

# Knowledge-by-Acquaintance First

Uriah Kriegel

**Abstract.** Bertrand Russell's epistemology had the interesting structural feature that it made propositional knowledge ("S knows that  $p$ ") asymmetrically dependent upon what Russell called *knowledge by acquaintance*. On this view, a subject lacking any knowledge by acquaintance would be unable to know that  $p$  for any  $p$ . This is something that virtually nobody has defended since Russell, and in this paper I initiate a sympathetic reconsideration.

## 1. Introduction

Psychological verbs tend to systematically take two kinds of complement. Consider:

[S1] I see a brown dog.

[S2] I see that the dog is brown.

[R1] You remember seeing a panda at the zoo.

[R2] You remember that you saw a panda at the zoo.

[I1] She imagined winning the Nobel prize.

[I2] She imagined that she won the Nobel prize.

The psychological states ostensibly reported in S<sub>2</sub>, R<sub>2</sub>, and I<sub>2</sub> are commonly called "propositional attitudes"; those ostensibly

reported in  $S_1$ ,  $R_1$ , and  $I_1$  are sometimes called "objectual attitudes."

There is a thesis in philosophical psychology, *Propositionalism*, according to which all mental states are propositional. Thus objectual-attitude reports must be amenable to paraphrase in propositional-attitude ones. *Anti-propositionalism* is the negation of Propositionalism, claiming that our psychological life involves mental states that cannot be correctly reported using propositional-attitude reports. For instance, there is no proposition  $p$ , however complex and conjunctive, such that "I love my son" paraphrases without remainder into "I love that  $p$ ."

Among the psychological verbs natural language has equipped us with is "know," which also admits of two kinds of complement:

[K1] I know Jimmy.

[K2] I know that Jimmy is tall.

Call the mental state ostensibly reported in K1 "objectual knowledge" and the one ostensibly reported in K2 "propositional knowledge." We may then formulate the following thesis of *Epistemic Propositionalism*:

(*Epistemic Propositionalism*) For any true objectual-knowledge report "S knows  $x$ ," there is some proposition  $p$ , such that "S knows  $x$ " can be paraphrased into "S knows that  $p$ ."

This is denied by *Epistemic Anti-propositionalism*, according to which there are irreducibly non-propositional knowledge truths:

(*Epistemic Anti-propositionalism*) For some true objectual-knowledge report "S knows  $x$ ," there is no proposition  $p$ , such that "S knows  $x$ " can be paraphrased into "S knows that  $p$ ."

This is just an application of Propositionalism and Anti-propositionalism to "know."<sup>1</sup>

Over the past century, analytic epistemologists have been far more interested in propositional than in objectual knowledge. Indeed, for large tracts of the past century, how to understand "S knows that  $p$ " was the *organizing question* of epistemology; whereas the analysis of "S knows  $x$ " has received much more limited attention.<sup>2</sup> This may reflect either (a) a widespread commitment to Epistemic Propositionalism, or (b) an inclination, however latent, to consider objectual knowledge less *important* than propositional knowledge, at least for the purposes of the theory of knowledge. We may call the disjunction of (a) and (b) *Methodological Propositionalism*.

One notable exception to Methodological Propositionalism is Russell, whose epistemology revolved centrally around the notion of a kind of irreducibly non-propositional knowledge he called *knowledge by acquaintance*. Since Russell, a number of other philosophers have insisted on the existence and significance of irreducibly objectual knowledge, putting it to work in a variety of areas, from the philosophy of consciousness (Conee 1994),

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<sup>1</sup> What does "paraphrase" mean here? This is not a straightforward question, but given the practice of evaluating proposed paraphrases in this and other areas of philosophy, at a minimum an adequate paraphrase requires replication of inferential role: if " $q$ " is an adequate paraphrase of " $p$ ," then there is no " $r$ " such that (a) " $p$ " entails " $r$ " but " $q$ " does not or (b) " $r$ " entails " $p$ " but does not entail " $q$ ."

<sup>2</sup> That said, in more recent philosophy several philosophers have taken renewed interest in what I called objectual knowledge - see especially Duncan 2020 and 2021, as well as Atiq 2021, Giustina 2022, and Ranalli forthcoming.

through ethics (Atiq 2021, Atiq and Duncan forthcoming) and aesthetics (Ranalli forthcoming), to the philosophy of religion (Stump 2010 Ch.3). Russell, however, maintained not only that there *is* this irreducibly objectual knowledge, but also that all propositional knowledge ultimately *depends on* it:

All our knowledge, both knowledge of things and knowledge of truths, rests upon acquaintance as its foundation. (Russell 1912: 75)

I will call this program “knowledge-by-acquaintance first” (not because it is structurally the same as the so-called “knowledge first” program, but because the label is independently fitting). In the next section, I attempt to distill the essentials of this program as it shows up in Russell.

## **2. Russell’s Knowledge-by-Acquaintance First Program**

For Russell, there are two importantly different kinds of objectual knowledge: one which is logically independent of any propositional knowledge and one which is logically dependent, where S’s objectual knowledge of x is logically independent of propositional knowledge just if its occurrence neither logically entails nor is entailed by the occurrence of any knowledge *that p*. Calling propositional knowledge “knowledge of truths” and objectual knowledge “knowledge of things,” Russell called the latter’s logically independent variety “knowledge by acquaintance” and its logically dependent variety “knowledge by description.” He writes:

Knowledge of things [i.e., objectual knowledge], when it is of the kind we call knowledge by *acquaintance*, is ... logically independent of knowledge of truths [i.e., propositional knowledge]... Knowledge of

things by *description*, on the contrary, always involves ... some knowledge of truths as its source and ground. (Russell 1912: 72-3; italics original)

Russell's terminology is suboptimal in two important respects. First, regarding calling propositional knowledge "knowledge of truths" and objectual knowledge "knowledge of things": pending further argumentation, there is no reason why truths could not be among the things of which someone has objectual knowledge. For S may know *of* a truth without knowing *that it is* a truth. Suppose *p* is true, and S knows *of p*; it does not yet follow that S knows *that p* – S may know *of p* without quite knowing of it that it is true. Second, the locution "knowledge by acquaintance" invites a misreading as denoting propositional knowledge which is *based on* acquaintance; when clearly, what Russell has in mind is knowledge which *is* acquaintance, that is, a distinctive, non-propositional kind of knowledge *constituted by* acquaintance (on this see Broad 1919, Pitt 2019, Giustina 2022).<sup>3</sup> To avoid these pitfalls, I will stick with the terminology of propositional vs. objectual knowledge and will refer to objectual knowledge that is logically independent of propositional knowledge as "knowledge-by-acquaintance" (with hyphens throughout) or "KbA."

In this terminology, we may render Russell's definition of knowledge-by-acquaintance as follows:

(KbA-def) S knows *x* by acquaintance iff (i) S knows *x* and (ii) there is no proposition *p*, such that S knowing *x* is either entailed by or entails S knowing that *p*.

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<sup>3</sup> To avoid confusion here, Broad (1919: 206) proposes to distinguish between knowledge *by* acquaintance and knowledge *which is* acquaintance, while Pitt (2019: 87) distinguishes knowledge by acquaintance from "acquaintance-knowledge" and Giustina (2022: 2) distinguishes between a causal and a constitutive reading of the "by" in "knowledge by acquaintance."

Four immediate comments on this definition are in order.

First, Russell is explicit that the *logical* independence definitive of KbA does not imply *nomological* independence: "it would be rash to assume that human beings ever, in fact, have acquaintance with things without at the same time knowing some truth about them" (1912: 72). The laws of human psychology may well be such that whenever we have knowledge-by-acquaintance of *x* we also know some proposition *about x*. Even in that scenario, however, KbA would exist as a distinguishable component of the subject's overall epistemic state.

Secondly, note that the "definition" here is entirely negative: it identifies KbA in terms of what it does *not* involve. It tells us nothing positive about the *nature* of KbA. Russell in fact says very little that is positive about the nature of KbA (cf. Edgell 1918: 176, Parker 1945: 1). His only positive specification is that KbA involves a relation of "direct awareness" (see already Russell 1910: 108). However, he neither asserts that KbA is the *only* relation of direct awareness nor specifies what might distinguish it from any other such relation. We are thus left without a positive way to fix on KbA in Russell. Moreover, *even if* Russell held that all and only states of KbA are states of direct awareness, it would remain an open question whether this is a *definitional* or a *substantive* truth about them. As I read Russell, what defines KbA for him is *only* that it is objectual knowledge logically independent of propositional knowledge. A state of objectual knowledge which is logically independent of propositional knowledge *could* in principle involve no direct awareness of anything. In reality, however, all states of KbA are states of direct awareness. Indeed, their being such is what *explains* why they bear no logical connections to states

of propositional knowledge: states of KbA are logically independent of propositional knowledge precisely *because* they are states of direct awareness (and propositional knowledge is not). That KbA states are states of direct awareness is to that extent the deeper truth about them. Nonetheless, it is not a *definitional* truth about them. The only definitional truth is the negative one in terms of lack of logical connections to propositional knowledge.

Thirdly, KbA-def as such takes no stand on what  $x$  may range over. Russell notoriously maintained that we have KbA of sense data and universals and do *not* have KbA of ordinary objects (see already Russell 1910). Nowhere does Russell suggest, however, that this falls out of the very definition of KbA. It may well turn out that entities of certain ontological categories are in principle ineligible to be objects of KbA; but if so it is not the *definition* of KbA that makes them so, but other, more substantive considerations.<sup>4</sup>

Fourthly, it is important to appreciate that Russell's KbA involves no conceptualization, categorization, or classification of that which is known. Suppose that  $S$  has objectual knowledge of  $x$ . For  $S$  to be in a position to apply the qualitative concept  $F$  to  $x$ ,  $S$  needs to know *that*  $x$  is  $F$ . It is hard to see how  $S$  could classify or categorize  $x$  as  $F$  if  $S$  did not believe that  $x$  is  $F$  (and if  $S$ 's belief is true, justified, and Gettier-proof, it would constitute knowledge that  $x$  is  $F$ ). By Russell's definition, this would make  $S$ 's objectual knowledge of  $x$  *knowledge by description* (where the relevant description is "an  $F$ "), since it would *not* be logically independent of propositional knowledge.

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<sup>4</sup> For most of his career, Russell held that only sense data and universals were eligible objects of KbA. Nowhere does he suggest, however, that this falls out of the very definition of KbA.

So, given that, by definition, KbA is logically independent of propositional knowledge, KbA of  $x$  involves knowing  $x$  without knowing it as ... *anything*, really. (This is consistent, recall from our first clarification, with the subject also knowing  $x$  as something; it's just that that part of the subject's knowledge would not be part of their knowledge-by-acquaintance.)

This last feature of KbA is something early discussants of Russell were quite exercised about. Already in 1917, Dawes Hicks (a prominent figure in the "critical realism" movement) characterized Russellian KbA as a purely passive "condition of acquiescence in what is given" (Hicks 1917: 332), a condition in which the subject is, in Beatrice Edgell's words two years later, "a passive recipient of the 'given'" (Edgell 1919: 200).<sup>5</sup> In other words, KbA is a condition of *perfect receptivity*, in which the subject exercises no conceptual capacities. Observe that here the expression "the given" carries a very specific meaning, as denoting whatever is the object of perfectly receptive awareness.

KbA-def is just a definition. The thesis that something *answers* to this definition - that is, that there *exists* KbA - we may call *KbA Realism*:

[KbA Realism] For some  $S$  and  $x$ , (i)  $S$  knows  $x$  and (ii) there is no proposition  $p$ , such that  $S$  knowing  $x$  is either entailed by or entails  $S$  knowing that  $p$ .

Russell seemed to think it *obvious* that KbA Realism is true (on this see especially Hart 1949, but also Moore 1919). Some of his early critics thought it was not only non-obvious but actually false (see Edgell 1915 and 1919, Hicks 1917 and 1919), and a

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<sup>5</sup> For more on Hicks and Edgell, see Kriegel forthcoming.



natural interpretation of Sellars' "myth of the given" says the same (more on that in §3).

The central thesis of Russell's program, however, is that "All our knowledge ... rests upon acquaintance as its foundation" (1912: 75). I will call this *KbA Foundationalism* and formulate it as follows:

[KbA Foundationalism] For any  $S$  and  $p$ , if  $S$  knows that  $p$ , then there are  $x_1, \dots, x_n$  such that (i)  $S$  has KbA of each  $x_i$  and (ii)  $S$  knows that  $p$  at least in part because  $S$  has KbA of each  $x_i$ .

There is probably more to the claim that all propositional knowledge is based on KbA than what is stated here. But the "thinner" idea expressed in KbA Foundationalism is sufficient to capture what I called Russell's Knowledge-by-Acquaintance First program, which we may now formulate as

[KbA First] KbA Realism & KbA Foundationalism,

that is, as the conjunction of KbA Realism and KbA Foundationalism.

Why does Russell hold KbA Foundationalism? Here as elsewhere, Russell is a tad programmatic. But as far as *empirical* knowledge is concerned, Russell famously held that our empirical beliefs about the external world are justified by inference to the best explanation from the stable patterns in the sense data of which we have KbA (Russell 1912 Ch.2, 1914 Ch.3). The hypothesis that there is a mind-independent laptop that has sat on my desk throughout the night best explains the fact that this morning I have KbA of laptop-y sense data that resemble

strikingly those of which I had KbA last night. What serves as the explanandum here is a web of relational facts (resemblance facts, contiguity facts, etc.) about the sense data of which I have KbA. Presumably, Russell thought that I could not have knowledge of such facts without having KbA of the sense data which are the constituents of these facts. This is not unreasonable. It is hard to see, for instance, how I could know that the laptop-y sense datum I am aware of right now resembles the laptop-y sense datum from two seconds ago without knowing-by-acquaintance at least the present sense datum. And so we have the makings of a line of reasoning like this: (1) no empirical knowledge without propositional knowledge about patterns across sense data; (2) no propositional knowledge about patterns across sense data without KbA of sense data; therefore, (3) no empirical knowledge without KbA.

(What about non-empirical, *a priori* knowledge? One *could* restrict KbA Foundationalism to empirical knowledge-that, and for the purposes of this paper that would be fine. But for the record, I think Russell held that even *a priori* knowledge rests on KbA. To see why, consider this passage:

The fundamental epistemological principle in the analysis of propositions containing descriptions is this: *Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted.* (Russell 1910: 117; italics original)

I am not concerned here with the plausibility of this principle, but with what the principle says. It says that to "understand" a proposition of the form  $\langle Fa \rangle$ , for instance, we must have KbA of  $a$  and of  $F$ . Call this principle P1:

(P1) For any  $S$  and  $p$ , if  $S$  understands  $p$ , then there are  $x_1, \dots, x_n$ , such that (i)  $x_1, \dots, x_n$  are constituents of  $p$  and (ii)  $S$  has KbA of each  $x_i$ .

This is important because, on many views, a priori knowledge is knowledge based entirely on understanding the proposition known. To obtain KbA Foundationalism for a priori knowledge we need something weaker than that, though: that understanding is a *precondition* for a priori knowledge:

(P2) For any  $S$  and  $p$ ,  $S$  knows that  $p$  a priori only if  $S$  understands  $p$ .

Together, P1 and P2 entail

(C) For any  $S$  and  $p$ , if  $S$  knows that  $p$  a priori, then there are  $x_1, \dots, x_n$ , such that (i)  $x_1, \dots, x_n$  are constituents of  $p$  and (ii)  $S$  has KbA of each  $x_i$ .

Again, I am not interested in whether this argument is sound. I advance it only as a conjecture about what might have animated Russell's belief that *all* propositional knowledge depends on KbA.

That said, for the remainder of this paper I set aside a priori knowledge and focus exclusively on empirical knowledge.)

Russell put forward many other theses about KbA, notably extensional theses such as that we enjoy KbA of sense data and of universals but not of ordinary objects such as tables and butterflies. I have not focused on these here because they are immaterial to the program of KbA First as such, and it is this program that interests me. What is essential to this program is just KbA Foundationalism and KbA Realism. In some respects, KbA Foundationalism is more essential, as it is this that captures

the asymmetric dependence at the heart of KbA First. On the other hand, KbA Foundationalism merely claims a dependence of A on B, without making any *categorical* claim regarding the existence of either A or B; it is thus consistent with *skepticism* (if all propositional knowledge required KbA, but there were no KbA, there would be no knowledge). It is the *combination* of KbA Foundationalism and KbA Realism that delivers the entire picture whereby we do have propositional knowledge, but only courtesy of our KbA.

### **3. KbA First and the Myth of the Given**

I mentioned that Russell's KbA involves no conceptualization, categorization, or classification of that which is known, and is instead a condition of perfect receptivity to "the given"; and that early commentators, such as Hicks and Edgell, targeted this feature of the view. In fact, both Hicks and Edgell rejected KbA Realism on this basis. Hicks argued that there is simply no such thing as a state of perfectly passive awareness in our psychology: "The crudest act of sense-apprehension is still an act of discriminating and comparing" (Hicks 1917: 336). Edgell argued that any such state, even if it existed, would not qualify as *knowledge* (see Edgell 1919: 202). We might say that Hicks denied the existence of acquaintance whereas Edgell denied acquaintance the status of knowledge, with both ending up denying that there is knowledge-by-acquaintance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Edgell explicitly puts her critique in terms of the "myth" that pure receptivity counts as knowledge, writing "I regard 'knowledge by acquaintance' as a myth invented by epistemology" (1919: 196). She may have a claim to being the first opponent of "the myth of the given." On this see Kriegel forthcoming.

Supposing for the sake of argument that there *is* in our psychological repertoire a state of pure receptivity to what is given, what would disqualify it from counting as knowledge, as Edgell claimed? This is where Sellars' renowned "myth of the given" becomes relevant. His "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" opens in earnest with a direct attack on the very notion of objectual knowledge:

if we bear in mind that the point of the epistemological category of the given is, presumably, to explicate the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a "foundation" of non-inferential knowledge of matters of fact, we may well experience a feeling of surprise on noting that according to sense-datum theorists, it is *particulars* that are sensed. For what is *known* even in non-inferential knowledge, is *facts* rather than *particulars*, items of the form *something's being thus-and-so* or *something's standing in a certain relation to something else*. It would seem, then, that the sensing of sense contents *cannot* constitute knowledge... (Sellars 1956: 128; italics original)

Superficially at least, this looks like an argument against the possibility of KbA, albeit not a particularly subtle one: (1) knowledge is by nature propositional; (2) the given is claimed by its proponents to be the object of *non-propositional* awareness; so, (3) the given cannot be the object of knowledge. Insofar as KbA is knowledge of givens, then, there is no KbA.

The question this "argument" raises, of course, is why think that knowledge is by nature propositional. After all, without independent support for this, the argument is entirely question-begging. Now, Sellars is not maximally transparent on why he takes knowledge to be necessarily propositional, but the following passage clearly captures the heart of his thinking:

in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing

it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says. (1956: 169; italics original)

To have a claim to the status of knowledge, a mental state must enter into epistemic relationships, notably of justification and reason-providing. Perhaps a state of bare acquaintance - a state of perfect receptivity in which the subject has not yet *done* anything - is not the kind of state that can be justified or unjustified. Still, to qualify as an epistemic phenomenon, it would at least need to *justify*. Otherwise there would be no real substance to the claim that it is an *epistemic* rather than merely psychological phenomenon. What it would need to justify, presumably, is some propositional states - beliefs. It is this, it seems, that Sellars thinks an objectual attitude crucially cannot do: justify a propositional attitude.

Why not? It is not easy to find an explicit argument in Sellars. But I surmise that Sellars had in mind the following thought. For a mental state M of subject S to provide S with justification for believing that things are one way or another, M must *make some claim* about how things are. But objectual attitudes, by their very nature, make no claims about how things are. To make a claim about how things are, a mental state must, at a minimum, have a content that involves some *predication*: being such-and-such would be predicated of something. But any state with such a content would eo ipso be propositional rather than objectual.

If this is what Sellars has in mind, it is far from implausible. Compare the linguistic acts of *asserting* and *blurting*. The assertion "The table is brown" commits the speaker to a certain view of how things are in the world. In contrast, blurting "brown table" commits to nothing - on its own, it is

just a verbal spasm of sort. Of course, if by uttering "brown table" in a certain context one communicates that there is a brown table, then one does assert rather than blurt, and one does say something about how things are in the world. But if one truly blurts, then one has said nothing about how the world is. Accordingly, if someone says to you "The table is brown," their utterance might in certain circumstances give you a reason to believe that the table is brown; but if they simply blurt "brown table," there is nothing you can do with this, epistemically speaking. It gives you no more reason to believe anything about how the world is than if someone blurted "flying monkeys." In similar fashion, if your mental state M "says something" about how things are in the world, that might give you a reason to believe that things are that way. But if M is a sort of "mental blurring" that says nothing about anything, it is not the kind of thing that *could* give you a reason to believe anything.

Here we have, albeit in impressionistic form, the makings of a genuine, substantive, and independent argument against KbA First. In fact, we have *two* arguments: one against KbA Realism and another against KbA Foundationalism. Against KbA Realism, we have something like the following argument:

***Sellarsian Argument against KbA Realism***

- 1) A mental state M qualifies as knowledge only if it can justify and/or be justified;
- 2) Acquaintance is not the kind of thing that can be justified;
- 3) A mental state M can justify believing that *p* only if M "says something" about how things are;
- 4) Acquaintance does *not* "say something" about how things are; therefore,
- 5) Acquaintance does not qualify as knowledge.

Even if one conceded to Russell KbA Realism, however, the above considerations would still undermine KbA Foundationalism - thus:

***Sellarsian Argument against KbA Foundationalism***

- 1) According to KbA Foundationalism, when S knows that *p*, there are some *x*s such that S knows that *p* at least in part because S has KbA of the *x*s;
- 2) For S to know that *p* in part because S has KbA of some *x*s, S's KbA of the *x*s would have to be part of S's justification for believing that *p*;
- 3) In order to be part of S's justification for believing that *p*, a mental state M would have to "say something" about how things are;
- 4) Acquaintance does *not* "say something" about how things are; therefore,
- 5) KbA Foundationalism is false.

Both arguments use centrally the impressionistic locution "say something about how things are." This may be unpacked as follows. First, to say something about how things are, a mental state must carry a content that involves predication. For this is what seems to be missing in "mere blurting." But predicative content is not enough. If S hopes that tomorrow will be sunny, S's mental state has predicative content, yet arguably hoping that *p* is not a way of taking a stance on how things are. For hope does not assert that the world *is* the way specified in its propositional content. So, to "say something about how things are," a mental state must also involve an *assertoric attitude toward* its predicative content.

If all this is right, then it is plausible to unpack "saying something about how things are" in terms of the compresence of



(i) assertoric attitude and (ii) predicative/propositional content. The two Sellarsian arguments presented above could be reframed explicitly in these terms. But to my mind their impressionistic formulation retains the advantage that it captures the pre-theoretic force in the idea that acquaintance does not have what it takes to be a justifier.

The two Sellarsian arguments form together a formidable critique of Russell's KbA First program. I think the program may survive the critique, though in importantly modified form. Before discussing this, however, I want to consider a different reaction to the two arguments: dumping KbA from the foundational role Russell gave it and replacing it with perceptual experience construed as an assertoric-cum-propositional state. This is the gambit of so-called dogmatism, at least as developed by James Pryor (2000, 2005).

#### **4. Pryor's Dogmatism**

In Pryor's dogmatism we find a sustained response to Sellars designed to rehabilitate the idea of immediate justification of beliefs by sub-doxastic experiential states (where justification for believing that  $p$  is "immediate" just when it does not depend on the subject's justification for any of their other beliefs). Pryor's basic response is to insist that perceptual experiences do have a propositional content, as well as an assertoric attitude or force, and so *do* say something about how things are.

Now, for someone like Sellars, the natural response is that if a mental state makes some claim about how things are, the question immediately arises of what justification there is for

making that claim (rather than another or none). If a mental state "says" that things are thus-and-so, there should be something that justifies it in "saying" that this is how things are. Otherwise what the mental state is "saying" would be entirely arbitrary - not the kind of thing that could ground *justified* beliefs.

So, in order to play its role in justifying beliefs, it looks like a perceptual state which does make a claim about how things are would need justification for making that claim. Just like beliefs, then, it would need to be justified in order to justify. As soon as a mental state itself requires justification, however, it can no longer serve as part of the epistemic *foundation*. Mental states which are epistemically foundational must be able to justify without themselves needing to be justified - they must be, in Sellars' apt phrase, "unmoved movers of empirical knowledge" (1956: 169).

As against this, Pryor argues that when we consider perceptual experiences, simply and without antecedent theoretical commitments, we notice that on the one hand they can justify beliefs and on the other they do not themselves call for justification. He writes:

Experiences and beliefs just have it in common that they both represent propositions. And both seem to represent propositions *assertively*; when they represent that P, they do so in a way that purports to say how the world is. So the [Sellarsian] Argument as we have it gives us no reason to exclude experiences from the ranks of justifiers.

Yet, unlike beliefs, experiences aren't the sort of thing which *could be*, nor do they *need to be* justified. Sure, beliefs about what experiences you have may need to be justified. But *the experiences themselves* do not. (If someone comes up to you and demands, "How dare you have that experience? What gives you the right?" what would you

say?) So we see that ... states that assertively represent a proposition won't always themselves require justification. (2005: 209-10; italics original)

In the first paragraph of this passage, Pryor makes clear that he takes perceptual experiences to have the assertoric-cum-propositional structure that grants them entry into the "space of justification." In the second paragraph, he suggests that it is something of a *category mistake* to say that your perceptual experience of a brown dog, say, is epistemically justified (or unjustified). It follows that perceptual experiences "say something" about how things are (and thus can justify) and yet are not the sort of thing which could be justified - precisely the epistemic unmoved movers that Sellars claimed were impossible.

I think there are two problems with this as a reaction to the Sellarsian challenge. The first is that, even if it is *intuitive*, on the one hand, that perceptual experiences are not the sorts of thing that can be justified, and on the other hand, that they do justify, it remains that these two intuitive claims do not sit well with a general principle, itself highly intuitive, that if a mental state makes a claim about how things are, then it needs some justification for making the claim it makes. There is certainly no category mistake in wondering whether there is any justification for saying that the world is one way rather than another, and that is after all what perceptual experiences do according to Pryor.

In other words, what we have on our hands here is a classic *inconsistent triad* of independently attractive theses:

- (A) Perceptual experiences say something about how the world is.
- (B) Perceptual experiences require no justification.
- (C) If a mental state says something about how the world is, the question arises of whether it says so justifiably.

Now it is no solution to a philosophical problem posed by an inconsistent triad to pick two propositions and point out that they entail the negation of the third. (Of course they do - that is why the triad is inconsistent!) What is needed is some additional, independent reason why *that* is the thesis which ought to be rejected. The problem with Pryor's approach is that it consists in pointing out that A and B are intuitive and rejecting C *on that basis alone*.

In the background is a deeper problem, though. Pryor's response to Sellars' challenge seems to me to trade on an ambiguity in perception talk. As we saw at the opening, the ostensible duality of objectual vs. propositional attitudes applies across the board, including to the perceptual realm: at least as far as natural language is concerned, perceptual verbs take - perfectly grammatically - both propositional complements ("I see that the dog is brown") and objectual ones ("I see the brown dog"). There is reason to suspect that the claim that perceptual experience is not the kind of thing that can be justified (because it is a category mistake to epistemically evaluate an *experience*) is plausible only for *objectual* perception, while the claim that perceptual experience is the kind of thing that can justify (because it bears an assertoric attitude toward a propositional content) is plausible only for *propositional* perception. If so, there is no type of perceptual experience for which both claims are plausible.

To see this more vividly, consider a subject whose objectual-perceptual state dramatically underdetermines their propositional-perceptual state.

*(Mixed-up Mishtu)* Mishtu is a subject in a Payne 2001-like experiment on implicit bias. In one trial, Mishtu seems to see *that the black man is holding a gun* (propositional complement). In the next trial, she seems to see *that the white man is holding a drill*. In both trials, however, she seems to see *the same shape* (objectual complement). That is, her state of perfect visual receptivity presents her with the same shape in both trials, but it is followed by a different state of *seeing-that* in each case.

When you and I later discuss Mishtu, it would not seem like a category mistake if I were to assert that her propositional-perceptual state of *perceiving that the black man is holding a gun* was epistemically unjustified, especially given her objectual-perceptual state of a drill-shaped object. And if upon calm examination of the stimulus anybody could see that, although it is a somewhat ambiguous figure, it really looks a bit more like a drill than a gun, we might even say that what Mishtu's objectual-perceptual state justified was perceiving *that the black man is holding a drill*.

Critics of dogmatism have sometimes wielded such cases to argue that perceptual experience is *not* justification-exempt in the way Pryor supposes (e.g., Siegel 2017 Ch.4). But I think the real lesson here is more nuanced: that perception talk is ambiguous as between objectual and propositional perception, and as far as propositional perception is concerned, epistemic evaluation of it as justified or unjustified is not nonsensical or "category-mistaken" after all. That leaves objectual

perception, of course, for which these kinds of claim still seem right: Mishtu is neither justified nor unjustified to see the shape she sees. But this kind of objectual perception does *not* involve propositional content, so does not "say anything" about how things are. It is precisely to avoid the Sellarsian problems this raises that Pryor leaned so heavily on *propositional* perception.

If all this is right, then even if perceiving-that can justify, because it has propositional content and assertoric attitude, it also itself requires justification; while objectual perceiving, if it is to be truly objectual, does not make any claim about how things are, and this leaves it unclear how it could justify the subject in believing that things are one way rather than another. Neither state, then, combines justificatory power with justification-exemption, as is required from a bonafide unmoved mover. The problem can be distilled into the following dilemma:

***Sellarsian Dilemma***

- (1) For any mental state M of a subject S, either M says something about how things are, or M does not say something about how things are;
- (2) If M does not say something about how things are, then M cannot justify S in believing things to be one way rather than another;
- (3) If M does say something about how things are, then there must be some justification for saying what M says; therefore,
- (4) For any mental state M of a subject S, M cannot justify S in believing things to be one way rather than another without itself needing to be justified.

Note well: This is not the *only* thing that can legitimately be called the "Sellarsian dilemma" - Sellars 1956 is full of destructive dilemmas and trilemmas against various subclasses of putative mythmongers. Regardless, *this* dilemma captures a challenge for a whole range of epistemological theories - essentially, all theories that hope to prove knowledge possible by positing some epistemic unmoved mover.

### **5. Show, Don't Tell: Overcoming the Sellarsian Dilemma with Knowledge-by-Acquaintance**

What Pryor rejects in the Sellarsian Dilemma is Premise 3: the notion that any mental state that *says something* about how things are must have justification for saying what it does. The other option is to reject Premise 2 and claim that a mental state M can justify believing that things are one way rather than another even when M does not say anything about how things are. This is the approach I want to explore in the remainder of the paper.<sup>7</sup>

The basic idea is this. Suppose S believes that *p* and, simultaneously, is in a mental state M that constitutes KbA of the very *truthmaker* of the belief that *p*. In such circumstances, it is reasonable to suggest, the fact that S knows-by-acquaintance that which makes true S's belief that *p* justifies S in holding that belief. On this approach, when S believes that *p*, there are at least two ways for S's belief to avoid being arbitrary. One is if S bases her belief that *p* on her beliefs

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<sup>7</sup> My approach bears important resemblance to Ricahrd Fumerton's (1995: 74-5). Nonetheless, it also differs from Fumerton in certain crucial respects. In addition, it is worth noting that Fumerton is in fact completely uninterested in *knowledge-by-acquaintance* and focuses only on acquaintance as such.

that  $q_1 \dots q_n$ , where (i)  $q_1 \dots q_n$  indeed support  $p$  and (ii)  $S$  believes that  $q_1 \dots q_n$  *justifiably*. The other is if  $S$  has KbA of the truthmaker of her belief that  $p$ . A subject who neither has justified beliefs that justify believing that  $p$ , nor knows-by-acquaintance the truthmaker of the belief that  $p$ , may have no justification for believing that  $p$ , and it would be arbitrary for them to do so nonetheless. But it is not arbitrary for anyone to believe that  $p$  so long as they either (a) can infer that  $p$  from other beliefs they have justification for or (b) have KbA of that which makes the belief that  $p$  true (cf. Raleigh 2017: 1401-2).

Impressionistically, we may say that in scenario (a),  $S$ 's beliefs that  $q_1 \dots q_n$  "tell"  $S$  to believe that  $p$ , and this involves them "saying" something about how things are; whereas in scenario (b),  $S$ 's state of KbA justifies  $S$  by *showing* rather than *telling*, where what it "shows" is the truthmaker of  $S$ 's belief that  $p$ .

If this is right, then contrary to Premise 2 of the Sellarsian Dilemma, a mental state *can* justify without saying anything, provided it *shows* something - something that constitutes the truthmaker of one of the subject's beliefs. That, I propose, is precisely what states of KbA do.

Just as we unpacked impressionistic talk of mental states "saying something" in terms of bearing an assertoric attitude toward a propositional content, we may unpack talk of mental states justifying by "showing" in terms of constituting KbA of truthmakers. What matters here, in any case, is not the impressionistic metaphors, but the underlying epistemological principle that there are two ways for a belief to be justified, for it to be epistemically non-arbitrary: one that requires "saying something" about the world and another that does not.



The justification S obtains when S has beliefs that "tell" S that  $p$  is *inferential justification*, because S infers that  $p$  from those other beliefs. In contrast, the justification S obtains when S's KbA "shows" the truthmaker of the belief that  $p$  is *non-inferential justification*. For here S performs no inference - not even inference from S's KbA to the belief that  $p$ .<sup>8</sup> Rather, S's justification for the belief that  $p$  consists simply in S's KbA of the truthmaker of that belief.

When S is *inferentially* justified in believing that  $p$ , S's justification for believing that  $p$  is *mediated* by S's justification for believing some  $q_1 \dots q_n$ . For if S infers that  $p$  from  $q_1 \dots q_n$ , but S has no justification for believing that  $q_1 \dots q_n$  in the first place, the inference will not generate a justified belief. Thus S's justification for believing that  $p$  on the basis of believing that  $q_1 \dots q_n$  *depends* on S's justification for believing that  $q_1 \dots q_n$ . In contrast, when S's justification for believing that  $p$  is *non-inferential*, and derives rather from S's KbA of that belief's truthmaker, S's justification for believing that  $p$  is not mediated by S's justification for believing anything else - it is *immediate* justification.

In the present framework, then, there exists epistemic justification which is both non-inferential and immediate. This justification occurs when a subject has KbA of the truthmaker of one of their beliefs.

As a first pass, the core epistemological principle of this approach may be formulated as follows:

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<sup>8</sup> There may be an inference-like sub-personal process linking S's KbA and their belief that  $p$ , but this is still quite different, as a form of justification, from personal-level inference.

[SHOW] For any subject *S*, if (i) *S* believes that *p* and (ii) *S* knows-by-acquaintance *x*, such that *x* is the truthmaker of the belief that *p*, then *S* is immediately justified in believing that *p*.<sup>9</sup>

So framed, however, SHOW faces an immediate objection. Suppose *S* believes that *p*, and has KbA of *x*, where (i) *x* is the truthmaker of *S*'s belief that *p*, but (ii) *S* is completely unaware that this is so - *S* has no clue that *x* is the truthmaker of their belief. In this scenario, *S*'s KbA "shows" the truthmaker of *S*'s belief, but *S* does not realize that this is what is happening. *S* does not appreciate that what *S* has KbA of is the truthmaker of *S*'s belief that *p*. As SHOW reads, *S*'s KbA justifies *S*'s belief in such circumstances, but this might seem counterintuitive.

To see how counterintuitive it is, imagine the following circumstance:

(*Sad Sam*) Sam believes that she's sad. She believes this because she has a peculiar pathology that makes her always

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<sup>9</sup> I frame SHOW in terms of *S* having KbA of the truthmaker of *S*'s belief that *p*, rather than in terms of *S* having KbA of *p* for two reasons. First, talk of "KbA of *p*" is ambiguous between KbA of the *proposition* that *p* and KbA of the (obtaining) state of affairs, or *fact*, that *p*. Obviously, the former is not the truthmaker of the belief that *p* in the normal case. Even more importantly, however, on some views there is daylight even between the state of affairs/fact and the truthmaker. Thus, while it is true that an obtaining state of affairs or fact is often the truthmaker of the belief that *p*, this may not always be the case. For instance, on some views existential beliefs are made true not by *existence facts*, but by *existent objects*. On this view, the belief that the Higgs boson exists is made true by the *Higgs boson itself*, not by the putative fact that the Higgs boson exists or the (obtaining) state of affairs of the Higgs boson existing.<sup>9</sup> (One basis for holding this - there are others - is the traditional idea that existence is not a property, and so could not figure as a constituent of a fact or state of affairs.) Given this potential daylight between the obtaining state of affairs/fact *p* and the truthmaker of the belief that *p*, it is preferable to frame SHOW directly in terms of the latter, thus avoiding any pitfalls emanating from the theory of truthmaking.

believe that she's sad. As it happens, today Sam really is sad, and moreover is acquainted with her sadness. However, due to exhaustion and distraction, Sam mistakes her sadness with irritability. Accordingly, on the basis of her KbA of what is in fact a sadness, she forms the belief that she is irritable. At the same time, she still holds the belief that she is sad, not however *because* of any state of acquaintance she is in, but simply because she always believes this (as a result of her pathology).

Intuitively, in this vignette Sam is *not* justified in believing that she is sad - even though she has KbA of what is in fact the truthmaker of her (true) belief that she is.

We cannot simply add a requirement that *S* appreciate the fact that what *S* has KbA of is the truthmaker of *S*'s belief that *p*. For this kind of "appreciation" seems to all the world like just another belief: the second-order belief, namely, that what *S* has KbA of is the truthmaker of *S*'s belief that *p*. This new belief would presumably need to be justified for *S* to be justified in believing that *p*. But this is problematic in at least two ways. First, according to KbA First our justification for all our beliefs depends ultimately on KbA. If justification by KbA depends in turn on having justified beliefs, it becomes mysterious how justification gets off the ground, so to speak (cf. BonJour 1985: 30-33). In addition, it is unclear what justifies the relevant second-order belief. Surely not that *S* has KbA of its truthmaker, if only because that would launch a vicious regress. But nor is this belief inferred from other justified beliefs the subject has (which beliefs?).

Partly in response to this kind of worry, Richard Fumerton argues that, to be justified in believing that *p*, *S* needs to be

acquainted not only with the truthmaker of the belief that  $p$ , but also (i) with  $S$ 's belief (or "thought") that  $p$  itself, as well as (ii) with the truthmaking relation (or "correspondence") between the truthmaker and the belief (Fumerton 1995: 74-6). I will argue momentarily that this psychologically dubitable complex-of-acquaintances is unnecessary to respond to the objection. But let me also point out that it would not really help meet the objection. Recall that for  $S$ 's objectual knowledge of  $x$  to qualify as  $KbA$ ,  $S$  must not classify or conceptualize  $x$  in any way, as that would make it knowledge by description rather than by acquaintance. Thus any acquaintance with  $x$  as  $x$  would not qualify as  $KbA$ . That means that even  $S$ 's  $KbA$  of the truthmaking relation between  $x$  and the belief that  $p$  would not, in itself, involve  $S$  *appreciating that* that is what  $S$  has  $KbA$  of. But then it is still the case that  $S$  is not appreciating that  $x$  is the truthmaker of  $S$ 's belief, despite enjoying the Fumertonian complex-of-acquaintances.

I think the right approach here is not to add more mental states to  $S$ 's mental life, but simply to require there to be some link between  $S$ 's belief and  $S$ 's  $KbA$  that makes it *non-accidental* that  $S$  believes that  $p$  given that what  $S$  has  $KbA$  of is the truthmaker of that belief. Various potential links may be envisaged, and we should probably choose the one that, upon closer inspection, does best at getting the intuitive extension right. But just to give texture to this approach, consider the requirement that  $S$ 's belief be *counterfactually dependent upon*  $S$ 's  $KbA$ . This would cast  $S$ 's believing that  $p$  as "sensitive" to what  $S$  has  $KbA$  of. If we incorporate this kind of requirement into *SHOW*, we obtain:

[SHOW+]For any subject *S*, if (i) *S* believes that *p*, (ii) *S* knows-by-acquaintance *x*, such that *x* is the truthmaker of the belief that *p*, and (iii) had *S* not known-by-acquaintance *x*, *S* would not believe that *p*, then *S* is immediately justified in believing that *p*.

Sad Sam was a counterexample to SHOW, but she is no counterexample to SHOW+, because it is not the case that Sam would not believe that she is sad had she not known-by-acquaintance her sadness; she *would*.

Now, it may turn out that SHOW+ does not return the right results on some other cases. After all, as soon as we appeal to relations of counterfactual dependence, we court complications to do with the "finks" and "masks" familiar from the disposition literature (see notably Martin 1994 and Bird 1998). My wager, however, is that there is some link between beliefs and KbA of their truthmakers - a causal link, a cognitive link, a basing link, or whatever - such that, whenever a subject has KbA that is properly linked to a belief made true by what one has KbA of, it is intuitively the case that that subject is justified in having the relevant belief.

Whatever the specific link we end up appealing to, the link is supposed to deliver it being non-accidental that *S* believes that *p* given that what *S* knows-by-acquaintance is the truthmaker of the belief that *p*. And this will handle the difficulty presented by cases such as Sad Sam. It is important to realize, however, that once we integrate the relevant link into our account of immediate justification *in lieu of* the requirement that the subject *appreciate* that what he or she has KbA of is the truthmaker of their belief, we effectively introduce a measure of externalism into our account. (What "measure" depends on how

exactly internalism and externalism are formulated.) This is bound to frustrate philosophers with Fumertonian sensibilities. But if I (following Bonjour!) am right, that any form of "appreciation" is really just a second-order belief that requires its own justification, then insisting on an appreciation requirement would, much less than ensuring internalism about immediate justification, undermine the very possibility of immediate justification.

## **6. KbA First Revisited**

This, then, is what I offer, on behalf of the KbA Firster, as a response to the Sellarsian Dilemma. The dilemma was supposed to sink any epistemology featuring centrally epistemic "unmoved movers" - mental states that can justify without needing to be justified. For any candidate unmoved mover, we can ask: does it or does it not say something about how the world is? If it does, does it not need justification for saying what it says? And if it does not, how can it justify one in believing the world to be one way rather than another? The solution I presented takes the second horn and proposes a way KbA states can justify believing the world to be thus-and-so despite not *saying* anything about how the world is. If this approach is right, then KbA states are suitable candidates for the job of epistemic unmoved movers.

However, a solution to the Sellarsian Dilemma, even if it were roundly accepted, would not yet constitute a positive reason to accept KbA First; it would only remove one obstacle. After all, KbA First is stronger than SHOW or SHOW+. SHOW and SHOW+ are sufficient-condition claims: they say that having the right KbA *suffices* for having (immediate) justification for believing

something. But KbA First entails at the very least also the necessary-condition claim that *only* if one has the right KbA can one have immediate justification for believing something. In other words, KbA First requires that the type of justification cited in SHOW(+) is the *sole* form of immediate justification. For only then could KbA be the *sine qua non* for propositional knowledge that KbA First claims it is.

In other words, the minimum we need to add to SHOW+, say, to obtain KbA First is this:

[SOLE] For any subject S who believes that *p*, S is immediately justified in believing that *p* only if there is an *x* such that (i) *x* is the truthmaker of S's belief that *p*, (ii) S knows-by-acquaintance *x*, and (iii) had S not known-by-acquaintance *x*, S would not believe that *p*.

If SOLE is true, then all immediate justification consists in KbA of truthmakers.

*Should* we accept SOLE? The topic is too vast, and opens on questions too varied and too complicated to settle here, this late in a philosophy article so to speak. But I want to close by indicating what I think would *need* to be done to mount a case for accepting KbA First, and sketching reasons to be optimistic it may be feasible.

A positive argument for KbA First would have to do two things, it seems to me. First, it would have to make the case that *something* must generate immediate justification. In a second stage, it would have to show that nothing *other than* KbA could do that. In other words, the way forward for the KbA Firster, as I see it, is to find a way to defend this kind of argument:

- 1) For any subject S, if S has justified beliefs at all, then S must have some mental state M that can provide immediate justification for some of S's beliefs;
- 2) Only KbA states can provide immediate justification; therefore,
- 3) For any subject S, if S has justified beliefs, then S must have some KbA states.

As noted, I cannot hope to develop a sustained two-stage argument of this sort here. What I want to do is raise two considerations - very abstract and quite unoriginal - that should inspire optimism about Stage 1; then indicate why I am optimistic about Stage 2 as well.

*Stage 1: first consideration.* Plausibly, mental states that justify only mediately are essentially justification-transmitters. My beliefs that (1) Paris is the capital of France and (2) France is in Europe justify me in believing that (3) Paris is a European capital - but they do so only if they are themselves justified. If I believe (1) because it was a mantra of a cult that brainwashed me, and (2) because a hammer fell on my head, then my belief in (3) is *not* justified, even if it is correctly inferred from true beliefs. Thus when my beliefs in (1) and (2) are *justified*, and on their basis I infer (3), there is a sense in which my inference takes my justification for believing (1) and (2) and *transmits* it to my belief in (3). Arguably, however, for mental states to transmit justification, there must exist justification for them to transmit. And this seems to suggest that there must also exist mental states which are justification-generators: they generate epistemic justification out of the epistemic void, so to speak. The beliefs that *these* states justify are justified without the mediation of



justification for any other beliefs - they are justified, that is, *immediately*.

*Stage 1: second consideration.* If we followed Sellars in denying that there is immediate justification, we would likely end up with coherentism: every belief is inferentially justified by other beliefs, with justifications for believing that  $p$  coming to an end only when the chain of justifying beliefs circles back to the belief that  $p$  in a happy way (read: resulting in a circle sufficiently big and sufficiently tight). Now, there are various problems with coherentism, of various degrees of technicality. But there is also the fundamental difficulty of understanding how inferential relations among beliefs, left to their own devices so to speak, can ever generate justification for taking the world outside the system of beliefs to be one way rather than another. Without input from outside the web of beliefs, it is mysterious how the web as a whole could be in any way *responsive* to the way external reality is.

This point goes to the very nature of epistemic justification. Beliefs are subject to various kinds of norm and can be evaluated along many different dimensions. Here are some natural evaluations we engage in:

- Alethic: "Newton was right to believe that there is such a force as gravity, but wrong to believe that it operated in absolute space and time."
- Epistemic: "Ptolemy's belief that the sun revolved around earth was wrong, but it was the right belief for him to have given the evidence at his disposal; Tycho, in contrast, had enough evidence to avoid this mistake, so *his* geocentric belief was unjustified."

- Aesthetic: "String Theory is so elegant, it's a shame that after half a century of research there's still no evidence whatsoever to support it." (Assume for the sake of argument that "theory" stands for a collection of beliefs.)
- Moral: "Aristotle and Kant were geniuses, but they did have thoroughly racist considered beliefs, and for this we cannot forgive them."
- Prudential: "Throughout his career, Cristiano Ronaldo firmly believed he was the greatest player alive; although this was pure wishful thinking, it did make him play better than he otherwise would have."

Perhaps some of these evaluations will not survive philosophical examination. But consider a belief, such as Cristiano Ronaldo's in the final example, which is prudentially justified but epistemically unjustified. What is this "epistemic" respect in which Ronaldo's belief is unjustified, and in which it differs from the respect in which it *is* justified? On the face of it, the problem with Ronaldo's belief - the problem we call "epistemic" - is that although it made him play better, the information at Ronaldo's disposal did not in fact indicate its likely truth. Epistemic justification differs from prudential justification in that it concerns the likely truth of a proposition believed given the information at the believer's disposal. Assuming that beliefs' truth is a matter not of connection to other beliefs but of connection to belief-transcendent reality, this means that epistemic evaluation of a belief system *must* take into account not only the interrelations among the beliefs making up the system, but also relations that these beliefs bear to the reality they purport to represent.

It very much seems that the only way to deal with this kind of difficulty, and ensure that a properly *epistemic* justification attaches to our web of beliefs, is to inject the web with some connection to external reality. This is what knowledge-by-acquaintance accomplishes, of course. In a way, this is *all* KbA accomplishes. By definition, the perfectly non-conceptual, non-classifying states of pure receptivity that constitute KbA do not make any claim about how things are: they *do nothing* but provide the connection to the external world, "showing" potential truthmakers "without commentary," thus rescuing the web of belief from its splendid isolation. And if some beliefs whose truthmakers they "show" are thereby rendered epistemically justified, this justification would be immediate.

*Stage 2.* Even if we accept that some beliefs must be immediately justified, and that KbA states can *make* them immediately justified, it does not follow that KbA states are the *only* states that can do that. A comprehensive case that they are would consider every remotely reasonable alternative and demonstrate its inadequacy. We cannot do this here, obviously. But I note that we did take up in §4 the *main contemporary alternative*, namely, Pryor's propositionally structured experiences. The problem with propositional perceptions, as we saw, is that they require their own justification, since they "make claims" about how things are.

The reason I am optimistic about Stage 2 is that this problem seems to generalize. Any mental state which "says something" about how things are (i.e., bears an assertoric attitude toward a propositional content), or is logically dependent on states that do (as with Russell's knowledge by description), will require justification; accordingly, it will

not be apt to provide *immediate* justification. This means that if any mental state could justify without itself requiring justification, it would have to be a mental state which does *not* "say something." Now, it is true that KbA states are not the *only* states like that: hope that *p*, too, does not bear an *assertoric* attitude toward a propositional content. But the main difficulty then is to understand *how* such a mental state could justify the subject in taking the world to be one way rather than another. In §4, we showed how KbA states could do that: by "showing" truthmakers of beliefs the subject would not have if she or he did not have these KbA states. It is natural to suspect that any mental state that (i) does not bear an assertoric attitude to a propositional content and (ii) presents the subject with the truthmakers of beliefs would be a KbA state.

These three considerations, even if accepted wholesale, may fall short of constituting a *sustained argument* for SOLE. Nonetheless, they should inspire optimism about the prospects for the kind of two-stage argument formulated above.

## **7. Conclusion**

According to KbA First, we have knowledge by acquaintance, and without it we would not have propositional knowledge. In support of KbA First, I have suggested that KbA states may well be the only mental states that can justify without needing justification: they don't need justification because they don't "say" anything about how things are, but they can justify because they show potential truthmakers of one's beliefs.

Note that the form of KbA First our line of reasoning supports is completely generic. To acquire more definition, the KbA Firster would have to settle a number of important questions, including:

- (Q1) Which mental states in our psychological repertoire do in fact constitute KbA?
- (Q2) Which types of worldly entities are eligible objects of KbA?
- (Q3) Which of our beliefs are made true by objects of our KbA states?
- (Q4) What exactly *is* KbA? What needs to be true of a mental state for it to qualify as an instance of KbA?
- (Q5) What is the measure of externalism in KbA First, and what the measure of internalism (and in what specific senses)?
- (Q6) What *exactly* is the link that a belief must have with a KbA state to be immediately justified by it?  
(Counterfactual dependence *might* be it, but as noted there are probably other options.)

A full development of KbA First would require a reasoned answer to at least these questions.

If KbA First is true, and empirical knowledge depends on knowledge-by-acquaintance, this would be philosophically significant in a number of ways.

First, KbA First would, if true, press the importance for epistemologists to pursue the analysis of "S knows-by-acquaintance *x*" with the same vigor they have shown regarding "S knows that *p*." The latter has attracted huge amounts of

philosophical attention over the past century, whereas the former has been by and large neglected. It is true that the analysis of "S knows that  $p$ " is not as central a project today as it used to be; but arguably, this is primarily the natural and perhaps healthy result of a certain intellectual saturation, whereby philosophical questions have received so much attention that progress on understanding the various options in logical space has taken a somewhat scholastic turn. Regardless, the analysis of "S knows-by-acquaintance  $x$ " has never had its heyday, so this kind of saturation does not threaten here. There is much progress to be made in this area, and the truth of KbA First would make such progress a priority.

Second, the notion of acquaintance has seen a certain revival in recent philosophy (witness Knowles and Raleigh 2019). The reason for this revival is in part the various areas acquaintance has been found to do useful work in, often in discussions of perception and self-knowledge, but more recently also in theories of consciousness (Pitt 2019, Giustina forthcoming), moral epistemology (Atiq 2021, Atiq and Duncan forthcoming), and even aesthetics (Ranalli forthcoming). One of the more familiar applications of acquaintance is in the theory of foundational knowledge (see Fumerton 1995 of course), and KbA First gives this application a particularly robust form.

Third, recent work in epistemology has investigated the epistemic significance of phenomenal consciousness (see notably Smithies 2019, as well as Pautz 2017, Duncan 2021, Ranalli 2021, and several essays in Lee and Pautz forthcoming). Relevant discussions have often unfolded within a dogmatist framework, but if I am right there may be a different and perhaps more promising avenue to securing a special epistemic value for phenomenal

consciousness. For, plausibly, acquaintance is necessarily conscious, so KbA is not something that zombies can enjoy. If so, the following line of argument opens up:

- 1) There is no (empirical) propositional knowledge without knowledge-by-acquaintance;
- 2) There is no knowledge-by-acquaintance without phenomenal consciousness; so,
- 3) There is no (empirical) propositional knowledge without phenomenal consciousness.

A zombie cannot have empirical knowledge of the world it inhabits, on this view, and the fact that you and I do have such knowledge is tied up with the fact that you and I are conscious beings.

KbA First may well have many other philosophical implications of significance. But just surveying these makes clear, I hope, that *if* KbA First is true, it is an *important* truth. Here I have attempted to explain KbA First and present some preliminary considerations in its favor. The antecedent plausibility of these considerations, and the potential significance of KbA First, seem to me to recommend investigating the full case for it.<sup>10</sup>

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