
(EPC) If there is a non-zero chance that p is false, given S’s evidence, then S does not know that p.  

We don’t need a theory of the relevant epistemic notion of chance to feel the intuitive force of instances of EPC. Many epistemologists give up these intuitions, because EPC seems to lead straight to skepticism. Yet the intuition is real, and should be accommodated if possible. David Lewis (1996) aims to preserve a similar infallibilist intuition (p. 550). John Hawthorne emphasizes the attractiveness of EPC (2004 pp. 24-28). Timothy Williamson (2000) is committed to such a principle on the basis that all knowledge is evidence (pp. 205-6), and defends its plausibility (pp. 249-251). Many philosophers working on epistemic possibility respect the intuition that if the train might be late, then I don’t know it won’t be. The threat of skepticism does not deprive that intuition of its prima facie force.

The attack on our initial verdict that Sally knows her car is round the corner generalizes to many things we ordinarily think people know. So we have a puzzle. Does the above reasoning bring out the fact that people actually know very little? Do people know lots of things, and we go wrong when we are led to deny this? Those unpalatable options seem to be the only possibilities. That’s what is puzzling about our changing verdicts about whether Sally knows.

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23 Compare Hawthorne 2004 p. 111.
I give two versions of the ‘preface puzzle’: the ‘epistemic probability’ version, and then the ‘closure’ version. It is November. John has the list of the 100 people who have paid to attend the philosophy conference he has organized for February. We are normally happy to judge that John knows that Ally will be at the conference, because he sees her name on the list. On similar grounds, John knows that Bert will be at the conference; etc., for the 100 people on the list. But we don’t think that John can know that all 100 people on the list will be at the conference—it is very likely given his evidence that at least one person will get sick in February. (At all past such conferences, two or three people cancelled.) The natural reaction is to conclude that John doesn’t actually know that Ally will be at the conference, etc. After all, the large chance that someone will get sick is the result of the small chances that Ally will get sick, that Bert will get sick, etc. (Suppose John has no special information about the health of the people on his list.) As we noted above, even a small non-zero chance that p is false seems incompatible with knowing that p.

Here’s the ‘closure’ argument that we should retract the claim that John knows that Ally will be at the conference. John cannot assert: “It is likely someone will get sick; Ally won’t.” The former claim should force him to withdraw the latter. He should admit he doesn’t know that Ally won’t get sick. More carefully, suppose Ally makes it to John’s conference in February. We can’t then report: Last November it was likely given John’s evidence that at least one person would get sick and drop out, and he already knew Ally was not going to. Intuitively, the first claim is correct and forces us to deny the second.

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Plausibly, this manifests our commitment to Multiple Item Closure (MIC).

(MIC) If S knows that P₁, S knows that P₂, …, and S knows that Pₙ, and S knows that (if P₁&P₂&…&Pₙ then Q), then S is in a position to know Q.

Suppose John’s knowing the conjuncts were perfectly compatible with his not knowing the conjunction. Then it would be true that: it was likely given John’s evidence that at least one person would get sick, and he already knew Ally wouldn’t. But that isn’t right. Given that John had no differentiating information about the health of the people on his list, those claims are incompatible. So knowing the conjuncts is not compatible with being unable to know the conjunction. In other words, MIC is true. John can’t know the conjunction, so he doesn’t know all the conjuncts. By symmetry, he doesn’t know any of them.

One will think MIC is false if one merely judges first that John knows that Ally will be at the conference, etc., and then judges that John doesn’t know that everyone will be. If one fails to reconsider whether John knows Ally will be at the conference, it will look like a counter-example to MIC. That’s the reaction of David Christensen (2004 chapter 3). It’s the same mistake as judging first that Sally knows her car is round the corner, then that she doesn’t know it hasn’t been stolen, and concluding that SIC is false. That is, Christensen’s mistake about MIC is the same as Fred Dretske’s (1970) mistake about SIC. In both cases, one must reconsider one’s initial knowledge-attribution to get the skeptical intuition, manifesting commitment to SIC or MIC. The intuitive case for MIC is strong. I give it further theoretical support in section 4.
The preface puzzle is so-called because of the case where the preface of a book asserts that the main text probably contains several errors. How can the author go on to make the assertions that constitute the body of the book? As John’s example makes clear, the puzzle generalizes. Take a large number of things that you think someone knows in similar ways. Usually, you’ll think that they can’t know the conjunction. So (by either of the above two arguments) they don’t know all of the conjuncts, in contrast to your initial verdicts. If the subject is in a similar epistemic position to all the conjuncts, then by symmetry they don’t know any of them. As with the lottery puzzle, rejecting the skeptical reasoning is implausible, but so is embracing widespread skepticism. I will propose a new way to sail between Scylla and Charybdis, avoiding the problems with the approaches seen in the literature.

3. Three kinds of Response.

This section sketches the space of possible responses to the lottery and preface puzzles. I raise prima facie problems with the options currently articulated. (I do not pretend to have given the last word on their tenability.) Further constraints on a solution emerge, which will motivate my positive view. The main purpose of this paper is to explain how the desiderata I describe in sections 2 and 3 can all be respected.

Responses to our puzzle fall into three broad categories. The first concludes that nobody knows very much. Call this ‘skepticism’. The second is that people do know a lot, and there is something wrong with the reasoning that leads us to judge that they don’t. Call this ‘dogmatism’. (This has nothing to do with James Pryor’s ‘dogmatist’ theory of perceptual justification (2000).) The third kind of response is that you were in
the most important sense ‘right’ to assert that Sally knows that her car is parked round the corner, but then ‘right’ to deny it in response to the reasoning outlined above. Call this ‘having your cake and eating it’. Let’s examine these responses in order.

3a. Skepticism.

The skeptical response is that Sally simply does not know that her car is parked round the corner. We were just wrong to think that she did. This conclusion generalizes as much as the puzzle does. People know very little.

Accepting the moral generalized from a specific case is a significant step. Just noticing in the abstract that one could apply similar reasoning to Heather’s putative knowledge that she will do her laundry tomorrow does not make it clear that she does not know it. Actually thinking of ways in which the future could go differently is necessary for generating the judgment that she does not know. And of course, we soon go back to attributing lots of knowledge to people, even the very claim that we rejected in response to the skeptical reasoning. Temporarily accepting that Sally doesn’t know does not automatically commit us to a stable theoretical position that nobody knows anything.

What’s wrong with skepticism? One might complain that it is intuitively obvious that people know a lot of things. This bare appeal to intuition is weak when applied to a specific example. When we go through the reasoning, the intuitive verdict is that Sally does not know her car is round the corner. We are only puzzled when we notice that we could similarly induce a skeptical verdict for just about any putative case of knowing. (That is not the case with Brain-In-a-Vat skepticism, which unfortunately is often run together with the lottery puzzle.)
I explain the repulsion from skepticism by appeal to the point of the concept of knowledge, namely the normative role of knowing. Knowledge is the epistemic Norm of Assertion (KNA). (See Unger 1975 chapter 6, DeRose 1996, and Williamson 2000 chapter 11.)

(KNA) One must: assert that p only if one knows that p. (Williamson 2000 p. 243)


(PR C) One ought only to use that which one knows as a premise in practical reasoning. (Hawthorne 2004 p. 30)

Jason Stanley holds,

One should act only on what one knows. (Stanley 2005 p. 9)


(AKP) Treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting only if you know that p.

Interpret these principles as giving the epistemic standard we aim to meet in asserting, etc. Knowing is epistemically necessary and sufficient for asserting or acting on a belief.
(I explain in chapter 3 why the knowledge norms do not render justified belief
normatively irrelevant. We should generally distinguish the ‘should’ of success from the
‘should’ of justification. The knowledge-involving norms are those we aim to meet, and
thus define the conditions for success, not for being justified.)

Here are two of Williamson’s arguments for KNA. Firstly, you can’t assert:
“Though I don’t know it, the keys are in the kitchen.” The best explanation is that KNA
is true, so that assertion must be improper. Secondly, you can’t assert your ticket won’t
win the lottery. Intuitively, that’s because you don’t know it won’t. This explanation
suggests that knowledge is the epistemic standard for assertion.

Here’s an argument for PRC and AKP (from Hawthorne 2004 pp. 29-31, 147).
Bill reasons: “My lottery ticket won’t win; so it is worthless; so I should sell it even for
one cent.” That conclusion is unacceptable, yet every step is valid. Intuitively, the
reasoning is bad because Bill does not know his ticket won’t win. If he did know it, the
reasoning would be good. This suggests that knowledge is the epistemic standard a
premise should meet.

Let’s see how this affects the case at hand. We judge that Sally does not know her
car is parked round the corner, because it might have been stolen. As Sally knows, it
happens about once a year that someone she works with has their car stolen during the
day. Sally and Jennifer discuss where to go for dinner. Sally says, “My car is parked
round the corner, so let’s drive to the diner on route 1.” Sally should not flat-out assert to
Jennifer that her car is parked round the corner, because she doesn’t know it. She should
say it’s highly likely. Sally shouldn’t really reason as she does, because she does not
know her premise to be true. She should reason from the fact it is highly likely her car is
round the corner. KNA and PRC get this exactly right. It is very plausible that those
normative judgments go along with the view that Sally does not know that her car is
parked round the corner. The reader might think, “Oh come on, Sally can assert her car is
round the corner, and use it as a premise!” That’s the same mood in which one responds,
“Oh come on, she knows it is parked round the corner!” This supports KNA and AKP.

Obviously there is a lot more to say here, but let’s work on the basis that AKP,
KNA, etc, are true. This broadens our task from just explaining the linguistic data about
our use of the word “knows”. It requires we understand normative issues faced by every
agent and communicator. If those principles are true, then skepticism entails that nearly
all our assertions are out of order, as is nearly all of our reasoning. That can’t be right.
Skepticism is bad because it cripples our understanding of people’s normative situation.
We feel unhappy enough having been put through one instance of the lottery puzzle and
thus judging that Sally is violating the epistemic norms of assertion and action. Luckily
we soon forget that we had been forced to say that Sally doesn’t know that her car is
parked round the corner. We should not accept the general and stable theoretical position
that nearly all our assertions and reasonings are out of order. That’s a bad picture of how
humans should conduct their business.

3b. Dogmatism.

Dogmatism is the view that, for example, Sally does know that her car is parked round
the corner, and we went wrong by reasoning to the conclusion that she doesn’t. In other
words, it is easy to get people into a mistaken skeptical frame of mind. This is an

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27 See Jessica Brown 2008 for objections, and chapters 3-4 and my MS for replies.
unattractive position. It must deny some intuitively compelling claims used to generate the puzzles. For example, there are two dogmatic ways to respond to the preface puzzle as generated by considerations of probability. The first holds there is zero probability given John’s evidence that at least one of the people who have signed up for the conference will get sick. That’s clearly wrong; we can even consider a case in which John is in a position to know that at least one person will get sick. The second strategy holds that there is a good chance given John’s evidence that at least one person will get sick. So on this view there is a non-zero chance that Ally will not be at the conference (etc), but John still knows that Ally will be there. It rejects the Epistemic Possibility Constraint. The natural extension to the lottery is that Sally knows that her car hasn’t been stolen, even though there is chance it has been, given her evidence. Having made this concession, the dogmatist can keep Single Item Closure. But Multiple Item Closure must go as well as EPC. Clearly John cannot know that none of the 100 will get sick. For his evidence makes it quite likely that someone will get sick. (See Christensen 2004 chapter 3 for more on the costs of combining dogmatism with MIC.) But MIC captures a real intuition.

More bad news: dogmatism is incompatible with the normative role of knowledge. We retract our judgment that Irene knows she won’t be able to afford a vacation in Barbados next year, because we judge that she doesn’t know that she won’t win the lottery in the meantime. Presumably, the dogmatist view is that she does know that she won’t win the lottery, thus preserving SIC. But Irene should not reason: my ticket will lose, so it is worthless, so I should sell it even for one cent. The natural explanation is that she does not know that the ticket will lose. The dogmatist can’t accept
that explanation, as on that view Irene does know that her ticket will lose. That’s the cost of denying that knowing that p is sufficient for it to be an acceptable premise in practical reasoning, as the dogmatist must.

3c. Have Your Cake and Eat It.
First we judged that Sally knows her car is parked round the corner. Then we judged that she doesn’t. Skepticism and dogmatism agree that one of those judgments is simply right, and the other is simply wrong. The third kind of response to the puzzle is that both judgments were ‘right’, given the different situations in which they were made. Call this the ‘have your cake and eat it’ strategy. Given the implausibility of skepticism and dogmatism, it seems the most promising avenue to investigate. The literature contains three attempts to implement this strategy, namely contextualism, Subject-Sensitive Invariantism (SSI), and truth-relativism. Sub-sections 3c.i-iii sketch problems with them.

3c.i. Contextualism.
Contextualism is the view that the word “knows” refers to different relations in different contexts of use. Thus utterances of the sentence “Sally knows her car is round the corner” can express different propositions, and have different truth-values. First we utter, “Sally knows her car is round the corner.” After the matter of car-theft has been made salient we utter, “Sally doesn’t know that her car is round the corner.” The contextualist diagnosis of the puzzle is that these utterances can both be true, because they do not

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contradict each other. Contextualism implements the ‘have your cake and eat it’ strategy by holding that both utterances are ‘right’ in the straightforward sense of being true.

There are big problems for contextualism if we want all utterances of the sentences MIC, EPC, KNA and AKP to be true.\(^2^9\) It looks like all the bad things the dogmatist says about knowledge the contextualist says about the relation referred to by “knows” in the initial context. Suppose the contextualist accepts all utterances of MIC. Then given the initial referent of “knows”, John is in a position to “know” that none of the 100 philosophers will get sick. Yet it is very likely given John’s evidence that someone will get sick. How can that be a paradigmatic sense of the word “know”?

Let’s put those problems aside, and turn to the most straightforward objection to the contextualist resolution of our puzzles. That solution says that we assert and then deny different propositions. That’s how both utterances can be true. But this does not fit the data. If that solution were correct, we would respond correctly to lottery cases as follows.

“Sally knows her car is parked round the corner.”

- “Does she know it hasn’t been stolen since she left it there?”

“I suppose not. So Sally doesn’t know that her car is round the corner. But that’s not to say that I spoke falsely a moment ago.”

\(^{29}\) See Hawthorne 2004 pp. 80-98, 179. Any speaker should utter truly, “John is in the same epistemic position with regards to whether Ally will be at the conference as whether any other of the people on his list will be there.” This rules out the strategy for accommodating MIC offered by Hawthorne pp. 97-8.
That’s not how we respond. As Williamson puts it (2005 p. 220), the intuitively correct reaction is:

“So I was wrong. Sally doesn't know that her car is round the corner after all.”

According to contextualism, you weren’t wrong. “After all” implies you are changing your mind, and contextualism says you aren’t.

There is a strong intuition that in our puzzle cases, we assert and then deny the very same proposition. The contextualist solution to the puzzle denies this. So there is strong reason to reject the contextualist solution. From now on, I will assume that our puzzles concern contrary attitudes to the same proposition.

(Rejecting the contextualist solution to our puzzles does not entail rejecting contextualism about the word “knows”. One could posit contextual variation only where it is not obvious that the two utterances contradict each other. Keith DeRose (2006) seems to take this path. This gives up the contextualist solution to the lottery and preface puzzles. For in these cases, the intuition that we changed our minds is robust.)

3c.ii. Subject-Sensitive Invariantism.

There is good reason to have our cake and eat it concerning contradictory attitudes to the same proposition. This constraint on a solution motivates Subject-Sensitive Invariantism (Hawthorne 2004 chapter 4). On this view, utterances of “knows” always refer to the same relation. The distinctive thesis is that whether the subject knows something depends on facts about the subject that are not traditionally thought of as epistemic. In the case at
hand, whether car-theft is salient to Sally can affect whether she is in a position to know that her car is parked round the corner (whether or not she continues to believe it). If car-theft becomes salient to Sally, she may cease to be in a position to know where her car is. This might help with self-ascriptions of knowledge. But it has no hope of dealing with third-person ascriptions of knowledge, like those I set out in section 2. Nothing changes about Sally or John when we go through the lottery or preface reasoning and change our minds about whether they know. SSI will have to give up EPC and MIC, just like dogmatism.³⁰

³c.iii. Truth-Relativism.

Truth-relativism is a more radical attempt to capture the idea that it was ‘right’ to assert, and then ‘right’ to deny, the very same proposition. Mark Richard 2004 and John MacFarlane 2005 give truth-relativist solutions to the lottery puzzle. I will argue that this strategy cannot be applied to the preface. (I challenge the coherence of truth-relativism more broadly in section 5.) On this view, truth is relativised to a possible world centered on a judge and a time.³¹ Suppose Polly is subjected to our example of the preface puzzle. Let ‘Polly1’ designate the pair of Polly and the time at which she makes her initial judgment that John does know Ally will be at the conference. Let ‘Polly2’ designate the pair of Polly and the later time at which she judges that John doesn’t know Ally will be there. Our truth-relativist holds that there is one proposition Polly changes her mind about, namely: <John knows that Ally will be at the conference>. This avoids the

³⁰ Hawthorne 2004 p. 162-6 tries to explain away the third-person intuitions. Williamson 2005 argues that this removes any dialectical advantage SSI has over dogmatism. Fantl & McGrath 2009 pp. 56-7 reply to Williamson’s objection.
³¹ See also Kolbel 2003; Egan, Hawthorne and Weatherson 2005; Yalcin 2007.
objection to contextualism. The puzzle is dissolved because that proposition is true-for-Polly1 but false-for-Polly2. The alleged sense in which both judgments are ‘right’ or ‘correct’ is that they are both true relative to the judge-time pair at which they were made.

Being true-for-that-judge is only a metaphysically serious sense of ‘correct’ if LINK is true.

(LINK) If p is true-for-J, then p is not completely at odds with the underlying facts.

For example, it can’t be true-for-someone that I know what numbers will win next week’s lottery. That would be a crazy take on my epistemic situation. Again, there are different legitimate ways of categorizing things are red. But it must be true-for-everyone that London buses as red—that’s the only assignment of relative truth that even minimally respects the underlying facts. (Don’t worry that LINK is vague. It’s just a label for a kind of step I will make in the argument below. The reader should be able to assess those steps on their own merit.)

Unfortunately, the truth-relativist solution to the preface puzzle is incompatible with LINK being true. The strategy is to endorse Polly’s reasoning from the premise that John doesn’t know everyone will be at the conference, to the conclusion that he doesn’t know Ally will be there. In reasoning in that kind of way, Polly commits herself to MIC.
(MIC) If S knows that \( P_1 \), S knows that \( P_2 \), \ldots, and S knows that \( P_n \), and S knows that
(if \( P_1 \& P_2 \& \ldots \& P_n \) then \( Q \)), then S is in a position to know \( Q \).

It would be incoherent of Polly to systematically accept any instance of the principle, but reject the generalization. It must always be ‘correct’ for her to accept MIC, so MIC is true-for-Polly1. (Why would you have to accept MIC if it were false-for-you? Nor does it help to assign MIC a third truth-value relative to Polly1.) I will now argue that this means it is true-for-Polly1 that John is in a position to know that no-one will get sick and miss the conference. But that’s completely at odds with the underlying facts: John’s evidence points strongly to at least one person getting sick. So LINK is false.

Relative truth is closed under entailment. Otherwise, the thing we have relativised is not truth.

(CLOSED) Suppose \( P_1 \) is true-for-J, \ldots, \( P_n \) is true-for-J, and \( \{P_1, \ldots, P_n\} \) entails \( Q \). Then \( Q \) is true-for-J.

Given that relative truth is closed under entailment, the following argument is valid.

1. It is true-for-Polly1 that John knows that Ally will be at the conference.
2. It is true-for-Polly1 that John is in the same epistemic position with respect to everyone on his list.
3. It is true-for-Polly1 that John knows who is on the list.
4. MIC is true-for-Polly1.
So,

5. It is true-for-Polly1 that John is in a position to know that no-one on his list
will get sick and miss the conference.

Suppose for reductio that LINK is true. By LINK (roughly), 2 and 3 are true. For it would
be completely at odds with the underlying facts to assign falsity (or a third truth-value) to
the proposition that John is in the same epistemic position with respect to everyone on the
list. To minimally respect the reality of John’s epistemic situation, an assignment of
relative truth must make 2 true, and similarly for 3. 1 is essential to the truth-relativist
resolution of the puzzle, and I argued above that 4 would have to be true. The truth of 5
follows by CLOSED. That’s a reductio of LINK, because it is completely at odds with
the underlying facts for an assignment of relative truth to classify John as in a position to
know no-one will get sick in February. So using truth-relativism to solve the preface
puzzle commits you to LINK being false.

This undermines the truth-relativist resolution of the puzzle, which depends on the
truth of LINK. If a proposition that is true-for-Polly1 is completely at odds with reality,
then being true-for-Polly1 can’t be what makes her judgment ‘correct’. Without LINK,
the truth-relativist hasn’t given a serious sense in which both of Polly’s judgments were
‘right’. Further, relative truth is an honorific. I suspect it is incoherent to hold that one is
relativizing truth, and yet that propositions that fail to minimally respect the underlying
facts are true-for-someone.

Of course, one might apply truth-relativism to the lottery, but not the preface.
Such a truth-relativist would bite the bullet on MIC and EPC. This strikes me as a
dialectically weak position. Resorting to a bold metaphysics, but getting only half the job done, is an unsatisfactory combination. Further, the next section argues that rejecting MIC prevents knowledge form playing the role we want it to.

4. The Point of the Concept of Knowledge

At this point, one might despair of respecting all the intuitions. Biting the bullet on EPC and MIC are common responses to our problem. I will argue MIC is central to the purpose of the concept of knowledge. Rejecting MIC strips knowledge of its role in our lives, as captured by AKP. We must endorse MIC, and EPC as a consequence. The argument of this section indicates the flavour of the metaphysical view defended in sections 5-8.

I claim that the point of the concept KNOWLEDGE is to designate the epistemic standard we aim for our beliefs to meet. To believe is to take a fact to be available as a basis for action (at least it normally is; see my MS). We want the beliefs we act on the reach a certain epistemic standard. It would be very useful for cognitively sophisticated animals to have such a concept designating this standard, to regulate their own thought, and to coordinate with others in joint problem-solving. That’s why we do have such a concept.

I suggest that for KNOWLEDGE to play this role, its use must be governed by our accepting something like MIC. We want to be able to reason from some beliefs that meet the standard to a new belief that also meets the standard. (There would be no point in reasoning if it didn’t produce beliefs that are also fit to be acted on.) Reasoning
typically proceeds from several premises.\textsuperscript{32} So what’s important is whether the relevant beliefs are collectively fit to be reasoned from. It would not be useful to have a way of endorsing individual beliefs that left open whether we could reason from a number of them collectively. For KNOWLEDGE to be a useful concept, we must be bound to accept MIC.

In fact, we don’t need to consider reasoning from multiple premises to see the point. We can consider a case of acting on individual beliefs. Here’s an example of logical inconsistency in belief leading someone to act in a practically inconsistent way. Suppose it is two weeks before John’s philosophy conference. He has 100 confirmed guests, but he believes (on excellent grounds) that at least one person will get sick and have to cancel. Thus John has booked a block of 99 rooms in the hotel for his guests. Yet he believes, of each of the people that has confirmed, that they will be at the conference.

The hotel gives him swipe-card pass-keys for the 99 rooms he booked. John believes that Ally will be at the conference, and acts on that basis, thinking to himself, “Ally’s coming—I’ll put the pass-key to room 1 in her welcome-pack.” He believes that Bert will be at the conference, and thinks to himself, “Bert’s coming—I’ll the pass-key to room 2 in his welcome-pack.” And so on, until he reaches Zod, the 100\textsuperscript{th} guest on his list. And

\textsuperscript{32} Fantl & McGrath (2009) endorse SIC but deny MIC. Here is a juxtaposition of this unhappy combination of views.

When you know a proposition p, no weaknesses in your epistemic position with respect to p … stand in the way of p justifying you in having further beliefs. (Fantl & McGrath 2009 p. 64)

When p is a reason you have to φ, that doesn’t give you free reign in all reasoning involving p and a large number of other premises; but it ought to have some implications for whether to φ. (Fantl & McGrath 2009 p. 82)
then John panics: he has already distributed all the pass-keys he obtained. Where will Zod sleep?

John’s putting the pass-keys in people’s welcome-packs is practically inconsistent with his only booking 99 rooms. A practical inconsistency arises from John’s acting on his beliefs that Ally will be there, etc., and his belief that at most 99 people will make it. It arises because of the logical inconsistency of those beliefs: that Ally will be there, and that Bert will be there, etc., entail that 100 people will make it. We want the standard for belief to prevent this kind of problem. That is, if John’s belief that Ally will be there is fit to be acted on, etc., then his belief that at most 99 guests will make it does not meet the standard. In fact, believing that all 100 guests will make it would meet the standard, for that’s what John needs to believe if he is to distribute pass-keys in the welcome-packs. In reverse, if John’s belief that at most 99 people will turn up is fit to be acted on, then his beliefs that Ally will turn up, etc., do not meet the standard. That is, he should not then put pass-keys into people’s welcome-packs on the basis that that guest will turn up. The moral is that believers act incoherently if they have inconsistent beliefs. The upshot is that we must accept MIC if KNOWLEDGE is to play the appointed role in regulating the beliefs we act on. That is, accepting AKP requires accepting MIC.

Notice that none of John’s acts is based on multiple beliefs, as would be analogous to reasoning from multiple premises; he acts on one belief at a time. Yet John is subject to a practical version of the preface puzzle: if he acts on the basis that at least one person will get sick, then he can’t act on the basis that Ally will make it to the conference (etc.). So it is a mistake to locate the source of the preface puzzle in the agglomeration of small risks when one reasons from multiple premises. Rather, the
source is that having a coherent plan of action requires one’s relevant beliefs to be consistent.

Denying MIC strips the concept KNOWLEDGE of its role in regulating belief and thus action and reasoning. Our philosophical theory should lead us to understand the use we make of the concept, not to mutilate it. If we accept MIC, we must accept EPC. I think that’s the right order of explanation—epistemic probability is parasitic on knowledge.

For the concept to be useful, we must take KNOWLEDGE to satisfy MIC. But the concept would not be useful if we refused to apply it to any beliefs. It would not be good for human beings to find all their beliefs unfit to be acted upon and reasoned from. But how are these two desiderata on a useful concept to be combined? For a commitment to MIC seems to lead straight to skepticism, by means of the preface reasoning. The answer is that the useful way for us to employ the concept is exactly the way we do employ it. That is, the thing to do is apply the concept KNOWLEDGE to certain beliefs, retract the attribution when MIC is used to create a preface puzzle, but quickly forget about the preface and go back to applying the concept liberally. (The appendix to this chapter examines other ways in which our employment of the concept must be flexible if it is to serve as the standard for belief.)

The human mind does work that way, and that is the best way for it to work. The philosophical project of trying to figure out which beliefs really are knowledge, and bringing our attributions into line with that verdict, is profoundly misguided. That project rides roughshod over the point of our employing the concept. The utility of the concept requires that we go back and forth about what it applies to. There is a strong tradition of
thinkers who agree that many of our ordinary concepts are perfectly in order as they are; and that philosophy should not find them wanting because they fail to live up to an artificial ideal of precision and objectivity. That attitude is associated with the ‘ordinary language’ school, and Wittgenstein and his followers. The philosophers working in those traditions are often found unclear, gnomic, even obscurantist by their opponents. That’s because those traditions are anti-metaphysical. Recording how we talk is meant to be an alternative to metaphysical theory-building. I think that’s mistaken. What we need is an alternative metaphysics, not an alternative to metaphysics. We need a theory that explains what’s wrong with wanting a once-and-for-all answer to whether Sally knows her car is parked round the corner. We need a relativist metaphysics of knowledge. In the next few sections, I’ll try to set out how such a theory would have to go. I won’t give a separate argument that the theory is correct. My question is, If there is a solution to the lottery and preface puzzles, how does it go?

5. Metaphysical Evenhandedness and ‘Right’ Judgment.

If there is a satisfactory solution to our puzzles, then our initial acceptance and subsequent denial that Sally knows are both ‘right’ in the crucial sense. What’s that sense of being ‘right’? If it is to let us transcend the theoretical choice between skepticism and dogmatism, we need to be able to make the following speech. (I owe this way of conceiving of the puzzle about relativism to Crispin Wright 2008).

(EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE) Sally doesn’t know her car is round the corner.

But that’s merely what’s ‘right’ for me to judge in my current situation. In my
previous situation, it was ‘right’ for me to judge that Sally does know. Neither of those situations, and neither of my judgments, is metaphysically privileged.

For example, ‘right’ can’t mean that the judgment is epistemically justified. As we think about the lottery case, we are forced to judge that Sally doesn’t know her car is round the corner. So we must accept that our first judgment was false. But the deeper insight, by which we avoid pernicious skepticism, is that the first judgment was ‘right’ nevertheless. We don’t get this result by saying that skepticism is true, but people are often epistemically justified in making false knowledge-attributions. Similarly, it is no alternative to skepticism to hold that, while nobody knows very much, false knowledge attributions are often pragmatically assertible. We need the fact that both judgments are ‘right’ to render philosophically impotent the question of which is true. We have been forced to say that our first judgment was false. To escape skepticism, we must say that that doesn’t matter—what matters is that both judgments were ‘right’. Epistemic justification and pragmatic assertibility can’t play this role.

The above monologue states that neither judgment is metaphysically privileged. That is, the relevant sense of a judgment’s being ‘right’ is a metaphysical sense, rather than an epistemic sense. Most philosophers think there is such a sense of being ‘right’, and they have a simple view of what it consists in. They affirm the following principle, CORRESPONDENCE.

(CORRESPONDENCE) S’s judgment that p is ‘right’ in the metaphysical sense iff p.
In other words, for a judgment to be ‘right’ in the metaphysical sense is for it to be true. We can gloss the idea as: a judgment ‘answers to reality’ iff it is true. On this view, a judgment is ‘right’ iff there is a correspondence between the way the judgment represents things as being (namely, as p being the case) and the way things are (namely, p being the case).

If there is a solution to our puzzles, then CORRESPONDENCE is false. We saw in discussing contextualism that our initial judgment and revised judgment contradict each other. So they can’t both be true. Given CORRESPONDENCE, they can’t both be ‘right’. So if they are both right, then CORRESPONDENCE is false.

To get a handle on what it means to reject CORRESPONDENCE, consider the following truth-relativist alternative.

(RELATIVE CORRESPONDENCE) J’s judgment that p is ‘right’ in the metaphysical sense iff p is true-for-J.

I suggest that the point of truth-relativism is to replace CORRESPONDENCE with RELATIVE CORRESPONDENCE. We still get to say that my Dad’s judgment, that curry is not delicious, is false. But that’s not a metaphysically serious criticism; his judgment is ‘right’ because it is true-for-him. In effect, I argued in section 3.c.iii. that RELATIVE CORRESPONDENCE won’t solve our puzzles. That is, if there is a solution, then RELATIVE CORRESPONDENCE is false. (I’ll argue more generally against RELATIVE CORRESPONDENCE below.)

The view I consider promising says that there is no general characterization of what makes a judgment ‘right’ in the metaphysical sense. On this view, what makes a
judgment ‘right’ is different for different subject-matters. Explaining what makes a
judgment about it ‘right’ is to give a metaphysical theory of the area of discourse. Let me
give two contrasting examples. Firstly, I suggest that J’s judgment that curry is delicious
is ‘right’ iff curry tastes very good to J. Attributions of deliciousness ‘answer to’ the
judge’s tastes. On this view, deliciousness is ‘subjective’ or ‘relative’ because whether it
is ‘right’ to affirm the proposition can vary between judges. By way of contrast, I think
that reality does have an inherent nature, constituted by what Kit Fine calls the ‘facts-in-
metaphysical-reality’ (Fine 2001, 2008). Those are the facts we should be heavy-duty
realists about. One can approximate the notion as: it is a fundamental fact that p. I suggest
that: it is a fact-in-reality that p iff what makes it ‘right’ for everyone to judge that p
is…that p. That is, there is a class of propositions for which CORRESPONDENCE is true;
those are the propositions we should be heavy-duty realists about. But that is a very small
class of propositions. I’ll come back to this in the next section. I’m just trying to show
what one might say about the ‘rightness’ of judgments on a case-by-case basis.

Let me explain what the theory says about truth. Our aim is to legitimize the
EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE. In considering the lottery puzzle, we end up judging that
Sally doesn’t know that her car is round the corner, and hence we find our earlier
judgment to be false. And yet we remain metaphysically evenhanded between the two
judgments: they are both ‘right’. To get this result, we must take the truth of the judgment
to be irrelevant to metaphysics, so it can’t unbalance the metaphysical evenhandedness.
That is, the metaphysical theory of p must be silent on whether p. On this view, the truth
of p is not part of the subject-matter of the metaphysical theory about p. In general,
theories have a subject-matter, and are silent on irrelevant questions. For example,
economic theories do not say what will happen if you shoot electrons at a certain apparatus, and quantum theory does not say what will happen if the government prints more money. (If it helps, think of a theory as a set of propositions. When a proposition is not part of the subject-matter, neither the proposition nor its negation is a member of set that constitutes the theory.) If there is a solution to our puzzles, legitimizing the EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE, then we must view the truth of p as not part of the subject-matter of the metaphysical theory about p. Otherwise, we would not remain metaphysically evenhanded between a false judgment and a true judgment. Rather, the metaphysical theory is only concerned with what makes judgments about p ‘right’.

The theory will say how to use the notion of truth. It is ‘right’ for J to judge that <it is true that p> iff it is ‘right’ for J to judge that <p>. (I think that we can evaluate combinations of judgments in a related way, and it is ‘wrong’ to have different attitudes to <p> and <it is true that p>. But that’s for a later stage in the development of the theory.)

It might sound very radical to claim that the truth of p is irrelevant to the metaphysics of p. It might help to compare the situation with expressivist theories in meta-ethics. Such a view explains why we get to say: “Murder is wrong”; and why we get to say: “It is true that murder is wrong.” Unless she is a monster, the expressivist theorist agrees that it is true that murder is wrong, yet is an anti-realist or non-factualist about such matters. Thus the expressivist must take the question of whether it is true that murder is wrong to be irrelevant to distinguishing factualist from non-factualist areas of discourse. Something other than truth of the proposition marks the deep metaphysical distinction the expressivist aims to delineate. (James Dreier 2004 agrees, but suggests that
the difference lies in the naturalistic theory of what it is to believe a proposition. I find it very odd to make the metaphysics of every subject-matter proceed via the metaphysics of belief. One should be able to be an anti-reductionist about belief and still divide subject-matters into factual and non-factual.)

It is an interesting question whether the truth-relativist can make sense of the EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE in the way I have proposed. I suspect not, and that’s a further reason not to be truth-relativist. This worry is general, not resting on the specifics of the application to knowledge. I will present the worry for the simpler case of deliciousness. To legitimize an EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE for deliciousness, the truth-relativist theory about deliciousness will have to consist only of propositions about who <curry is delicious> is true-for, and will not contain either <curry is delicious> or <curry is not delicious>. The truth-relativist theorist who likes curry agrees that curry is delicious, but takes that to be orthogonal to the metaphysics of deliciousness. The present worry is that this manoeuvre is not enough to secure the EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE; for the truth-relativist account of disagreement in such cases is incompatible with the account of why both judgments are ‘right’.

Let’s see how truth-relativism about deliciousness is meant to work. Suppose Terry likes curry, but Derek doesn’t. The theory is that, relative to Terry’s perspective, it is a fact that curry is delicious. Relative to Terry’s perspective, Derek is in conflict with reality when he judges that curry is not delicious. That’s a crucial part of the truth-relativist story. For Terry and to Derek disagree, Terry must assess Derek’s judgment as being false. That is, Terry assesses Derek’s judgment against the Terry-relative facts, and find the judgment wanting. That wouldn’t make any sense if Derek’s judgment inherently
‘targets’ or ‘is directed towards’ the Derek-relative facts. So if Terry and Derek disagree, then Derek’s judgment does not inherently target the Derek-relative facts.

But if Derek’s judgment is ‘right’ in the metaphysical sense, then it is inherently targeted at the Derek-relative facts. That’s the only explanation for why Derek’s judgment is ‘right’ though it is false-for-Terry, false-for-me, and so on. What else would determine that only the Derek-relative facts are relevant for assessing the ‘rightness’ of his judgment? (The truth-relativist can’t say that it isn’t part of our subject-matter that Derek’s judgment is false-for-Terry, for that fact is part of their metaphysical theory of deliciousness.) That is, the truth-relativist needs to accept RELATIVE CORRESPONDENCE to explain why Derek’s judgment is ‘right’; and that only makes sense if Derek’s judgment is inherently directed at how things are relative to Derek.

The truth-relativist account of Terry and Derek’s disagreeing is incompatible with the account of why both their judgments are ‘right’. So the truth-relativist has not explained how the EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE could be legitimate.

Here’s why the kind of relativism I favour is not subject to an analogous worry. On the truth-relativist view, there are many metaphysically deep truths we can use to assess Derek’s judgment: that it is true-for-Derek, it is false-for-Terry, false-for-me, etc. There is competition between these assessments to be the metaphysically serious one (the one that makes Derek’s judgment ‘right’). I argued that the explanation for why one of those assessments is privileged makes nonsense of the other assessments, which are needed if there is to be disagreement. But on my view, there is only one candidate to be the metaphysically serious assessment of Derek’s judgment. Derek is ‘right’ to judge that <curry is not delicious>, the end. Terry is ‘right’ to judge that Derek’s judgment on that
matter is false. That’s the assessment relevant to gourmet-ism, not to metaphysics. Terry
is not thereby assessing Derek’s judgment in a metaphysically serious way, simply
because he is not assessing it for ‘rightness’ in the relevant sense. By contrast, the truth-
relativist has to explain why it is not metaphysically serious when Terry find’s Derek’s
judgment to be contrary to the facts (-relative-to-Terry). Suppose Terry believes the truth-
relativist theory. How can he see his assessment of Derek’s judgment by the Terry-
relative facts as a non-serious and yet legitimate appraisal?

Here’s another way of approaching the worry about truth-relativism about
deliciousness. It is somewhat plausible that the nature of reality is fundamentally relative
to a time. Relative to one time, Lewis is sitting; relative to another, Lewis is standing and
not sitting. On this view, the facts are time-relative. But this relativity does not give rise
to evenhandedness between parties that disagree. When I first judge that Lewis is sitting,
my judgment ‘concerns’, ‘targets’, or ‘is about’ the relevant time. (See Fine 2005 chapter
8 section 9; MacFarlane 2007, 2009; Dreier 2009.) When I later judge that Lewis is not
sitting, my judgment concerns the later time. I have not contradicted myself by believing
in that way; my two judgments do not disagree. They do not disagree because they
‘target’ different versions of reality. The point is that the lack of disagreement flows from
the kind of relativity envisioned. When the facts, or reality itself, is relative (say to a
time), that does not give rise to disagreements in which both parties are ‘right’. That’s
because a judgment is ‘directed towards’ a particular version of reality, i.e. reality relative
to the judge’s situation. Judgments targeted at different versions of reality do not
disagree. If that’s right, then truth-relativism about deliciousness must postulate a
different metaphysics to the above relativity of reality to a time. Otherwise, judges with
different standards of taste could not disagree about what’s delicious, as they would be ‘targeting’ different versions of gustatory reality. But I know of no suggestion for how to differentiate two versions of truth-relativism, one which is appropriate for the relativity of reality to a time, and the other which is appropriate for deliciousness. (Remember, the difference about when judgments disagree has to flow from a difference in the metaphysics.) So there is no truth-relativist theory on the table that is a candidate to ground the EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE. If that’s right, my proposal is the only relativist game in town.

Let’s return to considering the positive proposal about satisfying the EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE. For it to be possible for contrary judgments about p to both be ‘right’, there must in some sense be “no fact of the matter”. If there was a “fact of the matter” in the relevant sense, then what would make judgments about p ‘right’ would be that they agree with that fact. I suggest that the relevant sense of a “fact of the matter” is Kit Fine’s notion of a “fact-in-metaphysical-reality”. As I said above, those are the matters for which CORRESPONDENCE is true. A relativist account of knowledge and deliciousness is committed to there being no facts-in-reality about such matters. That’s as it should be. I return to the relationship between what judgments are ‘right’ and what facts-in-reality there are in the next section.

I have explained how a view that legitimates the EVENHANDEDNESS MONOLOGUE will have to go. In short, it will have to deny CORRESPONDENCE, and instead hold that the truth of p is not part of the subject-matter of the metaphysics of p. For example, that curry is delicious is not part of the metaphysics of deliciousness. Let me explain how this resolves the lottery and preface puzzles.
One does not sense a puzzle when one changes one changes one’s mind, and judges that Sally doesn’t know her car is round the corner after all. The puzzle starts when one sees the generalization: people know very little. This feels like a deep discovery about the human condition. But the theory allows us to see that it is not a deep insight. The deep insight is that whether it is ‘right’ to judge that Sally knows changes with the judge’s situation. The deep insight is relativism about knowledge, not skepticism. The lottery and preface puzzles create a situation where it is ‘right’ for me to deny that people know; but in more usual situations it is ‘right’ to judge that people do know. My current skeptical verdict is not metaphysically privileged. I must temporarily accept that people know very little; but the theory allows me to see that as reflecting my peculiar position, not the objective nature of epistemic reality. Maybe you can get me to say that no-body knows anything; but I have explained why it doesn’t matter philosophically what I say on that question. Of course, judging that people know very little commits me to judging that the more usual generous attributions of knowledge are false. But the view is that truth and falsity are not metaphysically serious evaluations of how well a judgment answers to reality. For evaluating as true and false is just a matter of comparing the judgment with one’s own current verdict, and thus merely reflects whatever it is ‘right’ for me to judge now.

One might object that what one wants an answer to is whether Sally knows her car is round the corner, and indeed whether anybody knows anything. I have sketched a theory that does not answer that question. So allegedly the theory is silent on exactly the matter of interest. I reply that I have explained why (at least in the seminar room) one should not want an answer to the question of whether Sally knows. The view is that how
one answers that question does not matter philosophically. On the view I have outlined, there is such a question as whether Sally knows, and as to whether curry is delicious. Sometimes those questions are important to answer. For example, if one is trying to make dinner plans with Sally, it is important whether she knows where her car is. If one is trying to decide what to have for dinner, then it is important whether the curry at the restaurant is delicious. But on the view I have sketched, those questions are not relevant in the seminar room. I have explained why, if there is a solution to our puzzles, it will be such a view. To simply insist that one wants to know whether Sally knows is to bone-headedly ignore the possibility of resolving the lottery and preface puzzles. Pressing the question assumes that it has a single ‘objective’ answer; but the view under discussion is that it doesn’t, because the ‘right’ answer is different for different judges.

One would not object to the relativist theory of deliciousness by pressing the theorist on whether curry is delicious, and then declaring victory when I say that curry is delicious. That commits me to saying that people of the opposite opinion judge falsely, but not that they are in conflict with reality in any metaphysically serious sense. That curry is delicious is merely what I think. The only difference with the case of knowledge is that it is intuitively clear that deliciousness is relative in some sense; it is not immediately obvious that knowledge is relative. That’s why I spent sections 2-4 arguing that knowledge is relative. I can’t think of any reason for supposing that it is always obvious whether a subject-matter is relative. Indeed, the existence of the field of meta-ethics shows otherwise.

Another kind of worry one might have is about the metaphysical notion of ‘right’ judgment that I have employed. I have started saying some things about it, though none
of the theses amounts to a definition. How do we to understand ‘rightness’? It is a methodological error to worry too much about this. Everything I have said and will say about the notion helps understand it. One does not need to have either a clear intuitive grasp of the term or a definition of it before one starts building a theory using it. For example, one can’t refuse to consider quark-theory until it is explained to one what a quark is. I hesitate to say that ‘right’ is a theoretical term, defined by the theory it is embedded in. For I think that CORRESPONDENCE and RELATIVE CORRESPONDENCE are alternative, false views of the ‘rightness’ of judgments in the metaphysical sense. I think that we do have some intuitions about ‘rightness’, even if it takes some work to recognize that. For example, I think that relativism about deliciousness is plausible. I think that curry is delicious, my dad disagrees, and so I think his judgment on the matter is false. But in the metaphysically serious sense, it is the ‘right’ thing for him to think, because curry doesn’t taste good to him. Insofar as that thought is an ‘intuition’, the notions it features are ‘intuitive’. In particular, it would seem that we grope pre-theoretically for the notion of ‘right’ judgment I am articulating. In metaphysics, we start off with hazy notions. We sharpen them by building a theory from them. For example, Kit Fine develops his conception of realism by telling us more about ‘facts-in-reality’ (2001). One can object that not enough has been said about how a notion works for one to fully understand it, and raise questions that need to be answered. I welcome such objections. One cannot object that one didn’t have a good grasp on the notion before the theory about how it works has been put forward.

Let me end this section with a bit more detail on the case of deliciousness, which I claimed intuitively favours my brand of relativism. My Dad does not like curry. He
thinks that curry is not delicious. I disagree. I think curry is delicious, and that my Dad’s judgment on that matter is false. Yet it is not a serious metaphysical position that I am locked on to the nature of deliciousness, and my Dad isn’t. His judgment is false, but it is the ‘right’ verdict for him to give, because curry does not taste good to him. It does not do my Dad metaphysical justice merely to say that his false judgment is epistemically justified.

Contextualists about the word “delicious” reject this intuitive picture. They say that an utterance of “Curry is delicious” means that curry tastes very good to an appropriate proportion of a group of people determined by the context of utterance. Versions of contextualism on which I don’t disagree with my dad are thereby counter-intuitive. According to versions that secure our disagreement, we disagree about whether curry tastes delicious to most people in some group. That’s implausible. My Dad is painfully aware that most (British) people love curry. He bemoans the fact that most people these days like “foreign muck,” rather than proper food like fish and chips or cottage pie. So our disagreement does not stem from my Dad having a false sociological view. It stems from the fact that my Dad doesn’t like curry, and so thinks it is not delicious. More generally, we can suppose that my Dad and I have the same information about which people really like curry. So it seems that contextualism is unsatisfactory. (I admit the matter needs more detailed examination that I can provide here.)

(Cappelen & Hawthorne 2009 chapter 4 try to undermine the relativist intuition. They worry about intuitions framed in generic terms. But I disagree with my Dad in the same way about whether this plate of curry is delicious. Further, do not ask whether I really or strongly disagree with my Dad (tout court). Ask whether we disagree about
whether this plate of curry is delicious. Cappelen & Hawthorne also make trouble for
truth-relativist semantics on the basis of an ‘exocentric’ use, on which someone who
dislikes hotdogs can encourage a child who likes them to eat one by saying, “Hotdogs are
delicious!” This is irrelevant to my theory, which concerns what judgments are
acceptable. The speaker here does not judge that hotdogs are delicious, so there is no
challenge to my theory.)


This section develops the approach to metaphysics centred around the notion of ‘right’
judgment. Actually, I think we get a more flexible and powerful metaphysics if we take
the central notion to be a kind of goodness, rather than rightness. To distinguish it from
epistemic evaluation, let’s label it ‘metaphysical acceptability’. I will describe two
advantages of doing things in terms of the goodness of judgments.

Firstly, ‘rightness’ sounds like a kind of requirement. It doesn’t make much sense
to say that a given judge would be ‘right’ to judge that p and ‘right’ to judge that not-p. It
does make sense to say that either judgment would be ‘good’ or ‘acceptable’. This allows
the theory to be ‘permissive’ about judgments about borderline cases. Suppose a car is
half-way in colour between paradigmatic red and paradigmatic orange. We think it is
acceptable for Jane to judge that the car is red, and acceptable for her to judge that it is
not red. Crispin Wright is,

impressed by the datum that … one is entitled, if one is so moved, to a verdict in
the borderline area. (Wright Forthcoming a p. 5)
Mark Richard (2004) agrees: judges can permissibly disagree about whether winning $1,000,000 makes you rich for a New Yorker. More precisely, a given judge can go either way on that question; either judgment is ‘metaphysically acceptable’. I argue in chapter 6 for this gloss on Wright’s ‘permissiveness’ intuition. The intuition is not that either judgment would be true, for that entails a contradiction. The intuition is not that either judgment would be epistemically justified, as that leaves it open that one of the verdicts misrepresents the fact of the matter. The intuition is that either verdict fits reality well enough. That is, the intuition concerns the metaphysically relevant evaluation of judgments, which cannot be taken to be a matter of their truth. I develop a theory of vagueness from these materials in chapter 6.

The second advantage of doing things in terms of goodness is that it allows that in some cases, even the best judgment for someone to make is bad. In such a case, we can say that the question of whether p presents the judge with a ‘genuine paradox’. This need not mean that both judgments are on a par. Goodness comes in degrees, unlike requirement or permission. So it can be that judging that p is better than judging that not-p, though both are bad. (Similarly, the best action in a moral dilemma will still be morally quite bad.) I will argue in chapter 6 that something like this is going on in the case of the sorites paradox. For the time being, let’s use this idea to refine the treatment of the lottery and preface puzzles.

In the last section, I said that we can remain metaphysically evenhanded between our old judgment that Sally knows her car is round the corner, and our current judgment that she doesn’t know. Then we notice that the lottery- or preface-reasoning can be employed against just about any attribution of knowledge. Does this create a situation in which it is
‘right’ to judge that nobody knows anything? In our new ideology, we can say that pressing the puzzles creates a situation in which either judgment about whether skepticism is true is ‘bad’. This is compatible with one judgment being worse than the other. Maybe the best judgment in that situation is that skepticism is true. But not only is that judgment not metaphysically privileged, it is metaphysically bad. It may be the best that one can do under the circumstances, but those circumstances are defective. That is, pressing the lottery and preface puzzles distorts our understanding of the human epistemic predicament. This is accurate to the phenomenology of the puzzles: we are not even momentarily happy to say that nobody knows anything, whereas we were happy to say that Sally doesn’t know her car is round the corner. Maybe paradigm-case considerations, and the natural view of what Sally should take as a basis for action, count in favour of attributing knowledge to her; but those factors are trumped by the preface reasoning.

Let’s see how to approach metaphysics using the notion of metaphysically acceptable judgment. Nearly all judgments have a level of metaphysical acceptability.33 Saying what makes judgments that p acceptable replaces saying what grounds the truth of p (e.g. Fine 2001, Schaffer 2008). This allows us to understand subjectivity and objectivity as follows.

P is completely subjective iff only facts about the judge determine whether it is metaphysically acceptable for them to judge that p.

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33 Maybe we can characterize the ‘open future’ as the view that predictions don’t have a level of metaphysical acceptability until the time the concern has passed. They haven’t ‘answered to reality’ till then. They do already have a level of epistemic acceptability.
P is \textit{partially subjective} iff facts about the judge (qua judge) play a partial role in determining whether it is metaphysically acceptable for them to judge that p.

P is \textit{objective} iff one occurrent attitude is the only metaphysically acceptable one for anyone to take towards p.

Deliciousness is completely subjective. (An analogous moral anti-realism holds that there are moral beliefs and judgments. For them to be metaphysically acceptable is for them to reflect the judge’s deepest commitments of a certain kind. Of course, that’s not what it is for them to be morally acceptable.) I think that the lottery and preface puzzles show that knowledge is partially subjective. Whether a knowledge-attribution is metaphysically acceptable depends both on what’s psychologically salient to the judge, and on the situation of the subject of the ascription. Consider a borderline case where the underlying precise facts are objective, such as whether winning $1,000,000 makes you rich for a New Yorker. On the definitions I have suggested, such a proposition is neither subjective nor objective. I don’t mind if the reader prefers slightly different definitions. The ideology of metaphysical acceptability usefully distinguishes many cases, and it doesn’t matter exactly how the rough categorizations of common-sense map on to them. (I give a more detailed taxonomy in chapter 6.)

Metaphysical acceptability helps us lock on to the idea of reality-as-it-is-in-itself. I accept Kit Fine’s unanalyzed concept of a ‘fact in metaphysical reality’, abbreviated R(p) (Fine 2001, 2008). A good approximation of R(p) is: it is a fundamental fact that p. Some facts are metaphysically privileged. The others are still facts. Suppose that p. Realism about p holds that R(p). Anti-realism about p holds that not-R(p). It is not even a fact that
there are no chairs, let alone a fundamental fact. Anti-realism about chairs is not the
trivially false view that R(there are no chairs). It is the view that there are no R-facts
about chairs. There are chairs, but they are not elements of metaphysical reality, i.e. not
‘metaphysically real’ (Fine 2008). Analogously, there is such a property as being
delicious, and such a relation as knowing, but they are not ‘metaphysically real’.

Realism is linked to metaphysical acceptability by the following thesis. (Here I
differ from Fine.)

It is a fact-in-reality that p iff what makes it metaphysically acceptable for
everyone to judge that p is: that p.

The metaphysics of p consists in saying what makes judging that p metaphysically
acceptable or not. Usually, the explanation will not appeal to whether p. For example, our
accounts of deliciousness, vague properties, and knowledge did not appeal to facts about
their instantiation. (The point of the accounts is that they are silent on the instantiation of
the property.) This won’t always be the case. If it is a fundamental fact that p, the
explanation of what makes it ‘right’ or metaphysically acceptable to judge that p will be:
that p. Such an explanation shows that we can only understand the area of discourse by
adding such facts to our metaphysical picture of reality. So saying what makes it
metaphysically acceptable to judge that p tells us whether p belongs to reality-as-it-is-in-
itself.

Facts about knowledge aren’t fundamental. Everyone is anti-realist about
knowledge in that sense. My distinctive claim is that knowledge is partially subjective:
whether it is metaphysically acceptable to attribute knowledge to Sally differs between judges.

The anti-realist need not explain the metaphysical acceptability of a judgment in terms of R-facts. The anti-realist needs to understand the acceptability of judgments that p in more fundamental terms, not in absolutely fundamental terms. For example, it is metaphysically acceptable for me to judge that the cake is delicious, because it is disposed to taste good to me. Judging something to be red is metaphysically acceptable because of the precise shade the thing is. The explanans are not facts-in-reality. The anti-realist explains the practice of judging whether p, and one does not understand a way of life in terms of fundamental physics. One should also be anti-realist about how metaphysically acceptable a given judgments is, for that won’t be a fundamental fact. (There are different possible views about what makes judgments about metaphysical acceptability metaphysically acceptable.)

Let me end this section by gesturing at two extensions of the ideology of metaphysically acceptable judgment that are not crucial to solving the lottery and preface puzzles. So far, I have only described judgments as metaphysically acceptable or not. Firstly, I extend the ideology to apply to combinations of attitudes. Recall that because it is a borderline case, it is acceptable to judge that Quentin’s car is red, and it is acceptable to judge that it isn’t. Extending the ideology, we can say that it is metaphysically unacceptable to [judge that Quentin’s car is red and judge that it isn’t]. Either attitude is acceptable, but not both together. Similarly, it is a top-down fact that it is metaphysically unacceptable to [judge that Quentin’s car is red and judge that it is orange]. Metaphysically evaluating an individual judgment is evaluating how it answers to reality;
metaphysically evaluating combinations of judgments is evaluating how they fit together. Secondly, I extend the ideology so that the occurring attitude of suspending judgment towards a proposition can be metaphysically acceptable or not. By contrast, ignoring a proposition is not to take an occurring attitude towards it, and is not evaluable in that way. When one suspends judgment on a borderline case, intuitively one does not miss out on a fact of the matter. I capture this by saying that suspending judgment is metaphysically acceptable. Both extensions of the ideology are important to the account of vagueness given in chapter 6.

7. Metaphysics and the Semantics of Natural Language.

This metaphysics does not conflict with standard theories of the meaning of the word “know”. My theory concerns when a judgment is metaphysically acceptable. There’s nothing linguistic about that. I have not given an (assertibility-conditions) theory of meaning. On the other hand, a compositional meaning theory should be about purely linguistic matters. Its job is to explain why “le gateau est delicieux” means in French that the cake is delicious, in terms of the way the sentence is made up of those words. It is not the job of linguistics to tell you whether the cake is delicious, or how to judge on that issue. On the truth-conditional approach, we want the theory to predict that “le gateau est delicieux” is true iff the cake is delicious. Again, that’s independent of whether the cake is delicious, or how to judge on that issue. Anti-realism about such entities says that the cake exists, and that there is a property of deliciousness, though they are not ‘metaphysically real’ because they do not figure in any of the R-facts. So we can assign
the cake as the meaning of “le gateau”, and deliciousness as the meaning of “delicieux”. Metaphysical antirealism is compatible with referential semantics.

On my view, our compositional semantics is neutral on metaphysical issues. Let’s consider a theory that builds the metaphysics into the semantics. I will argue it makes it impossible to explain compositionality. Michael Dummett (1993) suggests that the meaning of a sentence consists in its assertibility-conditions. He has an epistemic conception of assertibility in mind, but let’s consider the corresponding view for metaphysical acceptability. Compositionality says that the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meanings of its parts. So if meanings are assertibility conditions, then the assertibility conditions of “p” and “q” must determine the assertibility conditions of “not-p”, “p or q”, and “p and q”. But I can’t see how they would. (Dummett 1993 p. 473 admits that, after thirty years of trying, he can’t see how to do negation.) For example, “Quentin’s car is red” is assertible, and “Quentin’s car is orange” is assertible, but “Quentin’s car is red and Quentin’s car is orange” is not assertible. I say that there is a top-down rule that red and orange are to be treated as incompatible. If that’s right, the assertibility conditions of the whole is not determined by the assertibility conditions of the parts. But that’s incompatible with meanings being assertibility-conditions (which would therefore have to compose). This kind of argument against epistemically constrained conceptions of meaning is championed by Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore (Fodor 1998, chapters 4 and 5; Fodor & Lepore 2002).

Prima facie, the Dummettian theory is not a sensible attempt to explain compositionality. By contrast, truth-conditional or propositional approaches have born fruit. It seems to me a methodological mistake to hold the attribution of content in
psychology and linguistics hostage to metaphysical concerns. Linguistics seeks to explain how linguistic communication works. That’s a matter of speakers and hearers knowing the linguistic conventions of word meaning and sentence construction, and understanding each others’ psychology. Compositional semantics is concerned with the former, or more precisely, what the linguistic conventions are. (How knowledge of the conventions is implemented in the brain is another matter.) For example, one convention might be that “knows” refers to knowledge. English speaker associate the word “knows” with their concept KNOWS, and this allows them to code and decode utterances about knowledge, i.e. to communicate about that topic. That’s what linguistic theory should capture, and it has nothing to do with the objectivity or relativity of knowledge. One cannot go to the linguistics department and tell them that they are pursuing a defective research programme because morality and knowledge are relative, and this needs to show up in the semantics of natural language. Metaphysicians don’t get to say what counts as good cognitive science. Similarly, I think it is a methodological mistake to argue from the metaphysical thought that there is no ‘objective fact’ about whether curry is delicious, to the linguistic conclusion that we should be contextualists about “delicious”. It is also a mistake to argue from invariantism about “delicious” to the metaphysical conclusion that there must be an ‘objective fact’ about what’s delicious. My theory gets these things right by making the truth of p irrelevant to the metaphysics of p.

My metaphysics does require that we don’t read too much into certain models of meaning we use to explain compositionality. A standard implementation of truth-conditional semantics assigns objects and functions as the ‘semantic values’ of expressions. Assertoric utterances get a semantic value (Kaplan’s ‘content’) that is a
function from possible worlds to \{\text{True, False}\}. That function models the truth-conditions of the utterance. An utterance of “the cake is delicious” maps the actual world to one of \{\text{True, False}\}. So there is no candidate semantic value it is metaphysically acceptable for all English speakers to conform to. This does not affect the explanatory power of positing semantic values as part of the scientific project of explaining compositionality. That task is to explain the meaning of complex sentences, \textit{given} the meaning of the atomic expressions. In the current terms, we explain how \textit{whichever} semantic value is assigned to “delicious” affects the semantic value of uttered sentences containing that word. This project does not assume that there is exactly one function that it is metaphysically acceptable for all English speakers to conform to. Nor does it require figuring out the semantic value of the atoms; we only need to know their type. (That’s fortunate. We would get into a pickle trying to settle on the semantic value of “knows”. Any candidate satisfying Multiple Item Closure would be either completely skeptical or encode objectionable dogmatism.)

Modeling meanings as semantic values is a good way to explain how compositionality works. Specific explanatory purposes warrant certain idealizations. We can ignore vagueness and the relativity of deliciousness and knowledge when explaining compositionality. When we are interested in the topics of this paper, we should not take seriously a model of meaning that abstracts away from those very phenomena.

8. Salience and Knowledge Attributions.
Let’s focus back on the account of knowledge. I need to explain the sense in which the account respects SIC, MIC and so on; and I need to explain how it avoids the objection to truth-relativism made in section 3.c.iii.

Facts about what is psychologically salient to the judge affect whether it is metaphysically acceptable for them to make a knowledge-attribution. Our initial judgment that Sally knows her car is round the corner is metaphysically acceptable. Once the question of car-theft is psychologically salient to the judge, the only acceptable judgment is that Sally doesn’t know. The metaphysical theory is silent on whether Sally knows—that’s irrelevant to understanding the nature of knowledge.

This theory gets right what contextualism gets wrong. You end up judging that Sally doesn’t know her car is parked round the corner, and you remember you just judged that she does know that. Thus you judge that your initial verdict was false, and in that sense wrong. You changed your mind. (This is compatible with recognizing that your previous judgment was metaphysically acceptable.)

I understand the salience of a proposition psychologically. Either the judge takes q into consideration in judging whether S knows that p; or the judge ignores q in so doing. Judgment is occurrent belief; taking into consideration is also an occurrent mental phenomenon. It is initially metaphysically acceptable to judge that Sally knows that her car is round the corner partly because the judge ignores whether Sally knows that her car hasn’t been stolen. This is so even if someone judges purely on the basis of testimony that Sally knows her car is round the corner. If the possibility of car-theft is salient to the judge, and Sally’s situation is as stipulated, then it is metaphysically unacceptable for them to judge that she knows where her car is.
A knowledge-attribution is part of a representation of the subject’s epistemic position. It is metaphysically unacceptable to represent Sally as in a position to know that her car hasn’t been stolen and taken elsewhere. When that issue is taken into consideration as a way for Sally’s belief to be false, judging that Sally knows her car is round the corner represents her as able to know that it hasn’t been stolen. When the issue is not salient, judging that Sally knows her car is round the corner does not represent that she is able to know it hasn’t has been stolen. That’s why taking car-theft into consideration stops it being metaphysically acceptable for you to judge that Sally knows her car is round the corner.

This explains why affirmation is the only metaphysically acceptable attitude to Single Item Closure. To judge that S knows that p, taking into consideration that q is a way for p to be false, is to thereby represent that S is in a position to know not-q. Not to judge that this is so would be incoherent, a metaphysically unacceptable combination of mental states. When one is not taking q into consideration, there may be nothing wrong with not judging that S knows that not-q. Note that the theory does not say that SIC is true; it says that it is metaphysically unacceptable to deny or suspend judgment in it. The same goes for MIC and EPC.

The judge’s taking into account a matter they had been ignoring is also the key to the other phenomena described in section two. One can judge metaphysically acceptably that Sally knows her car hasn’t been stolen, while ignoring the issue of assigning it a likelihood given Sally’s evidence. Once one considers it, the judge must deny that the epistemic probability for Sally that her car has been stolen is zero. That represents car-theft as epistemically possible for Sally; i.e. it represents that Sally doesn’t know it hasn’t
been stolen. (That’s why only affirming the Epistemic Possibility Constraint is metaphysically acceptable.) Ceasing to ignore the question of the epistemic probability changes the acceptability of judging that Sally knows.

The metaphysical acceptability of judgments about epistemic probability will vary between judges, as it does for judgments about knowledge. For S is in a position to know that p iff there is no chance given S’s evidence that not-p. A judge-invariant metaphysically acceptable answer as to whether [Sally’s evidence leaves no chance that her car is not round the corner] would determine a judge-invariant metaphysically acceptable answer about whether she is in a position to know it is still there.

Similarly, there can’t be a judge-invariant metaphysically acceptable answer to whether Sally is epistemically entitled to assert that her car is parked round the corner. Being known is the necessary and sufficient epistemic condition for being asserted, and for being taken as a premise. So whether it is metaphysically acceptable for someone to judge that [Sally is epistemically entitled to assert her car is round the corner] depends on whether car-theft is salient to them. Insofar as we intuitively affirm KNA, AKP etc in the cases at hand, this is the right result.

In the preface puzzle, the judge ignores whether John knows the conjunction, when acceptably judging of each person on the list that John knows that they will be at the conference. If they consider whether John knows that all 100 people will be there, they must judge that he can’t—given John’s evidence, the probability that someone will get sick is quite high. Now suppose the judge addresses whether John knows Ally will be at the conference, taking into consideration that it is likely given John’s evidence that someone will get sick, and that John is in the same epistemic situation with respect to the
attendance of each person on the list. The only acceptable way to do so is to affirm that there is a chance given John’s evidence that Ally will get sick, and hence that John does not know she will be at the conference. Judging that there is no chance Ally will get sick, and that John is in the same epistemic situation with respect to the other 100 conference-goers, thereby represents that there is no chance given John’s evidence that anyone will get sick. Hence judging that John knows that Ally will be at the conference ceases to be metaphysically acceptable.

That’s how the ‘epistemic probability’ version of the preface puzzle works. The ‘closure’ version is very similar. If we represent John’s epistemic situation with respect to all 100 people on the list, and that it is the same in each case, then we can’t judge that John knows Ally will be there, on pain of representing him as in a position to know that all 100 people will make it to the conference.

Salience also explains our different reactions to winning a lottery versus Jonathan Vogel’s ‘heartbreaker’ case. Prima facie, you can’t know you won’t win the lottery. But (prima facie) you can know that not all sixty golfers in the competition will get a hole-in-one on the fiendish ‘heartbreaker’ hole. (Vogel 1999 p. 165.) A matchbox might contain a few duds, but (prima facie) you can know that not every match in the box is a dud. (Hawthorne 2004 pp. 12-20.) What explains the difference in our reaction to a lottery versus the heartbreaker and the matchbox? I think it is the psychological proximity of preface-style considerations. It is usually salient when considering a lottery that every ticket has a chance of winning. (When it is not salient, a judge can acceptably insist that they know they won’t win. For example, a judge can partition outcomes only into their winning versus their losing. Hawthorne 2004 pp. 17-20 gets the psychology exactly
right.) When the matter is salient, you must respect that you are in similar epistemic positions with regards to each ticket’s winning. As in the preface, that forces the judgment that you can’t know of any particular ticket that it will lose. By contrast, we usually consider the heartbreaker and matchbox cases without there being such a salient set of propositions the subject is similarly positioned towards, and for which it is salient that the subject does not know that they are all true. When such a conjunction becomes salient, we must change our judgment about the case. (Again, Hawthorne 2004 points this out, pp. 17-20.) For example, if we think of the matchbox as one amongst millions made by a company, we must judge that we can’t know that no box contains only dud matches. The decent probability that there is a box that’s all duds is the result of the small but non-zero probabilities that any particular box is all duds. So we can’t know that this box is not all duds. Similarly, we can imagine the golf-competition being played every day for a million years. There’s a decent chance that on one such day, every golfer will get a hole-in-one on the heartbreaker. The actual competition isn’t special, so there’s a small chance that every golfer will achieve the feat today.34

Jason Stanley has worried that relativist theories of knowledge can’t say what the factivity of knowledge comes to (2005 pp. 145-7). We can’t capture the factivity of knowledge by saying that if p is false, then any judgment that someone knows that p is metaphysically unacceptable. Suppose I think Jennifer falsely but acceptably judges that Sally knows that her car is parked round the corner. Then I should say the same thing about Jennifer’s judgment that she knows that Sally knows her car is parked round the

34 This framework solves the problem with objective chance (Hawthorne 2004 pp. 4-5, 93-4). A judge can ignore that according to quantum theory, there is a non-zero objective chance that the cricket ball will pass through the window without breaking it. It is then metaphysically acceptable for them to judge they know the ball will break the window.
corner. Again, it is metaphysically acceptable for my Dad to judge he knows that curry is not delicious, even though it is. So let’s replace the bad first-pass at capturing factivity with the following. It is metaphysically unacceptable to: judge that S knows that p and not judge that p. It is metaphysically unacceptable to: judge that not-p and not judge that S does not know that p.

Let’s see how the theory avoids the objection to truth-relativism outlined in section 3c.iii. On this view, it is metaphysically acceptable at t₁ for Polly to judge that <John knows Ally will be at the conference>. At t₂, it is no longer acceptable for Polly to judge that <John knows Ally will be at the conference>. It is not acceptable at either time for Polly to judge that <John knows everyone will be at the conference>.

One might worry that this position is subject to an objection similar to that I made against truth-relativism, assuming that acceptability is a kind of permissibility. The following argument is valid in standard deontic logic. Premise (2) is meant to gloss that Polly must treat knowledge as closed in the manner of MIC. Premise (4) is meant to gloss that Polly must treat John as in the same epistemic position with respect to each person on his list. Asserting (1) but denying (5) is how my approach is meant to be preferable to truth-relativism.

(1) At t₁, Polly is required not to judge that <John is in a position to know everyone will be at the conference>.

(2) At t₁, Polly is required not to: [judge that <John knows Ally will be there>, judge that <John knows Betty will be there>, etc., and not judge that <John is in a position to know everyone will be there>].
(3) At $t_1$, Polly is required not to: [judge that <John knows Ally will be there> and judge that <John knows Betty will be there> and ...].

But,

(4) At $t_1$, for all $S_i$ and $S_j$ on John’s list, Polly is required not to: [judge that <John knows $S_i$ will be at the conference> and not judge that <John knows $S_j$ will be there>].

So,

(5) At $t_1$, Polly is required not to: judge that <John knows Ally will be at the conference>.

I reply that premises (2) and (4) are false. At $t_1$, Polly judges that <John knows Ally will be at the conference>, and does not judge that <John knows Betty will be at the conference>. But she is not violating the real requirement to treat John as in the same epistemic position with respect to each person on his list. What is forbidden is judging that <John knows Ally will be there> while denying or suspending judgment on whether <John knows Betty will be there>. Polly judges the former while ignoring the latter proposition, i.e. having no occurrent attitude towards it. Premises (2) and (4) have to be discarded in favour of (2*) and (4*), which can’t be used to argue from (1) to (5).

(2*) At $t_1$, Polly is required not to: [judge that <John knows Ally will be there>, judge that <John knows Betty will be there>, etc., and deny or suspend on whether <John is in a position to know everyone will be there>].
(4*) At $t_I$, for all $S_i$ and $S_j$ on John’s list, Polly is required not to: [judge that $<\text{John knows } S_i \text{ will be at the conference}>$ and deny or suspend on whether $<\text{John knows } S_j \text{ will be there}>$].

If fact, I suggested at the end of section 5 that it is best to make a kind of goodness the basic term of our theory, as opposed to a deontic notion like requirement or permissibility. There is no prospect of anything like standard deontic logic for such a notion. So there is no prospect of the objection to truth-relativism also applying to my theory.

I end this section with a note about how our puzzles relate to another problem in epistemology. Philosophers defending a ‘have your cake and eat it’ response to the lottery usually extend it to deal with Brain-In-a-Vat (BIV) skepticism. I don’t think that’s right. BIV skepticism turns on issues of epistemic priority, i.e. whether the Moorean solution is correct; epistemic priority is not at issue in the lottery puzzle. The lottery puzzle concerns whether the subject knows that $p$, versus $p$ being merely very likely given their evidence; that’s not the contrast at issue in BIV skepticism. I suspect that the puzzle about BIV skepticism turns on a philosopher’s mistake, whereas the lottery and preface puzzles manifest a deep fact about the metaphysics of knowledge.

9. Conclusion.

I judge that curry is delicious. But the deep philosophical question is not whether curry is delicious, but rather which judgments about that matter are metaphysically acceptable.
The answer to the deep question is that it is metaphysically acceptable for J to judge that curry is delicious iff curry tastes good to J. When we consider our lottery puzzle, we judge that Sally doesn’t know that her car is parked round the corner. But again, the deep question is not whether Sally knows, but rather which judgments on that issue are metaphysically acceptable. The answer to the deep question is that people usually ignore lottery- and preface-style considerations, and this helps make their generous attributions of knowledge metaphysically acceptable.

Knowledge works this way because it is the epistemic standard we aim for our premises and assertions to meet. That standard must be attainable, but also guarantee that the beliefs we properly acting on in addressing a practical situation are consistent. Those competing demands on knowledge can only be accommodated by loosening its ties to Reality.

Appendix: Pragmatic Encroachment.

Our assessment of the practical cost of a subject’s having a false belief that p affects our judgment as to whether they know that p. Call this ‘pragmatic encroachment’ into our knowledge attributions. This appendix extends my theory to deal with puzzles about this. Here’s our working example (following Stanley 2005 pp. 3-5).

It’s Friday afternoon. There’s a long line at the bank, so Bob decides to leave depositing his cheque till Saturday. It’s not important that he deposit it immediately. Bob is stopped in the street by Hannah, who asks him whether the bank will be open on Saturday. He answers, “The bank will be open on Saturday. I know because I was there on a Saturday only two weeks ago.” It is really important to Hannah and Sarah that they deposit a cheque by Saturday—they have a big direct debit due. They also remember that the bank was open on Saturday two weeks ago, but want to be sure about this Saturday. Hannah reports
back to Sarah, “No, that guy doesn’t know either that the bank will be open on Saturday.”

Intuitively, Bob spoke truly, Hannah spoke truly, but they are disagreeing about whether Bob knows that the bank will be open on Saturday. Those three things can’t all be true. As with the lottery paradox, there are three broad responses to this puzzle. The first is that Bob is right and Hannah is wrong—the end. (This is what subject-sensitive invariantism says, e.g. Hawthorne 2004 chapter 4 and Stanley 2005. For it holds that what matters is what’s at stake for the subject of the knowledge ascription, and Bob does not have much riding on the bank’s being open.) The second is that Bob is wrong and Hannah is right—the end. The third is that they are both right in the important sense. For example, contextualism says that Bob and Hannah both spoke truly, but did not actually contradict one another. I will extend the framework I proposed to deal with the lottery and preface puzzles to deal with this problem. I will note places where the resulting view is superior to subject-sensitive invariantism and to contextualism. (I should admit that the case against a contextualist account of the puzzles about pragmatic encroachment is weaker than the case against a contextualist resolution of the lottery and preface puzzles.)

We can have different purposes in evaluating whether Bob knows. We can be interested in whether Bob should leave depositing his cheque till Saturday. We can be interested in whether Bob should plan a bank robbery for Saturday. We can be interested in whether Hannah and Sarah should leave depositing their cheques till Saturday. We can be focused on different practical questions for different agents, who need not be the subject of the knowledge ascription. That focus affects whether it is metaphysically
acceptable for us to attribute knowledge to the subject. In the example, we are interested first with Bob and then with Hannah’s normative situation.

It is worse for Hannah to falsely believe that the bank will be open on Saturday than it is for Bob to do so. So when we are focused on Hannah’s normative situation in deciding when to go to the bank, we rightly judge the attribution of knowledge to any subject more skeptically. Hannah can’t leave the trip to the bank till Saturday, because she does not know that the bank will be open then. The Action-Knowledge Principle captures this intuitively compelling explanation. We are focused on Hannah’s situation, so whether other subjects know is only relevant insofar as it affects whether she knows. Other subject’s knowledge is relevant because they can tell her things. We judge that Bob doesn’t know that the bank will be open because we judge that Hannah can’t come to know that on the basis of his testimony. When we are focused on Hannah’s situation, the intuition is that Bob spoke falsely to her; he claimed to know but didn’t. Contextualism gets the wrong result here, as it claims that the truth of Bob’s utterance depends on what’s at stake for him as the speaker. (Notice that we can preserve the principle that: if A and B both believe that p on the same evidence, then A knows that p iff B knows that p. Whose practical interests are salient to us affects whether we acceptably judge that they both know that p, or that neither do.)

Suppose we focus on Hannah’s normative situation, and so judge that Bob does not know that the bank will be open on Saturday. An obvious way to shift the normative focus from Hannah to Bob is to consider whether he should act on the premise that the bank will be open on Saturday. Considering how the AKP applies to Bob shifts the focus to his normative situation. My theory correctly predicts that when we consider how the
AKP applies to Bob, we revise the verdict reached when focused on Hannah’s situation.
Now we judge that Bob can leave his trip to the bank till Saturday, because he knows it
will be open. That judgment is metaphysically acceptable because the judge focuses on
Bob, just as the contrary verdict was metaphysically acceptable when the judge focused
on Hannah. Thus my theory endorses the intuition that Hannah spoke truly, and the AKP.

(That is dialectically important. Stanley argues that no view can accommodate
that intuition and AKP, and that given the choice we should accept AKP and reject our
intuition that Hannah spoke truly (2005 pp. 114-5). His subject-sensitive invariantist
theory is thus right to reject the intuition, claims Stanley. But if some theory does endorse
AKP and the intuition that Hannah spoke truly, then it is a mark against Stanley’s view
that it rejects the intuition.)

In the lottery and preface puzzles, the acceptability of a knowledge-ascription
depends partly on which matters are psychologically salient to the judge. In the present
case, what makes a difference to the metaphysical acceptability of a knowledge-
attribution is: which practical question for which agent the judge is psychologically
focused on. This addition to my treatment of the lottery and the preface puzzles is very
modest, and of a kind already accepted. The theory says that Bob and Hannah’s
judgments are both metaphysically acceptable, though they disagree. There will also be
corresponding variation in the metaphysical acceptability of judging that Bob is
epistemically entitled to assert that the bank will be open.

In our initial example we shift which agent we are focused on in assessing the
knowledge-attribution. Here’s a case where we hold the agent fixed, but shift the
practical question we are interested in. Consider whether Agnes knows that her car won’t
get stolen in Greenpoint. She currently lives in Greenpoint, but is struggling financially, and rent in Bushwick is substantially lower. If we are interested in whether Agnes should move from Greenpoint to Bushwick, then we might judge that Agnes knows that her car won’t get stolen in Greenpoint, she doesn’t know it won’t get stolen in Bushwick, and that this is an argument she can give for staying in Greenpoint. However, if we are interested in whether Agnes should renew her insurance against car-theft, the best judgment is that she doesn’t know that her car won’t get stolen in Greenpoint. Intuitively, whether she should take it as a premise shifts, along with whether she knows it. The intuitions are in perfect harmony with the Action-Knowledge Principle.

Subject-Sensitive Invariantism is not well placed to accommodate this kind of example, because the subject’s situation does not change just because a judge starts attending to a different practical question. Given AKP, cases like Agnes’ demand a more radical relativity of knowledge to a practical question. For example, we could go contextualist, and say that we only attribute the property of knowing relative to the practical question of whether Agnes should \( \phi \). There is some intuitive cost to that view. Considering whether Agnes should buy car insurance, it seems natural to say that people are speaking loosely and falsely when they say things like, “It may smell in the summer, but at least you know your car won’t get stolen in Greenpoint.” In giving a combined theory of the relativity to an agent and a practical question, there is sufficient reason to prefer the relativist account to contextualism.
Chapter 6: A Theory of Vagueness

1. Introduction.

This chapter explains how to respect three puzzling intuitions about vagueness. The first is that one can go either way on a borderline question. Either verdict is acceptable. Call this ‘the permissiveness intuition’. The second intuition is that one can suspend judgment on a borderline question without thereby ‘missing out on a hidden fact of the matter’. The third intuition is that there is no sharp boundary in the application of a vague property, which results in the sorites paradox. I argue that we should take the permissiveness intuition at face value—either judgment on the question is ‘acceptable’ in the sense relevant to understanding how they answer to the underlying facts. We should take this notion of acceptable judgment as the central ideology of our metaphysical theory. Two natural and modest extensions of this ideology allow us to deal attractively with the second and third puzzling things about vagueness. It allows us to give a ‘no solution’ solution to the sorites paradox, while evading the objections to Michael Dummett’s version (1975).

I start by examining the permissiveness intuition, not because it is strongest intuition, but because it is the easiest way to explain the overall theory. I argue in section 2 that the sense in which contrary verdicts are both acceptable is not to be understood epistemically. Rather, we need to give up the following standard view about how our judgments answer to reality.
(CORRESPONDENCE) J’s judgment that p is acceptable in the metaphysical sense iff p.

CORRESPONDENCE must be false if contradictory judgments can both be ‘metaphysically acceptable’. On that view, the metaphysical theory of p says when it is metaphysically acceptable for J to judge that p; it does not address the question of whether p is true. Section 4 argues that my proposal is preferable to analyzing the permissiveness intuition using relative truth. Section 5 extends the ideology to capture the second puzzling intuition about vagueness, namely that one can suspend judgment on a borderline case without missing out on a ‘fact of the matter’.

Sections 6 and 7 step back from the specific case of vagueness, sketching the general approach to metaphysics and philosophy of language respectively. Section 6 relates metaphysical acceptability to the distinction between realism and anti-realism, analyses what it is for a subject-matter to be objective or subjective, and identifies different senses in which there can be ‘no fact of the matter’. In particular, the approach gets direct intuitive support from the subjectivity of matters of taste, such as whether curry is delicious. The ideology of metaphysical acceptable judgment is metaphysically radical but linguistically conservative. As I explain in section 7, my approach to vagueness is perfectly consistent with the familiar ways of giving a compositional semantics for natural language.

Sections 8 to 10 refocus on vagueness. Section 8 extends the ideology: combinations of propositional attitudes, as well as individual attitudes, can be metaphysically acceptable or not. This allows us to capture logical relations and
penumbral connections. In section 9, I argue that it is metaphysically unacceptable for a pair of judgments about the application of a vague property to treat similar cases differently. When presented with a sorites paradox, there is no way for one’s attitudes to respect this prohibition and be individually metaphysically acceptable. I explain why the paradox does not infect the judgments we make under normal circumstances. The sorites is a genuine paradox. Just as some questions permit different answers, some questions permit no answer. As I explain in section 10, solving the paradox is no more philosophically pressing or interesting than settling whether curry is delicious.

2. The Permissiveness Intuition.

Quentin shows Agatha and Daniel his car. It’s half-way between paradigmatic red and paradigmatic orange. Quentin says, “Is my car red? Write your answer on a piece of paper without conferring.” Agatha writes down, “Yes, that’s true.” Daniel writes down, “No, that’s false.” Agatha Affirms and Daniel Denies that the car is red (in the same sense, namely Quentin’s).

Intuitively, both their answers are acceptable. They are acceptable representations of the colour of Quentin’s car; they adequately fit its shade. Agatha and Daniel have a ‘faultless disagreement’ about whether Quentin’s car is red. Crispin Wright has emphasized the ‘permissiveness intuition’ for some years.

It’s tempting to say, indeed, that a statement’s possessing (one kind of) vagueness just consists in the fact that, under certain circumstances, cognitively lucid, fully
informed and properly functioning subjects may faultlessly differ about it. (Wright 1992 p. 144)\textsuperscript{35}

A verdict about a borderline case is always acceptable; it’s always alright to have a (suitably qualified) opinion. (Wright 2003b p. 12)

[I am] impressed by the datum that … one is entitled, if one is so moved, to a verdict in the borderline area. (Wright forthcoming a p. 5)

Mark Richard agrees.

Competent users of phrases such as ‘rich for an American’ or ‘rich enough to buy a Lexus’ can and do differ about what it is to be rich for an American, rich enough to buy a Lexus. … The fact is that we don’t think that there is only one correct way to use a vague phrase like ‘rich for an American’. (Richard 2004 p. 225)

The intuition is that certain questions have more than one acceptable answer; that for certain propositions both affirming and denying are acceptable attitudes. I want to see what sense we can make of that intuition. Readers who do not share the intuition should still be interested in whether it can be worked into a coherent theory. More concretely, the permissiveness intuition is the easiest way to introduce my approach to vagueness. The intuitions may be stronger that one can suspend judgment on a borderline case without missing out on a ‘fact of the matter’, and that there is no sharp cut-off in a sorites series. We’ll get to those issues. We will come at the overall theory by considering the permissiveness intuition. That is: In what sense are both Agatha and Daniel’s attitudes ‘acceptable’?

\textsuperscript{35} It is plausible that this permissiveness is constitutive of vagueness. For suppose one thinks that two is not a lot of children to have, but three is. (This example is due to Brian Weatherson forthcoming.) One is not susceptible to a sorites paradox for the property of [being a lot of children]. One does not suspend judgment on any question of what numbers have that property. Yet one can permit others to disagree about whether three is a lot of children to have, because the application of the property is vague in that case.
Their attitudes are not both true, as they are contradictory.\textsuperscript{36} They are both acceptable; so acceptability is not truth. A contextualist strategy can’t save the idea that both judgments are acceptable in the sense of being true. That approach says that the words Quentin used could be used on another occasion to ask a different question. But we are fixed on the one question Quentin actually asked. So contextualism is irrelevant to whether the differing verdicts of Agatha and Daniel are both acceptable.

It doesn’t help understand the intuition to claim that the relevant proposition gets a third truth-value, namely Indeterminate. For then both attitudes go beyond what the world licenses. The proposition being Indeterminate seems to make suspending judgment the only acceptable attitude.\textsuperscript{37} For example, suppose a certain interpretation of quantum mechanics is correct, and it is indeterminate whether an electron is at point p. Then one should neither affirm nor deny that it is at point p. Or suppose one introduces by the following stipulations the term ‘dommal’: every dog is a dommal, and every dommal is a mammal (Williamson 1994 p. 213). It is indeterminate whether a cat is a dommal, if anything is. But one should neither affirm nor deny that a cat is a dommal.

These two cases show that indeterminacy does not explain permissiveness. In fact, a theory that asserts p to be Indeterminate seems to be incompatible with one’s being able to go either way on whether p. And we can we why this is so. That strategy is to increase the number of candidate answers to a question. That doesn’t help us capture the idea that some questions permit several different answers. The objection applies regardless of

\textsuperscript{36} Terence Horgan and Matjaž Potrč’s (2006) notion of ‘semantically correct affirmability’ won’t do for this reason, because they identify it with the truth of the assertion.

\textsuperscript{37} Similar arguments appear in Wright 2001 p. 70, 2003 p. 10; Stephen Schiffer forthcoming a pp. 3-5.
whether we label the three truth-values True, False, and Indeterminate (such as the 
supervaluationism of Kit Fine 1975); or 1, 0 and \( \frac{1}{2} \) (such as three-valued logic of Hartry 
Field 2003); or Determinate Truth, Determinate Falsity, and Indeterminate (such as the 
supervaluationism of Van McGee and Brian McLaughlin 1995).

No ‘ontic’ or ‘metaphysical’ view of indeterminacy due to vagueness will do, even 
those views on which it is always determinate that p is either true or false (e.g. Elizabeth 
Barnes forthcoming). For if reality is inherently unsettled in regards to whether p, then 
asserting p goes beyond what the world licenses. (One might reply that it is unsettled 
whether the world licenses affirming that p. However, on this approach it is determinate 
that the world does not license both of affirming p and denying p. The approach must 
reject the permissiveness intuition.)

Assigning a truth-value (or related metaphysical status) to the proposition Agatha 
and Daniel disagree about won’t help characterize the permissiveness intuition. A 
different strategy is to do so epistemically. Is it enough to say that Agatha and Daniel’s 
judgments are both epistemically justified? I think not. The intuition is that Agatha and 
Daniel’s disagreement is precisely not like a disagreement over a clear case, such as 
whether I have three coins in my pocket. A belief about what is in fact a clear case can be 
epistemically justified yet simply wrong. Such a belief is a poor representation of how 
things are; it fails to adequately fit reality. By contrast, Agatha and Daniel’s judgments 
are acceptable reflections of the shade of Quentin’s car. The intuition concerns how well 
those judgments answer to the underlying reality; it does not concern the epistemic status 
of the judgments. The intuition would be the same if Agatha and Daniel had not seen the
car, but had come to their judgments by flipping a coin. Both their judgments would be epistemically unjustified, but both would be an acceptable fit for reality.

A different epistemic strategy is to characterize one’s being permissive as (roughly) one’s not being in an epistemic position to criticize either Agatha or Daniel. This is Crispin Wright’s strategy. Here is his best formulation.

No-one is in a position to claim to know that any polar verdict [i.e. affirmation or denial] about a borderline case is, just in virtue of its subject matter and specific polarity, not knowledgeable. (Wright forthcoming a p. 10)

So we can’t claim to know that Agatha’s judging that the car is red is

strictly out of order—as making an ungrounded claim and performing less than competently. That [she] is doing anything of that sort is just what I don’t know. (Wright 2003b p. 12)

I don’t think any proposal in the vicinity will work. Wright thinks that any false judgment is a “cognitive shortcoming” (2001 p. 85); it is not knowledgeable and hence “less than competent” (2003b p. 12). He assumes that a false judgment is just wrong, i.e. unacceptable in the sense at hand. But contradictory judgments can’t both be true. Wright endorses the trivial consequence:

It is not the case that [Agatha’s] and [Daniel’s] conflicting opinions involve no cognitive shortcoming. (2001 p. 85)

It is not the case that their disagreement is blameless (2001 p. 86). In our terms, it is not the case that both their judgments are acceptable. Wright endorses intuitionistic logic, so
he thinks it does not follow that one of their judgments is unacceptable. While we know that its negation is false, “we have no warrant” for that claim (2001 p. 86). But Wright’s logical revisionism is irrelevant. The intuition is that both the conflicting opinions are acceptable. Wright’s theory says that’s not true.

The problem stems from the (natural) idea that a false judgment is just plain wrong, and so unacceptable. The standard view on how judgments ‘answer to reality’ is given by CORRESPONDENCE.

(CORRESPONDENCE) J’s judgment that p is acceptable in the metaphysical sense iff

\[ p. \]

CORRESPONDENCE is a thesis about the metaphysical sense of ‘acceptable’ judgment, as opposed to epistemic acceptability, or moral acceptability. If CORRESPONDENCE is true, then conflicting judgments can’t both be acceptable, on pain of contradiction. So a view that takes the permissiveness intuition seriously has to reject CORRESPONDENCE. The next section sketches how such a view will have to go. We will take the permissiveness intuition at face value, start fleshing out the relevant notion of ‘acceptable’ judgment, and explaining how it relates to truth and falsity. Section 4 argues against another alternative to CORRESPONDENCE, based on the idea of relative truth.


Our intuition is that both Agatha and Daniel’s judgments are acceptable. That’s not epistemic acceptability. It is an evaluation of how well their judgments fit reality. To
distinguish it from epistemic justification, let’s label it ‘metaphysical acceptability’. The standard view about metaphysical acceptability is that its nature is given by **CORRESPONDENCE**. Let’s explore dropping that assumption, and respecting the permissiveness intuition instead. The reader may feel that that substitution leaves her with an inadequate grip on the notion of metaphysically acceptable judgment. I will have a lot to say about the notion in the rest of this chapter; I hope those claims will collectively sharpen the notion in the reader’s mind. It is the nature of metaphysics to start with a hazy notion and clarify it (e.g. Kit Fine’s 2001 discussion of realism). Of course the theses I put forward do not amount to a definition of metaphysical acceptability.

We take the following as an undefined piece of ideology: It is metaphysically acceptable at t for J to judge that p. To judge is to occurrently believe. This choice of ideology is directly supported by the permissiveness intuition. The relevant notion of acceptable judgment appears in an intuition, and hence is an intuitive notion. As I explain in section 4, it is also the crucial notion in the intuition that disagreements about matters of taste are ‘faultless’. It allows us to understand two other phenomena central to vagueness, explained in sections 5 and 9. In the end, the reader has the choice between sticking with a familiar but unsatisfactory theory that preserves **CORRESPONDENCE**, or following the intuitions at the price of dealing with a notion that at least starts off hazy. If the reader opts for the former, there’s little I can say to them. (I do have a list of intellectual vices such a choice displays.)

I don’t claim it is immediately obvious that the correct metaphysical theory concerns which judgments are metaphysically acceptable. But it would be strange to
think that one’s metaphysical theory should not go beyond what’s common-sense. Common-sense supplies some of the data for our metaphysics, not the theory itself.

Suppose we deny CORRESPONDENCE, and say that Agatha and Daniel’s judgment are both metaphysically acceptable. What will such a view say about the truth of their judgments? I suggest the approach will deem the question of whether p is true to be outside the subject-matter of the metaphysics of p. For suppose that question were part of understanding the metaphysics of p. Then it would be utterly mysterious why accordance with the truth of p wouldn’t determine the metaphysical acceptability of judging that p.

That is, to deny CORRESPONDENCE, we need to hold that the truth or falsity of p is not part of the subject-matter of the metaphysics of p. We have given the complete metaphysical theory of the matter when we say that, because of the shade it is, it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that Quentin’s car is red, or to deny that it is. Whether it is true that Quentin’s car is red is not relevant to understanding the metaphysics of being red.

The metaphysical theory itself is silent on the truth of the proposition whose vagueness it explains. The theory is not concerned with the truth of the proposition; that is not part of the subject-matter. For example, the metaphysical theory is silent on whether Quentin’s car is red. It is silent on whether London buses are red. It is even silent on whether: London buses are red and not red. The theory does explain our use of the ‘minimal’ notion of truth. It says that it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that it is true that London buses are red. In general, judging that [it is true that p] is metaphysically acceptable iff judging that [p] is. (In section 8, I extend the domain of metaphysical acceptability from individual judgments to include combinations of judgments. That
allows us to say that: it is metaphysically unacceptable not to treat [it is true that p] as equivalent to [p].)

This is not the only approach on which the metaphysical theory explains our use of a ‘minimal’ notion of truth, but does not say which propositions or sentences of the discourse are true. Truth-relativism and expressivist theories of value also have this feature. One would not expect an expressivist theory about morality to say whether murder is wrong. That meta-ethical view does not say there is a truth of the matter, though it explains why we are licensed to say that murder is wrong. In particular, it explains why the person who believes the expressivist theory is licensed to say that it is true that murder is wrong.

Clearly, the view I have sketched requires that—in some sense—there are no facts ‘out there’, ‘in reality’, about the instantiation of vague properties. Otherwise, according with such a fact would be what makes a judgment metaphysically acceptable or not. I agree that there is such a metaphysically loaded notion of fact, for which CORRESPONDENCE is true. I think that is the notion that Kit Fine labels “a fact in metaphysical reality” (Fine 2001). In that terminology, the account of the permissiveness intuition requires that there are no facts-in-metaphysical-reality about the instantiation of vague properties. That’s as it should be. I discuss the metaphysically-loaded notion of ‘fact-in-reality’ in section 6. For now, simply note that the current approach deflates truth and properties: it is not metaphysically loaded to judge that Quentin’s car is red; nor to judge that that proposition is true; nor to judge that the car has the property of being red. None of those judgments concerns the metaphysics of being red.
Our metaphysics must be silent on the truth of a vague proposition, and hence on whether it is ‘made true’ by the underlying precise facts. ‘What makes a proposition true’ is not addressed by the correct metaphysical theory. The question is framed using faulty ideology. In cases where there is no relativity to a judge, whether it is metaphysically acceptable for J to judge that p depends only on what is usually termed the ‘supervenience base’ for the vague proposition. For example, it is the precise shade of Quentin’s car that makes it acceptable for Agatha to judge that it is red, and acceptable to judge that it is not red. Judgments about whether Bill is bald ‘answer to’ the arrangement of hair on his hair. That’s what makes judging him to be bald acceptable (or not).

Holding that the truth of p is irrelevant to the metaphysics of p allows us to give a satisfying account of one kind of ‘higher-order vagueness’. This higher-order vagueness in whether p is just first-order vagueness in whether it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that p. For example, suppose Quentin’s sweater is closer to paradigmatic red than paradigmatic orange. Then Agatha and Daniel might disagree about whether it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that the sweater is orange. If both their verdicts on that matter are metaphysically acceptable, we can call that higher-order vagueness in whether Quentin’s sweater is orange. But really it is ordinary vagueness in a different question. In general, [whether p] is irrelevant to understanding the vagueness of p; what’s relevant is when it is metaphysically acceptable for someone to judge that p. That’s so even when p is the proposition that [it is metaphysically acceptable for J to judge that q]. The truth of the proposition is irrelevant to understanding the vagueness in whether Quentin’s sweater is orange; what’s relevant is which judgments on that matter are metaphysically acceptable. But that’s not relevant to understanding the vagueness in the
metaphysical acceptability of judging that Quentin’s sweater is orange. What’s relevant
there is whether it is metaphysically acceptable for Agatha to judge that [it is
metaphysically accept to judge that the sweater is orange]. And so on. What’s relevant to
n-th order vagueness in p is whether [it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that]^{(n)} p.
For any natural number n, we can understand n-th order vagueness in this way. I have
given a schema for explaining the vagueness in a specific question. The story about
higher-order vagueness requires our metaphysical explanations to be piece-meal. There is
no absolute division of propositions into those that are part of our metaphysical theory
and those that are not.

4. Relativism, Permissiveness and Relative Truth.

It is metaphysically acceptable for Agatha to judge that Quentin’s car is red; it is also
metaphysically acceptable for Agatha to judge that Quentin’s car is not red. (Recall that
this is not the familiar idea that the proposition is neither definitely true nor definitely
false. For that entails that one should not assert p, and not assert not-p.) Matters of taste
are a different kind of case that provides direct intuitive support for rejecting
CORRESPONDENCE. For example, my Dad does not like curry. He thinks that curry is not
delicious. I disagree; I think it is delicious. I think his judgment on that matter is false.
Yet it is not a serious position in metaphysics that I am locked on to the nature of
deliciousness and my Dad isn’t. I think his judgment is false, yet ‘right’ in the sense
relevant to the metaphysics of deliciousness. Curry does not taste good to my Dad, and
that makes it ‘acceptable’ for him to judge that it is not delicious. Indeed, that’s the only
acceptable attitude for him to take. Call this the ‘relativity intuition’.
Contextualists about the word “delicious” reject this intuitive picture. They say that an utterance of “Curry is delicious” means that curry tastes very good to an appropriate proportion of a group of people determined by the context of utterance. On some versions of the view, my Dad and I do not disagree, contrary to intuition. If some version of contextualism is right, then if my Dad and I disagree, we disagree about whether curry tastes delicious to most people in some group. That’s implausible. My Dad is painfully aware that most (British) people love curry. He bemoans the fact that most people these days like “foreign muck,” rather than proper food like fish and chips or cottage pie. So our disagreement does not stem from my Dad having a false sociological view. It stems from the fact that my Dad doesn’t like curry, and so thinks it is not delicious. (More generally, we can suppose that my Dad and I have the same information about which people really like curry.) So it seems that contextualism is unsatisfactory. Obviously there is much that can be said about this, but let’s work on the assumption that contextualism is false.

That matters of taste are ‘subjective’ just is the idea that one can think someone else’s judgment is false but ‘right’ in the metaphysical sense. The relativity intuition is not merely that my Dad’s judgment is epistemically justified. That would be compatible with my Dad being wrong about a perfectly objective matter of fact. If we take the relativity intuition at face value, we must reject CORRESPONDENCE.

The relativity intuition and the permissiveness intuition are distinct. Given how curry tastes to us, the only acceptable attitude for my Dad to have is that curry is not delicious, and the only acceptable attitude for me to have is that it is delicious. We can’t go either way. Whether it is acceptable to judge that curry is delicious varies between
judges. The permissiveness intuition is that a judge can go either way on a question. This need not be accompanied by any variation between judges in which attitudes are metaphysically acceptable. Both intuitions motivate untying the metaphysical notion of ‘acceptable’ judgment, a judgment that answers to reality well enough, from the judgment’s being true.

The approach to the permissiveness intuition sketched in section 3 extends easily to capture the relativity intuition. I argued against using truth-relativism to do so in chapter 5 section 5. This section examines independent demerits of analyzing the permissiveness intuition in terms of relative truth. That approach to the permissiveness intuition is taken by Mark Richard (2004, esp. pp. 225-7). According to our truth-relativist, the proposition that Quentin’s car is red is true-for-Agatha and false-for-Daniel. It is true-for-Daniel that the car is not red.38 Truth-relativism is compatible with there also being a minimal notion of truth, which we can label ‘truthM’. On this view, necessarily:

[it is trueM that p] is true-for-J iff [p] is true-for-J. The truth-relativist theory is silent on which propositions are trueM, instead specifying which judges a proposition is true-for. Analogously, my theory is silent on which propositions are true, instead specifying for which judges it is metaphysically acceptable to affirm the proposition.

The natural truth-relativist analysis to try is that both Agatha and Daniel’s judgments are ‘acceptable’ in the sense that they are both true-for-that-judge. That is, the natural truth-relativist view replaces CORRESPONDENCE with RELATIVE CORRESPONDENCE.

38 An alternative view relativises truth to a ‘criterion’ for redness, i.e. a function from shades to the set of possible answers. This strategy misses the point. Why talk about acceptable criteria for redness, rather than acceptable judgments directly? It just brings in a lot of irrelevant questions, such as whether my shoes are red. This variation also shares the defects discussed in the text.
(RELATIVE CORRESPONDENCE) J’s judgment that p is acceptable in the metaphysical sense iff p is true-for-J.

That is unsatisfactory. Relativising truth to a judge is relativising the one correct answer to a judge. But our intuition is that there is not only one correct answer, even relative to a specific judge. When presented with that question, I can think to myself: I can go either way here. Agatha judges that Quentin’s car is red, but it is acceptable for her to judge that it isn’t. It is acceptable for a judge to go either way on Quentin’s question. Contradictory propositions can’t both be true-for-J. So we can’t say that it is acceptable for J to judge that p iff p is true-for-J.

Let’s examine a different strategy for defining acceptability. On this approach, whether it is true-for-J that Quentin’s car is red depends on the shade of his car and on whether J judges that it is red. By contrast, it is true-for-J that London buses are red no matter what J judges on the matter, for they are a clear case. So let’s try to capture the permissiveness intuition as follows.

(PERMISSION) It is acceptable for J to judge that p iff [holding fixed everything apart from J’s judgment on whether p (and J’s related dispositions), it could have been true-for-J that p].

I don’t know whether this can be sophisticated into something extensionally adequate. But we can already evaluate the costs and benefits of such an analysis.
I see no benefits. The relevant notion of acceptable judgment is intuitive, in that it features in the permissiveness intuition. Relative truth is not an intuitive notion in that way; it does not enjoy direct intuitive support. Neither does the truth-relativist analysis have any theoretical benefits. The counterfactuals that constitute the analyses are not simpler facts than those about acceptable judgments. Relative truth can’t explain a wider range of phenomena than metaphysical acceptability. By the measures of simplicity, generality, and unification, the truth-relativist analysis of the permissiveness intuition is not a good explanation.

Here’s a cost of accounting for permissiveness in terms of relative truth.39 Suppose we can express the idea that a question has multiple acceptable answers. Then we should also be able to express the idea that a question has no acceptable answers. I will argue that the truth-relativist cannot do so. This is particularly pointed in the context of discussing vagueness. Sections 9 and 10 use the ideology of metaphysically acceptable judgment to give a ‘no solution’ solution to the sorites paradox: every possible response is unacceptable. Defining acceptability in terms of relative truth rules out that diagnosis.

Relative truth is closed under entailment. Otherwise, the thing we have relativized is not truth. Thus:

(Closed) Suppose \( P_1 \) is true-for-\( J \), \( \ldots \), \( P_n \) is true-for-\( J \), and \( \{ P_1, \ldots, P_n \} \) entails \( Q \).

Then \( Q \) is true-for-\( J \).

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39 See chapter 5 section 3c.iii for another example of the expressive limitations of truth-relativism.
Suppose \( n \) items are arranged in a sorites series from \( F \) to non-\( F \), and Peter is
contemplating the propositions \( \{F_1, \neg F_\bar{n}, \neg \exists x(Fx \land \neg Fx')\} \). If we endorse classical logic,
then because relative truth is closed under entailment (i.e. closed is true), it is true-for-everyone that \( \exists x(Fx \land \neg Fx') \). The truth-relativist must then accept that’s the right response
to the paradox. But we wanted to express the view that this response to the paradox is not
acceptable, and neither are any of the others.

On any sane logic, the paradox-forming propositions entail a contradiction. A
contradiction can’t be true-for-someone. So no sane view holds it to be true-for-Peter that
\( \neg \exists x(Fx \land \neg Fx') \). Adopting a three-valued logic does allow us to say that it is
Indeterminate-for-Peter that \( \neg \exists x(Fx \land \neg Fx') \). Presumably, the right response to the
paradox is then to neither affirm nor deny that proposition. But we wanted to express the
view that this stance is not acceptable either. And that view is attractive: the pull of
saying there is no sharp cut-off, and the reductio of that claim, do not cancel each other
out leaving us in a comfortable silence. They leave us most uncomfortable. Even multi-
valent truth-relativism is expressively inadequate.

(There remains the view that when Peter denies \( \neg \exists x(Fx \land \neg Fx') \), it is Indeterminate-
for-him; and when he suspends judgment on it, it is false-for-him. That view can’t be
married with the spirit of permission, according to which relative truth accommodates
our judgments, rather than anti-accommodating them.)

One might make the ideology more flexible, by making relative truth come in
degrees. As such an ideology becomes structurally more like mine, the question becomes
increasingly pressing: Why call this a kind of truth? I suggest that the ordinary notion of
truth is ‘minimal’, which the truth-relativist identifies as ‘truth\textsubscript{M}’. It only confuses things to call a very different notion by a similar name.

5. Extending the Ideology: suspending judgment on a borderline case.

One conception of a borderline case is that it is metaphysically acceptable to go either way on it. Another conception is that one suspends judgment on such a proposition without thereby ‘missing out on a hidden fact of the matter’. Intuitively, if someone suspends judgment on whether I have three coins in my pocket, they miss out on something about the world. By contrast, if someone suspends judgment on whether Quentin’s car is red, they do not.

The ideology of metaphysically acceptable judgment is easily extended to capture this idea. Suspending judgment is an occurrent mental state, an attitude to a proposition, just like affirming and denying. Ignoring a proposition is a different mental state, incompatible with suspending judgment. Let’s allow that it can be metaphysically acceptable for someone to suspend judgment on a proposition. That captures the idea that suspending judgment acceptably fits reality. Suspending judgment on whether Quentin’s car is red fits reality at least as well as either affirming or denying that proposition. By contrast, suspending judgment on whether I have three coins in my pocket does not fit reality at all—affirming that I do is the only metaphysically acceptable attitude to that proposition.

Metaphysical acceptability is different from epistemic acceptability. An epistemically unjustified belief that I have three coins in my pocket now would be metaphysically acceptable—it fits reality. A justified belief that I have one coin in my
pocket now would be metaphysically unacceptable. Someone who lacks evidence either way is epistemically required to suspend judgment on whether I have three coins in my pocket, even if they know that suspending judgment is metaphysically unacceptable.

We can now recognize a kind of permissiveness that’s more modest than that examined in section 2. There can be cases where it is acceptable to judge that p, or suspend judgment, but not acceptable to deny that p. Some readers might find this more obvious than the original permissiveness intuition.

The suggestion of this section can be expanded into a theory of indeterminacy. That theory is silent on which propositions are indeterminate, and does not say ‘what it is’ for a proposition to be indeterminate. Rather, it tells us when it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that a proposition is indeterminate.

It is metaphysically acceptable for J to judge that [p is indeterminate] iff it is metaphysical acceptable for J to suspend judgment on p.

(Don’t confuse this conception of indeterminacy with the idea that both affirming and denying the proposition are metaphysically acceptable. It is only on the newly defined conception that it is incoherent to hold that p is both true and indeterminate. That’s the conception most philosophers have had in mind.)


I will return to the sorites paradox after placing my approach in a wider context. This section sketches a metaphysics built around the notion of metaphysically acceptable
judgment, rather than that of a fact holding in virtue of certain others (in the manner of Fine 2001 and Schaffer 2009). It isn’t only judgments on issues affected by vagueness or relativity that have a level of metaphysical acceptability. Nearly all judgments do. We can use that ideology to characterize degrees of objectivity, and different senses of there being ‘no fact of the matter’ about certain questions. I start by explaining how metaphysical acceptability relates to realism.

I adopt Kit Fine’s conception of realism (Fine 2001, 2009). We accept the unanalyzed concept of a ‘fact in metaphysical reality’, abbreviated R(p). A pretty good approximation of R(p) is: it is a fundamental fact that p. Some facts are metaphysically privileged. The others are still facts. Suppose it is the case that p. Realism about p holds that R(p). Anti-realism about p holds that not-R(p). Again following Fine (2009), we can say that an object or property is ‘real’ iff it features in a fact-in-reality. The vast majority of objects and properties are not metaphysically privileged in that way. Diverging from Fine, I hold that realism is linked to metaphysical acceptability by the following thesis (it’s not a definition of either notion).

(REALISM) It is a fact-in-reality that p iff what makes it metaphysically acceptable for everyone to judge that p is: that p.

That is, there are some matters for which CORRESPONDENCE is true, and they are the matters we should be metaphysical realists about.

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40 Maybe we can characterize the ‘open future’ as the view that predictions don’t have a level of metaphysical acceptability until the time the concern has passed. They do have a level of epistemic acceptability when they are made.
To defend anti-realism about p is to explain how judgments that p can be
metaphysically acceptable without appeal to its being the case that p. Anti-realism in this
sense does not imply any subjectivity. R(p) makes affirming [p∨q] the only
metaphysically acceptable attitude to that disjunction. We don’t need to include the
disjunction among the facts-in-reality; we have explained which judgments about that
matter are metaphysically acceptable in other terms. So on my view, not-R(p∨q). This
seems right on Ockhamist grounds.\footnote{In general, judging that \([A\lor B]\) is made metaphysically acceptable by whatever makes
affirming one of the disjuncts metaphysically acceptable (or both of them). But I don’t
want to get caught up in whether we should accept the Law of Excluded Middle.}

The anti-realist need not explain the metaphysical acceptability of a judgment in
terms of the facts-in-reality. The anti-realist needs to understand the acceptability of
judgments that p in more fundamental terms, not in absolutely fundamental terms. For
example, it is metaphysically acceptable for me to judge that curry is delicious, because it
is disposed to taste good to me. Judging something to be red is metaphysically acceptable
because of the precise shade the thing is. The explanans are not facts-in-reality. The anti-
realist explains the practice of judging whether p, and one does not understand a way of
life in terms of fundamental physics. Good metaphysical explanations will be local in this
way. There is no complete metaphysical theory of every area of discourse. Rather, there
is a theory of p_1 in terms of p_2, which is silent on whether p_1 is true but asserts p_2. There
is a theory of p_2 in terms of p_3, which is silent on whether p_2 is true but asserts p_3. And so
on. Another reason there can’t be a unified theory of every area of discourse is that
metaphysical acceptability is vague. The theory about p asserts certain things about when
it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that p; the theory about the metaphysical
acceptability of judging p won’t do so. (See the end of section 3.)

On my approach to vagueness, we explain the metaphysical acceptability of
judgments about the instantiation of a vague property in terms of the underlying precise
facts. So there are not facts-in-reality about the instantiation of vague properties. They are
not ‘real’ in Fine’s sense; they are not constituents of metaphysical reality. There are such
properties, they just aren’t metaphysically privileged in that way; they aren’t ‘in our
ontology’. That’s all there is to say on the topic of whether vagueness is ‘in reality’.

One should also be anti-realist about how metaphysically acceptable a given
judgments is, for that won’t be a fundamental fact. This was already clear, because it can
be vague whether the judgment is metaphysically acceptable. Note that it is also true on
more orthodox metaphysical approaches that the facts reported by metaphysics are not
fundamental or facts-in-reality. Views that use as their ideology ‘p grounds [or makes
ture] q’ should not take those facts to be facts-in-reality. For it would follow that the
grounded truth q would be part of reality, and the spirit of such views is that the grounded
facts are not facts-in-reality. Further, even if it is a fact-in-reality that p, it is not a fact-in-
reality that it is a fact-in-reality that p.

I will now consider different cases in which one might want to say that there is
‘no fact of the matter’ about p. That expression gestures at many different conditions.
First consider an under-defined property, such as Williamson’s ‘dommal’.

Suppose we have a word ‘dommal’, of which our use turns out to be constrained
by just two principles: that every dog is a dommal, and that every dommal is a
mammal. Is a cat a dommal? (Williamson 1994 p. 213)
There is a single judge-invariant metaphysically acceptable answer over dogs (yes) and non-mammals (no). Where the term is not defined, i.e. for mammals that are not dogs, both judging that p and judging that not-p are unacceptable. The single acceptable attitude is suspending judgment. That’s the same for all judges.

When there is variation between judges in what attitudes it is metaphysically acceptable to have towards p, p is (at least partially) a subjective matter. The crudest such theory of taste would be: J’s judgment that curry is delicious is metaphysically acceptable iff curry tastes very good to J. On that view, attributions of deliciousness ‘answer entirely to’ the judge’s mental state and dispositions. One might want to say that there is ‘no fact of the matter’ about whether curry is delicious (even if one believes that it is.) (A moral anti-realism analogous to my treatment of deliciousness holds that there are moral beliefs and judgments. For them to be metaphysically acceptable is for them to reflect the judge’s deepest commitments of a certain kind. Of course, that’s not what it is for them to be morally acceptable.)

An advantage of my ideology is that it allows subjectivity to come in degrees. For example, chapter 5 argues that whether a knowledge-attribution is metaphysically acceptable depends both on facts about the subject of the attribution, and on what’s salient to the judge. So knowledge is only partly subjective.

I claimed that vagueness leads to propositions it is metaphysically acceptable to affirm, deny, or suspend judgment on. This is another sense in which there can be ‘no fact of the matter’. In this sense, one can think there is ‘no fact of the matter’, yet still affirm that p. Section 10 will describe a further kind case in which there is ‘no fact of the
matter’: when presented with a genuine paradox, there is no metaphysically acceptable response for the judge to give.

The kinds of ‘no fact of the matter’ distinguished by the ideology do seem distinct. We are achieving some clarity in these murky matters. We have captured degrees of subjectivity, and degrees of permissiveness. I don’t think this captures all the ways in which we are inegalitarian about the properties featured in propositions we are anti-realist about. I don’t think subjectivity and permissiveness capture the sense in which biological species mark distinctions that are ‘more real’ than the property of being between one and two metres long. The latter is perfectly precise and objective, yet marks no ‘joint in nature’ at all. There is no significant difference between things that are 1.01m and 1.99m on the one hand, and 0.99m and 2.01m on the other. There is a significant difference between cats and rabbits. Here is my proposal for capturing that thought. Some properties and things feature in good explanations. They allow us to see patterns in the world. Let us say that properties and objects have a level of ‘explanatory validation’. The property of being between one and two metres long has little explanatory validation. Vague natural kinds have a lot of explanatory validation, though they do not feature in the facts-in-reality. (I worry that talk of ‘natural’ properties sometimes conflates explanatory validation and Finean ‘reality’.) I reckon that metaphysical acceptability has a lot of explanatory validation, as does the notion of a fact-in-reality. I have labeled a phenomenon rather than explained it, but that’s not a worry.

Here’s a related labeling. Some properties and things are pragmatically important for human beings to identify. For example, it is useful to think about tables and chairs because of the uses we put them to. They have a lot of ‘pragmatic validation’. Some
things have pragmatic validation because they feature in useful explanations, i.e. deriving from their explanatory validation. Things with little explanatory or pragmatic validation are things we should cease to think about.

7. Metaphysics and Compositional Semantics.

My metaphysics is compatible with standard approaches to compositional semantics. The metaphysics says when a judgment is metaphysically acceptable. There’s nothing linguistic about that. On the other hand, a compositional meaning theory should be about purely linguistic matters. Its job is to explain why “le gateau est deliceux” means in French that the cake is delicious, in terms of the way the sentence is made up of those words. It is not the job of linguistics to tell you whether the cake is delicious, or how to judge on that issue. On the truth-conditional approach, we want the theory to predict that “le gateau est deliceux” is true iff the cake is delicious. Again, that’s independent of whether the cake is delicious, or how to judge on that issue. Anti-realism about such entities says that the cake exists, and that there is a property of deliciousness, though they are not ‘metaphysically real’ because they do not figure in any of the facts-in-reality (Fine 2009). So we can assign the cake as the meaning of “le gateau”, and deliciousness as the meaning of “deliceux”. Metaphysical antirealism is compatible with referential semantics.

My metaphysics does entail that we shouldn’t read too much into certain models of meaning we use to explain compositionality. A standard implementation of truth-conditional semantics assigns objects and functions as the ‘semantic values’ of expressions. Assertoric utterances get a semantic value (Kaplan’s ‘content’) that is a
function from possible worlds to \{True, False\}. That function models the truth-conditions of the utterance. An utterance of “Quentin’s car is red” maps the actual world to one of \{True, False\}. So there is no candidate semantic value that is the single metaphysically acceptable one for any English speaker to conform to. Similarly, My Dad and I must disagree about the semantic value of “delicious”. This does not affect the explanatory power of positing semantic values as part of the scientific project of explaining compositionality. That task is to explain the meaning of complex sentences, given the meaning of the atomic expressions. In the current terms, we explain how \textit{whichever} semantic value is assigned to “delicious” affects the semantic value of uttered sentences containing that word. This project does not assume that there is exactly one function that it is metaphysically acceptable for any English speaker to conform to. Nor does it require figuring out the semantic value of the atoms; we only need to know their type. (That’s fortunate. We wouldn’t want the linguistics journals to be full of arguments about whether curry falls under the extension of “delicious”, or whether Quentin’s car falls under the extension of “red.”)

Getting clear on the explanatory task of linguistics supports its independence from metaphysical concerns. Linguistics seeks to explain how linguistic communication works.\footnote{I am influenced by Stephen Neale’s ‘Linguistic Pragmatism,’ e.g. his 2005.} How is it that the hearer tokens the right concepts in response to the speaker’s utterance? In outline, speakers and hearers know the linguistic conventions of word meaning and sentence construction, and understand each other’s psychology. More concretely, hearers perform two types of cognitive processing: decoding according to the linguistic conventions, and psychological interpretation. We learn a lot about how
hearers decode by finding out what the conventions of word meaning and sentence construction are, which is what semantics studies. For example, it might be a convention that “delicious” refers to deliciousness, and that NP-VP constructions are predicative. Such conventions explain why “curry is delicious” means that curry is delicious. This gives us a handle on how hearers decode that sentence: by associating the word “delicious” with their concept DELICIOUS, “is” with predication, and thus constructing the complex representation CURRY IS DELICIOUS.

Some sentences are built up in a very complicated way. Maybe the most perspicuous way to theorize about how the conventions of composition determine the compatible interpretations of the speaker is to model the conventions using Kaplanian semantic values. For example, we model the meaning of “delicious” as a function from worlds and objects to truth-values. Modeling meanings as semantic values is good for understanding how compositionality works. Specific explanatory purposes warrant certain idealizations. We can ignore vagueness and relativity when explaining compositionality. That idealization is in the service of the wider goal of understanding how a hearer computes a complex representation when faced with a complicated sentence. It is irrelevant to such a project whether predicative words and concepts have a determinate and objective extension.43


43 Dummett (1993) tries to define semantic values in terms of an epistemic notion of acceptable judgment. He admits in his valedictory lecture (1993 p. 473) that, after thirty years of working on his verification-conditions theory of meaning, he still can’t give a semantics for negation. Let’s stick to truth-conditional semantics.
Let’s return to giving an account of vagueness. Stephen Schiffer thinks that when one suspends judgment on a case like whether Quentin’s car is red, one does so ambivalently (Schiffer forthcoming a pp. 3-5). One might take a contrasting view: suspending judgment is better than either positive verdict, though all three are acceptable. I don’t commit myself on those two views, but we can easily extend the ideology to express them, as follows.

Acceptability is a normative notion. We see from the moral case that we need a family of normative notions to capture all the phenomena. For example, we need comparisons and the absolute moral goodness of an act, as well as moral requirement, to understand supererogation. An act is supererogatory iff it is not required, though it is good, and it is better than some of the other permissible acts. In a moral dilemma, all the possible acts are very bad. We capture finer-grained distinctions in terms of goodness and badness than in terms of requirement and permissibility. So I will take metaphysical acceptability to be analogous to moral goodness rather than permissibility. I will make free use of the idea that metaphysical acceptability comes in degrees, and that some judgments are more acceptable than others. When this terminology feels strained, I will talk of metaphysically ‘happy’ judgment to denote the relevant kind of goodness. We can express Schiffer’s intuition by saying there are cases in which suspending judgment is metaphysically acceptable, and at least as acceptable as affirming or denying, yet still not very metaphysically happy. The contrasting view says that all three attitudes are metaphysically acceptable, though suspending judgment is metaphysically more acceptable than the others.
Here is another way I enrich the ideology of a judgment being metaphysically acceptable. Combinations of judgments can also be metaphysically acceptable or unacceptable. It is acceptable for Agatha to affirm that Quentin’s car is red, and acceptable for her to affirm that it isn’t. But it is metaphysically unacceptable for her to do both. This idea allows us to characterize penumbral connections. It is acceptable for Agatha to affirm that the car is red, and acceptable for her to affirm that it is orange; but it is unacceptable for her to do both.

It is metaphysically unacceptable to: judge that Quentin’s car is red but suspend judgment on whether it is not red. A cluster of related truths about metaphysical acceptability explains our practice of reasoning in accordance with the law of non-contradiction. More generally, I conjecture that we can explain our practice of logical reasoning in this manner. Certain combinations of mental state are bad, and avoiding them constitutes logical belief revision. I will not attempt to give a general theory of logic here. I will just make use of the claims needed to explain our reaction to the sorites paradox.

Whether a judgment is metaphysically acceptable is a measure of how it answers to reality. That was a natural part of taking the permissiveness intuition seriously. It does not seem right to say that judging Quentin’s car to be red and judging it to be orange is a combination that answers badly to reality.\footnote{Thanks to Michael Johnson here.} It is not some thing in reality that makes that combination bad. I don’t think this is a problem. Metaphysical acceptability is the kind of acceptability we appeal to in coming to a metaphysical understanding of an area of discourse. Individual judgments answer to reality more or less well; there are also top-
down prohibitions on certain combinations of judgments. In both cases, we are using
metaphysical acceptability to explain how we ‘play the game’ of making judgments on
such matters. We want our judgments to fit reality, and to mesh with each other. It is no
problem that meshing with each other is not a way for combinations of judgments to
‘answer to reality’.

I suggest we take the metaphysical acceptability of a judgment to be *intrinsic* to it,
i.e. independent on how it meshes with the others made by the judge. For example, only
the shade of the object is relevant to whether it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that
it is red. When a judge is faced with multiple questions, the truths about the (intrinsic)
metaphysical acceptability of each attitude, plus the top-down truths about the
acceptability of combinations of those attitudes, together determine the *all-things-
considered* metaphysical acceptability of each combination of attitudes to the questions
faced. Faced with the questions of whether *p*, *q*, and *r*, the combination [judging that *p*,
suspending on *q*, and denying that *r*] gets a level of all-things-considered metaphysical
acceptability in that way. Compare the following case of moral evaluation. Suppose I
have two nephews, Nigel and Neil, who are both good boys. $20 is a good birthday
present to give either of them, as is $30. But it would be bad to give them different
amounts. The combination of [giving Nigel $20 and Neil $30] is all-things-considered
bad, even though there is nothing intrinsically wrong with giving Nigel $20 and there is
nothing intrinsically wrong with giving Neil $30. By contrast, it is the intrinsic value of
the individual acts that explains what’s wrong with the combination of [giving Nigel $2
and Neil $2].
9. The Sorites Paradox.

The ideology of metaphysically acceptable judgment allows us to state a ‘no-solution’ solution to the sorites paradox. That response is extremely attractive (though not mandated by the rest of this paper). The rough idea is that when you consider the paradox-forming set of propositions, there is no combination of attitudes to them that is all-things-considered metaphysically acceptable. The situation is analogous to being in a moral dilemma: every response is bad. Usually, the propositions one is considering do not form such a paradoxical set. As I will explain, this means the paradox does not infect our normal judgments. The next section explains how this theory dissolves the paradox without solving it.

I claim we are metaphysically required to treat vague properties as having No Sharp Boundary (NSB) between their application and non-application. This constrains the combinations of judgments we make, and also the complex judgments we make (e.g. about conjunctions). Here’s an example of the former.

(NSB1) When shades s and s* are very similar, and the question of their redness comes up, it is metaphysically unacceptable to: [judge that shade s is red and not judge that shade s* is red].

In other words, if you have occurrent attitudes about the redness of s and s*, they must be the same one. This prohibition is not violated if one judges that s is red but ignores the question of whether s* is red, and thereby doesn’t judge that s* is red. It is violated if one judges that s is red and suspends judgment on whether s* is red. Suspending judgment on
a proposition is an occurrent attitude towards it, while to ignore the proposition is to lack any occurrent attitude towards it. This distinction means that one automatically satisfies NSB1 if one is only judging the redness of one object.

We need this kind of prohibition to deal with penumbral connections too.

(PC1) For all shades s, when the questions of whether s is red and whether s is orange come up, it is metaphysically unacceptable to: [judge that s is red and not deny that s is orange].

Again, there is nothing wrong with judging something to be red and ignoring the question of whether it is orange. One does not thereby flaunt the penumbral connection, as one does if one judges s to be red and suspends judgment on whether it is orange. Hence PC1 and NSB1 need to be formulated as restrictions on pairs of occurrent attitudes. Just because it is metaphysically unacceptable to hold a certain pair of attitudes does not mean that one of the attitudes must be individually unacceptable. A violation of PC1 or NSB1 in the borderline will involve two attitudes that are individually metaphysically acceptable, though their combination is unacceptable.

Treating redness as having no sharp boundary also constrains our attitudes towards certain conjunctions, conditionals, etc. The same is true of treating red and orange as incompatible colours. For example:

(PC2) For all shades s, it is metaphysically unacceptable for a judge to affirm or suspend judgment on whether: [s is red and s is orange].
In other words, either one ignores that conjunction, or only denying it is acceptable.

(NSB2) If shades s and s* are very close, it is metaphysically unacceptable for a judge to affirm or suspend judgment on whether: [s is red and s* is not red].

In other words, if the question of that conjunction comes up, one must deny it. For any shade s, a judge who considers it must deny that s marks the boundary between red and non-red. I think that as a result, a judge who consider it must deny that any shade s marks the boundary between red and non-red. Let us be clear: the theory does not say that there is no sharp boundary between red and non-red. It says that every judge who is paying attention to the question is required to affirm that there is no sharp boundary.

Recall that what makes it metaphysically (un)acceptable to judge that something is red is the precise shade of the thing. Treating red as being incompatible with orange, and treating red as having no sharp boundary, does not affect the metaphysical acceptability of individual judgments. The key to the sorites paradox is that sometimes, these facts about the acceptability of individual judgments, and the requirement on pairs of judgments that they treat similar cases in the same way, cannot all be respected. When faced with the paradox-forming propositions, no combination of attitudes to them is all-things-considered metaphysically acceptable. Usually we are not considering such a set of propositions, and there is no problem making judgments that are individually and
combinatorially metaphysically acceptable. (I am indebted to Tim Maudlin (2008) in what follows.)

Suppose Olive is currently only considering One question about what’s red. Her attitude to that one issue can’t draw a sharp boundary; NSB1 is empty in this case. She only needs to respect the metaphysical acceptability of her single attitude. Tamsin is currently considering exactly Two questions about what’s red, namely whether Quentin’s car is red, and whether Quentin’s sweater is red. If those two items are of sufficiently different shades, then NSB1 places no restrictions on her verdicts. No pair of attitudes to those two questions would treat similar cases differently. All Tamsin needs to respect in this case is the acceptability of the two individual attitudes. Suppose Henry is faced with a Hundred objects, and tries to say which ones are red. If the objects cluster into groups of similar shades, then Henry can avoid treating similar cases differently. For Henry can give the same answer within each cluster, but different answers between clusters. NSB1 does constrain Henry’s attitudes, unlike those of Olive and Tamsin. Henry must not switch answers in the middle of a cluster. But he can satisfy that requirement and the acceptability of his individual attitudes, as long as the objects Henry is considering cluster in the right way.

In a sorites series for redness, the shades of the objects do not cluster. Every item in the series is of a very similar shade to the previous item. Suppose Sam tries to say

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45 Unfortunately, Maudlin uses his account of acceptable attitudes in a given ‘judgment situation’ to define up truth-values for the relevant propositions, and hence solve the sorites paradox. His solution is that it is not true that no red object is next to a non-red object in the sorites series. I think the ‘no-solution’ solution is more attractive. Further, Maudlin says that propositions on which one can go either way get a third truth-value, Indeterminate. It is not clear what other account he could give of the idea that one can suspend judgment on a borderline case without missing out on a ‘fact of the matter’.
which items in the series are red. She satisfies NSB1 only if she takes the same attitude to every item in the series. If she does that, she takes the same attitude to the first and last items in the series. But she is required to judge that the first item is red, and required to judge that the last item is not red. So it is impossible for Sam to satisfy both NSB1, and the requirements to judge the first item in the series to be red and the last item in the series to be not red. Sam cannot avoid some feature of her mental state being metaphysically unacceptable. Sam’s individual judgments can all be metaphysically acceptable, but then a pair of them will treat similar cases differently. That pair of judgments will be metaphysically unacceptable, though each member of the pair is metaphysically acceptable.46

The sorites is a genuine paradox. Suppose Peter is presented with an n-step series, starting with something red and ending with something that clearly isn’t. For all x in the series, let x’=x+1. The only (intrinsically) metaphysically acceptable attitude for Peter to take is to affirm that the first item is red, i.e. that R1. The only metaphysically acceptable attitude for Peter to take is to affirm that ¬Rn (that the last item is not red). The only metaphysically acceptable attitude for Peter to take is to affirm that ∀x¬(Rx&¬Rx’). But it is metaphysically unacceptable for Peter to: [judge that R1, judge that ¬Rn, and judge that ∀x¬(Rx&¬Rx’)]. Whatever combination of attitudes Peter has to the members of the set {R1, ¬Rn, ∀x¬(Rx&¬Rx’)}, something about his attitudes will be metaphysically unacceptable. Judges faced with a full sorites series or the paradox are

46 In a forced march, it is increasingly metaphysically unacceptable to judge (individually) that the next item is red. But one is required to treat it in the same way as one does the previous item. So the best one can do becomes increasingly poor. Eventually one satisfies the two demands by giving up one’s previous judgment, saying that this item and the previous one both aren’t red.
simply stuck. However, judges who are not faced with a full sorites series or the paradox
can usually satisfy all the demands of metaphysical acceptability. There was no problem
in Olive, Tamsin and Henry satisfying the requirements on their individual attitudes and
pairs thereof. There is a successful practice of judging things to be red because judges
usually ignore the full range of such questions.

The following analogy might help. Suppose a junior diplomat is given three
orders about greeting dignitaries.

1. Shake hands with British citizens.


3. Don’t both kiss and shake hands with anyone.

Most people are not citizens of both countries. So in the usual cases, it is completely clear
how to satisfy all three orders. John is British and not French, so shaking hands and not
kissing him passes muster. Pierre is French and not British, so kissing him and not
shaking hands does so. But one day Paul arrives, who is both British and French. In this
case it is impossible to satisfy all three orders. This does not show there was a problem in
the cases of John and Pierre. It is misleading to say that the three orders are
‘inconsistent’. Rather, they are satisfiable is the cases of John and Pierre, but necessarily
violated in the case of Paul.\footnote{Peter Vranas (2008) agrees, given his definition of consistency for imperative logic.}

Anaglogously, the demands of metaphysically acceptable
attitudes and combinations thereof are not unsatisfiable \textit{tout court}. A judge faced with a
sorites can’t have an all-things-considered acceptable combination of attitudes, but a judge in a more normal situation can.

So far in this section, I have glossed certain claims about metaphysical acceptability as an attitude’s being required. Similarly, Michael Dummett (1975) frames his ‘no-solution’ solution to the sorites paradox in terms of what the rules require.48 There is a logical problem with this, and a deep explanatory problem. The rest of this section explains how we avoid those problems by taking metaphysical acceptability to be a kind of goodness, rather than permissibility or requirement.

Suppose Peter is required to judge that R1, and required to judge that \( \forall x \neg (Rx \& \neg Rx') \), and required not to: [judge that R1, judge that \( \forall x \neg (Rx \& \neg Rx') \), and judge that \( \neg Rn \)]. Then it follows by (admittedly controversial) standard deontic logic that Peter is required not to judge that \( \neg Rn \). But item n is at the far end of the sorites series and so clearly isn’t red; so according to this approach, Peter is required to judge that \( \neg Rn \). So Peter is required to judge that \( \neg Rn \) and required not to, which is a contradiction in standard deontic logic. Giving a ‘no-solution’ solution to the sorites in terms of required judgments leads to a contradiction in standard deontic logic.

I won’t explore whether a non-standard deontic logic might be satisfactory, because there is a deep explanatory objection to any such characterization of the paradox. The objection is pressed against Dummett by Crispin Wright (forthcoming b section IV). Wright points out that when faced with the paradox, we feel no pressure against our

48 Wright (forthcoming b section IV) interprets Dummett (1975) as holding that one violates the rules whenever one judges something to be red, not just when considering the sorites. Wright correctly objects that this can’t make sense of our stable practice of judging things red. We avoid the objection by distinguishing suspending judgment from ignoring a question, as I did at the start of this section. Olive and Tamsin’s judgments violate no rules (and if the objects before him cluster, neither does Henry’s).
verdicts about the clear cases at either end of the sorites series. It is out of the question to
stop judging that the clearly red shade is red, and that the clearly blue shade isn’t red. By
contrast, we do feel pressure not to affirm that $\forall x(\neg(Rx \& \neg Rx'))$. This cannot be explained
by a theory that says all three judgments are required. We need more expressive power to
accommodate Wright’s datum. We should frame the theory in terms of degrees and
comparisons of badness, rather than what is required. The view is that every combination
of attitudes to the paradox-forming propositions is bad, though some are worse than
others. For example, affirming a contradiction, or give up our verdicts about clear cases
of the predicate, are outrageous responses to the paradox. It is bad, but not as bad, to
temporarily suspend judgment on whether there is a sharp boundary and on whether
*reductio ad absurdum* is valid. There is no prospect of the logic of badness being strong
enough to derive a contradiction from this proposal.

It is not surprising that talk of requirement and prohibition is inadequate for
describing the dilemma posed by the sorites: that’s so for moral dilemmas too. In a moral
dilemma, all the options are really bad, though some are still worse than others. That
can’t be glossed in deontic terms. Further, it is misleading to add deontic judgments to
this characterization. Here’s a powerful example. Sophie is in a concentration camp, and
is given the opportunity to save one of her two children. If she doesn’t pick one to be
saved, both her children will be killed. The central point about ‘Sophie’s Choice’ is that
all her options are horrific. One might want to add that letting both children be killed is
even worse than picking one to be saved and one to be killed. But it strikes me as crass to
believe that Sophie ought to nominate one of her children to be saved, or that she is
morally required to choose. (If she had been presented with two strangers to pick
between, that would be the right answer.) It also strikes me as crass to believe that she is morally permitted to choose between her children. The deontic categories are unhelpful in understanding the moral situation. If one judges some of the options to be permissible and the others impermissible, one has resolved the dilemma to one’s satisfaction. To judge all the options impermissible is to cease to struggle with the dilemma, and thus to cease to see it as a dilemma. It seems that a situation can only be characterized as a dilemma by sticking to degrees and comparisons of badness, and eschewing the deontic notions of requirement and permissibility. I remain analogously silent about which responses to the sorites paradox are permissible.

10. A Genuine Paradox.

If this is the right picture, philosophers should not ‘solve’ the sorites paradox. We don’t need to identify the ‘right’ answer about how to avoid the contradiction, any more than we should identify the ‘right’ answer in borderline cases. In the borderline, there are multiple acceptable answers; in the paradox there are no acceptable answers. That is all that’s relevant to having a metaphysical understanding of vagueness. I argued in section 6 that in general, whether it is true that p is irrelevant to the understanding the metaphysics of p, and the paradox-forming propositions conform to this.

What do I say about which of the propositions that form the paradox are true? Let me prepare you for my answer by considering two analogous questions. My theory says that it is metaphysically acceptable for me to judge that curry is delicious, and indeed, that’s the only acceptable verdict for me to give. So while the theory does not say that curry is delicious, you should expect that I will assert that it is, when pressed on that
question. And here I go…Curry is delicious! That is sometimes a good question to ask me, for example when we are looking at a menu. But it is not a good question to press in the seminar room. Whether curry is delicious is irrelevant to understanding the metaphysics of deliciousness. If you are expecting philosophical illumination from my answer to that question, you haven’t understood the approach.

Similarly, my theory says that all three occurrent attitudes are acceptable as to whether Quentin’s car is red. You shouldn’t expect the holder of the theory to have one attitude rather than another. You can press me on whether Quentin’s car is red, and I’ll tell you what I think. But that answer is of no philosophical interest. What’s of philosophical interest is that all three attitudes are metaphysically acceptable (including suspending judgment). If you are trying to understand vagueness, pressing me on whether Quentin’s car is red shows that you haven’t understood my approach.

My theory says that judges presented with a sorites paradox cannot have attitudes to those propositions that are individually and combinatorially metaphysically acceptable. What should we expect someone who holds that theory to say about which of the propositions are true? We should expect them to grimace and say, “Oh bugger!” That’s what I’ll say if you press me on the matter. Maybe I’ll temporarily withhold judgment on the validity of reductio ad absurdum, and on whether there’s a sharp boundary, but I’ll be pretty unhappy about it. And I’ll soon go back to affirming that there is no sharp boundary, and that the laws of classical logic are valid. But you won’t be pressing me on a philosophically illuminating question. Maybe the all-things-considered least-bad response to the paradox is to temporarily suspend judgment on the validity of reductio ad absurdum. But when the paradox is not on the table, it remains all-things-considered
forbidden to refuse an instance of *reductio*. The paradox does not establish a moral about validity that can be exported to other situations.49

I’ve explained our use of vague concepts, including why we don’t accept any response to the paradox. A question remains, and it is a question no-one can answer, but answering it is no part of understanding the origins and significance of the paradox. Pressing me to say which of the propositions that form the paradox are true makes the same mistake as pressing me on whether curry is delicious, or whether Quentin’s car is red. It ignores that I have explained why that question is irrelevant to understanding the paradox.

Analytic philosophers are rightly annoyed by Wittgenstein’s remark that if we find an apparent contradiction, we should “let it lie. Do not go there.” (ed. Diamond 1976/1989 p. 138.) He does not explain how come the paradox does not infect every judgment we make. I have done so, using the notion of metaphysical acceptability. (No doubt my position is too theoretical and metaphysical for Wittgenstein.) The ‘no solution’ diagnosis of the paradox is attractive, given the intuitive costs to all the straight-forward ‘solutions’. This is further support for denying CORRESPONDENCE and theorizing in terms of metaphysically acceptable judgment.

49 The anti-realist spirit of this view will seem less shocking if one has considered Hartry Field’s expressivism about validity (Field 2009a, 2009b).
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