

# What Is Knowledge by Acquaintance?

Uriah Kriegel

Forthcoming in *Noûs*

## Introduction/Abstract

Russell famously posited a type of knowledge distinct from and irreducible to propositional knowledge, which he called *knowledge by acquaintance*. In recent years, several epistemologists have reignited interest in knowledge by acquaintance, pointing out an array of theoretical jobs it is serviceable in performing. Nonetheless knowledge by acquaintance continues to be met with resistance and disregard. I surmise that this has partly to do with the specific conception of knowledge by acquaintance propounded by Russell and many of his followers – what I will call here the “classical conception” of knowledge by acquaintance. At the heart of this conception are two theses, which I will label *relationalism* and *infallibilism* and try to articulate more fully in what follows. The main aim of this paper, however, is to construct an *alternative* notion of knowledge by acquaintance – fallibilist and non-relationalist – and argue that this alternative conception is just as fit to perform the theoretical jobs identified by proponents of knowledge by acquaintance. The hope is to thereby rescue knowledge by acquaintance from its relationalist and infallibilist associations, the better to foster its wider acceptance.

## 1. Russell’s Two Notions of Knowledge by Acquaintance

Russell defined knowledge by acquaintance twice over. One definition is in terms of non-propositional knowledge logically independent of any propositional knowledge; the other in terms of knowledge consisting in an unmediated awareness of an item. These definitions may or may not prove coextensive, but they are conceptually distinct. In §1.1 I explain the former, in §1.2 the latter; I explain why I belabor the distinction in §1.3.

### 1.1. *Knowledge by Acquaintance Via Negativa*

Russell’s first way of introducing knowledge by acquaintance is by *genus et differentia*:

Knowledge of things, 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 scheme involves two distinctions (see Fig. 1): first, between knowledge of truths ("S knows that  $p$ ") and knowledge of things ("S knows  $x$ ," where  $x$  ranges over individual items); and within the latter, between knowledge of things that is *logically independent* of knowledge of truths ("knowledge by acquaintance") and knowledge of things logically *dependent* on knowledge of truths ("knowledge by description").

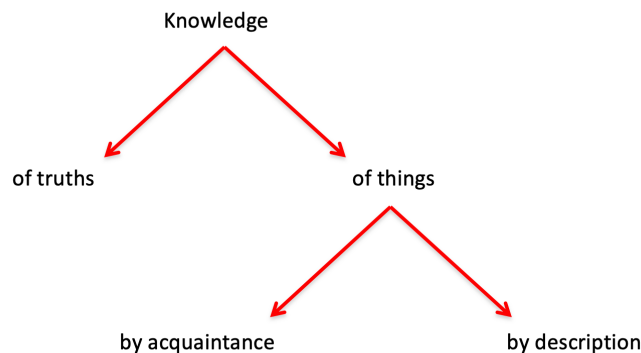


Figure 1. Russell's varieties of knowledge

The *genus* here is "knowledge of things," and the differentiating factor is logical independence from knowledge of truths.

What does "logical independence" mean in this context? Suppose my next-door neighbor is the mayor, but I am unaware that she is. I know the mayor, but I don't know her *as* the mayor. I just know her as my neighbor. Here there is one kind of knowledge by description that I have, namely knowledge of  $x$  as my neighbor (the relevant description is "my neighbor"), and another that I don't, namely knowledge of  $x$  as the mayor (here the description is "the mayor"). Why do I have the first but not the second? For Russell, the reason is obvious: Because I know *that*  $x$  is my neighbor but not *that*  $x$  is the mayor. Thus what makes it the case that I know-by-description  $x$  as my neighbor, and do not know-by-description  $x$  as the mayor, is the *propositional* knowledge I have: had I not known that  $x$  is my neighbor, I would not know  $x$  as my neighbor. This is how knowledge by description *depends upon* propositional knowledge: it is impossible for any  $S$  to know  $x$  as  $F$  without knowing *that*  $x$  is  $F$ .

Knowledge by acquaintance, in contrast, is knowledge of  $x$  which it is possible to have without any propositional knowledge. In this case, there is a person you know-by-acquaintance whom you don't know to be the mayor. Your knowledge-by-acquaintance of this person is thus independent of propositional knowledge that she is the mayor.

It may seem like too much to ask for independence from *any* propositional knowledge. Thus, although I don't know that this person is the mayor, I do know that she is my neighbor; and even if I hadn't, I would at least know that she is a woman, or that she is a human being, or, at the very least, that she is a *thing*. But this is where the "logical" in "logical independence" becomes crucial. Russell is very much open to the possibility that, as a matter of contingent fact, or even of the laws of human psychology, we always know something *about* whatever we know-by-acquaintance:

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. (Russell 1912: 72)

Thus even if non-propositional knowledge is never *nomologically* independent of propositional knowledge, knowing a thing is conceptually and logically different from knowing something about it. This conceptually and logically independent knowledge of the thing, even if in practice always "embedded" in some propositional knowledge, is the epistemic phenomenon that interests Russell. The idea is that even if, as a matter of fact, I cannot know *x* without knowing (say) that *x* is a human being, my knowledge that *x* is a human being involves as component or constituent an element of knowing *x* itself that, logically speaking, I could have even had I not known that *x* is a human being.

With this in mind, I propose the following as Russell's first definition of knowledge by acquaintance:

(KbA-def-1) S knows-by-acquaintance *x* iff (i) S knows *x* and (ii) there is no *p*, such that had S not known that *p*, S would not know *x*.

Observe that this definition *makes no mention of acquaintance*. A label like "irreducibly non-propositional knowledge" for it would be equally apt. But as we will now see, there is a reason why Russell appeals to the notion of acquaintance in isolating the epistemic phenomenon that interests him.

### 1.2. *Knowledge by Acquaintance Via Positiva*

In other passages, Russell does define knowledge by acquaintance in terms of acquaintance. We will say more about Russell's conception of acquaintance momentarily, but two points should be made immediately. First, for Russell ordinary material objects are not eligible objects of acquaintance; only sense data, universals, and perhaps the self are (see Russell 1910: 109, 111, and 110 respectively). Secondly, for Russell knowledge by acquaintance (henceforth: KbA) is not knowledge which is *based on* acquaintance, but knowledge which *consists in* acquaintance (see Giustina 2022: 2, but also already Broad 1919: 206). It's not as if there is a state of acquaintance,

and on the basis of it the subject enters a second state, the state of knowledge. No: there is a state of acquaintance, and that state *is* the knowledge. Thus we should hear the “by” in “knowledge by acquaintance” not as we would hear, say, “knowledge by memory” or “knowledge by testimony,” but as we would hear “knowledge by justified true belief.” The idea is that when S knows-by-acquaintance something, it is because S is acquainted with that thing and that acquaintance constitutes the kind of epistemic achievement that entitles it to the appellation *knowledge*.

The question is what is involved in this epistemic achievement – what S being acquainted with *x* amounts to. This is where Russell becomes quite circumspect, telling us little more than this:

I say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, i.e. when I am directly aware of the object itself. (Russell 1910: 108)

Acquaintance is direct, or *immediate*, awareness, that is, awareness of something that is not mediated by awareness of something else. If I hear the fridge by hearing its *grrr grrr*, the fridge is something I am aware of but not something I am acquainted with – because my auditory awareness of the fridge is mediated by my auditory awareness of the *grrr grrr*. (Here the *grrr grrr* is the sense datum. Its precise ontological status – mental or physical? – is a vexed question of Russell exegesis that I am here sweeping aside.)

Awareness unmediated by other awareness may not yet capture, however, the contrast between acquaintance and *description*. After all, descriptions too may be divided into those that are based on other descriptions and those that are basic. Yet basic-descriptive awareness is not acquaintance, involving as it does classification, categorization, or conceptualization: it is awareness of *x as F*. To capture the acquaintance/description contrast, the acquaintance-constituting awareness must not be mediated by conceptualization either: it is awareness of *x* that is not awareness of it as *F* for any *F*. Consider: sometimes we are aware of a *grrr grrr* a split second before becoming aware of the fridge, but often the awareness of the two is essentially simultaneous, at least at the “personal level.” And we can certainly imagine creatures who are so attentive to a certain sound, because they are so keenly concerned with the sound source, that they are *always* aware of the sound and the source simultaneously. If they are a fridge-obsessed people, for instance, they might be aware of the fridge as soon as they are aware of the *grrr grrr*. Even in such conditions of perfect simultaneity, however, we would not be tempted to say that these people are aware of the *grrr grrr* in virtue of being aware of the fridge, or that they are aware of the *grrr grrr* and the fridge independently of each other. We would still say that they are aware of the fridge in virtue of being aware of the *grrr grrr*. The reason, it seems to me, is that awareness of the fridge requires a certain cognitive process of conceptualization or categorization that the awareness of *grrr grrr* does not. It is doubtless possible to dream up

scenarios in which the awareness of the *grrr grrr* is based on conceptualization of some other awareness; but in the scenarios we encounter in our ordinary lives this is not typically the case. In our ordinary life, there is this asymmetry between our auditory awareness of the *grrr grrr* and of the fridge: we become auditorily aware of the fridge, as a fridge, when we become aware of the fridge's sound – the *grrr grrr* – and conceptualize that sound as the fridge's sound; but we can and in the first instance do become aware of the *grrr grrr* itself without yet applying any description to it. It is for this reason that it's natural to take the awareness of the fridge (as a fridge) to be mediated by the awareness of the *grrr grrr* even if the two are simultaneous.

It is possible to deny the picture just laid out, of course, but this is the picture Russell seems to have in mind. I surmise that this is why he sometimes describes acquaintance as awareness more thoroughly unmediated:

We shall say that we have *acquaintance* with anything of which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of inference or any knowledge of truths. (Russell 1912: 73)

Here it is not just awareness of some *y* that the acquaintance with *x* must not be mediated by, but also any process of inference or any background propositional knowledge.

Talk of “process of inference” may seem strange here, though. We understand what it means to infer one belief from another. But what does it mean to infer one awareness from another?<sup>1</sup> I suspect Russell is using “inference” somewhat widely, allowing cognitive processes of moving from one mental state to another that we won't intuitively call “inference” – including moving from awareness of *grrr grrr* to awareness of fridge through a process of conceptualization. And as we saw before, for Russell the conceptualization that yields knowledge by description presupposes propositional knowledge: in order to be aware of the fridge when hearing the *grrr grrr*, one must know *that* the fridge makes that kind of sound. Here background propositional knowledge functions as a sort of enabling condition of an awareness, and it is in this sense that it is an “intermediary.” Acquaintance is awareness that does not require this intermediary, that is, awareness requiring no background propositional knowledge.

To capture all this, I propose the following definition of Russellian acquaintance:

(*Acquaintance*) *S* is acquainted with *x* iff (i) *S* is aware of *x*, (ii) there is no *y*, such that *S* is aware of *x* in virtue of being aware of *y*, and (iii) there is no cognitive process of conceptualization *C*, such that *S* is aware of *x* at least in part in virtue of undergoing *C*.

Observe that this defines acquaintance in terms of *awareness*, which may seem like limited progress. And as far as I can tell, what awareness itself consists in is something Russell tells us strictly nothing about – beyond that it is a “cognitive relation to an object.”

I doubt this is an oversight on Russell's part. I suspect that Russell tells us so little because, ultimately, he is a sort of *primitivist* about awareness: he takes it to be a *sui generis* cognitive relation, something we cannot "get underneath" and analyze in terms of a plurality of underlying constituents.

If Russell's second definition of KbA is as knowledge constituted by acquaintance, then that definition is:

(KbA-def-2) S knows-by-acquaintance x iff (i) S is aware of x, (ii) there is no y, such that S is aware of x in virtue of being aware of y, and (iii) there is no cognitive process of conceptualization C, such that S is aware of x in part in virtue of undergoing C.

Here KbA is defined in terms of a primitive cognitive relation of awareness doubly unmediated.

### 1.3. *Why I Belabor the Distinction*

You might think: KbA-def-1 and KbA-def-2 are almost certainly going to be coextensive; indeed, that would best explain why Russell runs them together.

That sounds very reasonable to me. The reason I nonetheless belabor the distinction is this: It is possible to reject certain doctrines about the nature of acquaintance as a putative psychological phenomenon and yet insist that some knowledge is irreducibly non-propositional. The trouble is that the relevant doctrines – doctrines which will be our focus of discussion in §2 – are so central to Russell's thinking, as well as to many of his followers', that they have effectively ossified into the very notion of acquaintance as it figures in modern philosophy of mind and language. This philosophical notion of acquaintance can easily force on us a specific understanding of KbA – but only so long as we define KbA as knowledge constituted by acquaintance. In contrast, the notion of non-propositional knowledge logically independent of propositional knowledge is comparatively free of philosophical baggage, and accordingly frees us to develop a conception of KbA unwedded to the aforementioned doctrines. That, indeed, is the main aim of this paper. I start with an exposition of the relevant doctrines.

## 2. Knowledge by Acquaintance: The Classical Conception

In this section, I lay out what I call the "classical conception" of knowledge by acquaintance. It is the conception that comes to us from Russell and is embraced by contemporary proponents of KbA, notably Matt Duncan (2017, 2020, forthcoming), Emad Atiq (2021), Chris Ranalli (2021, forthcoming), and Anna Giustina (2022, 2023). I formulate this conception in terms of the

conjunction of two theses: a metaphysical thesis (“relationalism”) and an epistemological one (“infallibilism”).

### 2.1. *Knowledge-by-Acquaintance Relationalism*

As we saw, Russell construes acquaintance as a “cognitive relation to the object.” The relationality is something he’s quite insistent about: “the word *acquaintance* is designed to emphasize ... the relational character of the fact with which we are concerned” (1910: 109). But is descriptive awareness of *x* not also a relation to *x*?

The answer is that the two are relations in very different senses: description is an “intentional relation,” acquaintance a “real relation.” A real relation requires the existence of both relata to be instantiated. An “intentional relation” is otherwise: it can be instantiated in the absence of some relata. (This is why Franz Brentano himself referred to intentionality as “something relation-ish” [*etwas Relativliches*] or “relation-like” [*Relativen Ähnliches*] – see Brentano 1911/1973: 134/272.) For Russell, acquaintance is clearly a *real* relation. As we will see momentarily, this is why he takes the occurrence of acquaintance to remove doubt as to whether the object of acquaintance really exists.

On the emerging picture, knowledge by acquaintance *consists in* the subject standing in an unmediated “real relation” to something. The contrast here is with the idea that underlying knowledge-by-acquaintance is some intentional (or representational) state that can occur even if its object does not exist. Compare the traditional conception of *propositional* knowledge as unGettiered justified true belief. Here knowledge that *p* is understood as a belief that *p* that has met certain additional conditions. Knowledge that *p* is something we can “get underneath” of, and when we do, one thing we find is the representational state of believing that *p* – a state that can occur even if *p* does not obtain.

A parallel conception of KbA would isolate a certain representational state that underlies KbA and seek to identify the additional conditions such a state needs to satisfy to qualify as KbA. I will pursue this project in §4, but for now let us just formulate the following core commitment of such a “representationalist” approach:

**[KbA-Representationalism]** There is a representational state type *R*, such that if *S* knows-by-acquaintance *x*, then *S* has a token *R* that represents *x*.

*R* is to KbA what belief is to propositional knowledge. And just as one can believe that *p* even if *p* doesn’t hold, one can have a token of *R* that represents *x* even if *x* doesn’t exist.<sup>2</sup>

Russell would clearly reject **KbA-Representationalism**. For him, acquaintance is a real relation that cannot be analyzed into an underlying representation and certain additional

conditions. As we saw, acquaintance can be analyzed in terms of immediate awareness, but awareness itself is something Russell is a primitivist about. There may be an underlying metaphysical structure to awareness that theorizing could bring out, but awareness is nonetheless a primitive at least in the modest sense that no *representation* underlies it. This is what I will call Relationalism about KbA:

[***KbA-Relationalism***] S knows-by-acquaintance *x* iff S stands in the right primitive real relation to *x*.

As I understand “primitive real relation” here, ***KbA-Relationalism*** entails the falsity of ***KbA-Representationalism***. From this metaphysical commitment to ***KbA-Relationalism*** flows another, epistemological commitment, to which we now turn.

## 2.2. *Knowledge-by-Acquaintance Infallibilism*

For Russell, KbA is a very nice thing to have, epistemically speaking. Knowledge *that* the table is rectangular is consistent with doubt as to whether it really is; but knowledge-by-acquaintance of the relevant rectangularity sense datum rules out doubt. Indeed,

it is possible, without absurdity, to doubt whether there is a table at all, whereas it is not possible to doubt the sense-data. (Russell 1912: 74)

Whereas propositional knowledge is consistent with the rational persistence of doubt, KbA is not. That is, KbA delivers *certainty*.<sup>3</sup>

There is a *reason why* KbA is certain in this way. Knowledge that the table is rectangular is constituted by a certain state of belief. This underlying representational state, this belief, is something that may hit its mark or may fail to: it *can* misrepresent and be a false belief. KbA of the rectangularity sense-datum, in contrast, is constituted by an acquaintance relation which by definition cannot fail to hit its mark. There is no such thing as *misacquaintance*:

the sense-data which make up the appearance of my table are things with which I have acquaintance, things immediately known to me *just as they are*. (Russell 1912: 74; italics mine)

Thus there is no appearance-reality gap for the objects of KbA. When S knows-by-acquaintance *x*, there is nothing more to *x* than the way *x* appears to S in S’s acquaintance state. Ultimately, it is for this reason that there is no room for doubt about the existence of *x* once S has KbA of it.

I am going to refer to this as Russell’s *infallibilism* about KbA. It might be objected that talk of fallibility and infallibility is nonsensical for non-propositional states. Fallibility is a matter of susceptibility to error, infallibility a guarantee of truth. Accordingly, in/fallibility applies in the first instance to *truth-apt* mental states. But it’s unclear how a non-propositional mental state *could* be truth-apt: plausibly, where there is no predication, there is no truth and falsity.



I don't disagree with the substance of this complaint. Still, even if truth and falsity are not attributes of non-propositional states, there is a distinction between semantic success and failure for such states. For a mental state with a propositional content like  $\langle x \text{ is } F \rangle$ , there are two ways to fall short of semantic success: through failure of reference (there is no  $x$ ) and through failure of predication ( $x$  is not  $F$ ). Semantic success is achieved when referential success is joined to predicative success, that is, when  $x$  does exist and really is  $F$ . In a mental state with non-propositional, "objectual" content, no predication is involved. But there is still semantic success, namely when (and only when)  $x$  really does exist. Accordingly, when we envisage a non-propositional state for which failure of reference is ruled out, what we are envisaging is a non-propositional analogue of an infallible propositional state. To that extent, it should be possible to formulate fallibilist and infallibilist theses about  $K_bA$  – or whatever we want to call such theses – that mirror the parallel theses for propositional knowledge.

Oddly, although a familiar topic in discussions of propositional knowledge, fallibilism and infallibilism do not command a canonical formulation. Intuitively, the infallibilist idea is that  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  qualifies as knowledge only if  $S$ 's evidence *guarantees* the truth of  $p$ . For a more precise statement of infallibilism, I will adopt David Lewis' formulation:

Subject  $S$  knows that  $P$  iff  $P$  holds in every possibility left uneliminated by  $S$ 's evidence; equivalently, iff  $S$ 's evidence eliminates every possibility in which not- $P$ . (Lewis 1996: 551)

What does it mean for  $S$ 's evidence to "eliminate every possibility in which not- $p$ "? Lewis writes:

I say that the uneliminated possibilities are those in which the subject's entire perceptual experience and memory are just as they actually are. There is one possibility that actually obtains (for the subject and at the time in question); call it *actuality*. Then a possibility  $W$  is *uneliminated* iff the subject's perceptual experience and memory in  $W$  exactly match his perceptual experience and memory in actuality. (If you want to include other alleged forms of basic evidence,... be my guest. If they exist, they should be included...) (1996: 553)

I am going to take Lewis up on his parenthetical invitation to recognize other forms of basic evidence, because I'd like to include introspective impressions alongside perceptual experiences and ("episodic") memories, or "recollections."<sup>4</sup> The result is the following formulation of infallibilism about *propositional* knowledge:

**[PK-Infallibilism]**  $S$  knows that  $p$  only if  $p$  holds in every possibility in which  $S$ 's perceptual experiences, recollections, and introspective impressions are exactly as  $S$ 's perceptual experiences, recollections, and introspective impressions are in actuality.

Our task here is not to evaluate the plausibility of this thesis; we just want a good formulation, that we may engineer a parallel one for *non-propositional* knowledge. Two preliminary clarifications are in order though.

First, note that I have demoted Lewis' biconditional to a mere necessary condition – because it seems to me that, in order to ensure that S knows that  $p$ , S would need not only to satisfy **PK-Infallibilism** but also to *have the belief that  $p$* . For the infallibilist, *if S believes that  $p$ , and the occurrence of S's perceptual experiences etc. is incompatible with  $\sim p$ , then S knows that  $p$* .

Second, Lewis makes clear that what needs to be incompatible with  $\sim p$  is not the *content* of one's perceptual experiences etc., but *their very occurrence*:

When perceptual experience  $E$  (or memory) eliminates a possibility  $W$ , that is not because the *propositional content* of the experience conflicts with  $W$ ... The propositional content of our experience could, after all, be false. Rather it is the *existence* of the experience that conflicts with  $W$ :  $W$  is a possibility in which the subject is not having experience  $E$ ... (Lewis 1996: 553; italics mine)

The idea is that under infallibilism, if  $p$  holds, then we couldn't possibly *have* the same (perceptual, mnemonic, and introspective) experience we do. Thus the occurrence of our experience guarantees that  $p$  holds.

**PK-Infallibilism** is one of the *bêtes noires* of contemporary epistemology, often thought to lead directly to skepticism, by imposing far too stringent a requirement on knowledge. But the *plausibility* of **PK-Infallibilism** is not our concern here. Our concern is to use **PK-Infallibilism** as a *model* for a parallel thesis about KbA. Intuitively, the parallel idea is this: For me to know-by-acquaintance something, I need to be acquainted with that thing, such that the very occurrence of the experience I am having rules out the non-existence of that thing. More precisely:

[**KbA-Infallibilism**] S knows-by-acquaintance  $x$  only if  $x$  exists in every possibility in which S's perceptual experiences, recollections, and introspective impressions are exactly as S's perceptual experiences, recollections, and introspective impressions are in actuality.

**KbA-Infallibilism** is part of what I aim to reject. Instead, I am committed to:

[**KbA-Fallibilism**] Possibly, (i) S knows-by-acquaintance  $x$  and (ii)  $x$  does not exist in some possibility in which S's perceptual experiences, recollections, and introspective impressions are exactly as S's perceptual experiences, recollections, and introspective impressions are in actuality.

To be sure, *in actuality*  $x$  must exist for S to know-by-acquaintance  $x$ ; just as *in actuality*  $p$  must hold for S to know that  $p$ . For knowledge is factive. Still, for the KbA-fallibilist this is consistent with there being an experientially indistinguishable possibility in which  $x$  does not exist.

### 2.3. Classical Knowledge by Acquaintance

Call the conjunction of *KbA-Infallibilism* and *KbA-Relationalism* the “classical conception” of KbA. On this view, there is a primitive non-intentional relation in which subjects can stand to individual items, that relation amounts to knowledge, and that knowledge is infallible (immune to semantic failure).

*KbA-Infallibilism* and *KbA-Relationalism* are not equal partners in the classical conception. In a sense, infallibilism *falls out* of relationalism. Since objectual states do not involve predication, their semantic success requires only the existence of the individual item they are directed at. But by relationalism, the occurrence of acquaintance *guarantees* the existence of the individual item it is directed at. In other words, if some experience E qualifies as acquaintance, then no subjectively indistinguishable experience E\* could fail to qualify as acquaintance. And so the occurrence of acquaintance guarantees semantic success – which is what infallibilism amounts to here.

My goal in what follows is to rescue KbA from these relationalist and infallibilist associations. More specifically, my main thesis is:

[*Thesis*] There is a notion of KbA that (a) can do the theoretical work for which proponents of KbA posit KbA, even though (b) neither relationalism nor infallibilism is true of it.

In other words, I will defend the viability of a representationalist and fallibilist notion of KbA that can do all the work we need KbA for.

There are many reasons why one might want a workable notion of representational-cum-fallible KbA. For my part, I simply don’t believe an infallible real relation is part of our psychological repertoire – with the possible exception of a narrow range of introspective cases. In particular, I don’t believe *perceptual experience* involves a non-intentional relation of the sort naïve realists posit. This is not the place to present a critique of naïve realism about perception (and anyway I don’t have anything original to offer). But for anyone who, like me, rejects relationalism about perception but believes in *perceptual knowledge by acquaintance*, a representational-cum-fallible notion of KbA is a must.

Observe that *Thesis* is an existential asserting the existence of a representational and fallible form of KbA. It does *not* by itself deny the existence of *another* form of KbA that would be relational and infallible. It may be that once a representational-fallible form is available, it makes the relational-infallible one redundant. But if some introspection, for instance, turns out to really be infallible, then it may well be that in addition to representational-fallible KbA there is a more rarified variety that is relational and infallible (compare Duncan forthcoming Ch.1). *Thesis* itself does not take a stand on this. That is, *Thesis* leaves the door open for a kind of *KbA Pluralism*.

What *Thesis* does oppose is the idea that all KbA is by nature relational and infallible. That was Russell's own conception of KbA, which is shared by his 21st-century followers. Consider this passage from Richard Fumerton:

While it would be nice to provide an analysis of acquaintance, it won't come from me. On my view, the idea of acquaintance is one of those indefinitely many simple ideas out of which more complex ideas are formed... As I understand acquaintance, it is not an *intentional* state, at least if we understand intentional states as those that can be 'directed' at objects that 'do not exist'... Acquaintance is a real relation that requires *relata*. I cannot be acquainted with a pain that does not exist. (Fumerton 2016: 240-1)

Fumerton frames his point in terms of acquaintance rather than *knowledge* by acquaintance. But proponents of KbA, who take acquaintance to constitute knowledge, sound a similar note:

When a subject knows of things, the relation she bears to a content is the *aware of* (or conscious of) relation. I think that this relation is *primitive* – it admits of no informative (i.e., non-circular) definition or analysis. (Duncan 2020: 3563)<sup>5</sup>

[My] discussion is premised on the assumption that in perceptual experience agents bear a unique relation of acquaintance to the immediate objects of perception... Further characterization of the acquaintance relation may be difficult given its likely status as a metaphysical primitive. (Atiq 2021: 14036)

[Acquaintance] is *metaphysically* direct in that, when S is acquainted with *x*, no causal process mediates between *x* and S's awareness of *x*. Differently from representation (that can be directed at non-existent objects), acquaintance entails the existence of its *relata*: if S is acquainted with *x*, then *x* (as well as, of course, S) exists. (Giustina 2024: 340-1)

According to these authors, what we can say about acquaintance is that it is an awareness-making relation, that the relevant awareness is unmediated, and that the awareness relation cannot occur unless the item of which one seems to be aware exists. But the awareness relation itself is not something we can *get underneath* in any way. In particular, we cannot look "under the hood" and find a representational state which may or may not hit its mark.

In contradiction to this outlook, in this paper I develop a non-classical account of KbA as analyzable into a number of elements one of which is a representational state. I proceed as follows. In §3, I identify the main theoretical jobs assigned to KbA by its contemporary proponents. In §4, I develop a representational, fallibilist notion of KbA. I then argue, in §5, that this notion can discharge the theoretical responsibilities of KbA.

### 3. What Can't Epistemology Do without Knowledge by Acquaintance?

What kind of epistemological work is KbA needed for? Surveying the work of new-generation defenders of KbA – Emad Atiq, Matt Duncan, Anna Giustina, and Chris Ranalli most prominently – I think we may discern three main roles for KbA.

### 3.1. Knowledge of Qualities (or Their Natures)

The *main* motivation for KbA in contemporary discussions, it seems to me, has to do with the thought that complete propositional knowledge of truths pertaining to certain qualities seems to leave out some additional knowledge, knowledge of the qualities *themselves*. The point is made sometimes with respect to sensible qualities, such as colors and sounds, and sometimes with respect to *phenomenal* qualities, such as the subjective feel of sadness or of tasting mango.

Anna Giustina, for instance, argues as follows. Suppose subjects S and S\* have the exact same propositional knowledge about some phenomenal quality Q, but S has introspective direct awareness of Q itself, whereas S\* does not. Intuitively, S is *epistemically better off* than S\*; and this is so even if we stipulate away any downstream consequences this difference in awareness might have entrained (Giustina 2022: 10-11). For instance, S and S\* may have the same beliefs about what it's like to taste mango, and all their beliefs about that may be true, justified, and Gettier-proof; but whereas S has direct awareness of mango-taste phenomenology, S\* does not. On the face of it, this is not just a *psychological* difference between S and S\*, but also a *normative* difference: S's overall epistemic situation with respect to mango-taste phenomenology is *superior to* S\*'s. The normativity at play here is *epistemic*. There is a difference in *epistemic value* between S's and S\*'s overall cognitive lives. How may we account for this epistemic-value difference? A simple suggestion is: While S and S\* have all the same *propositional* knowledge about Q, S also has knowledge-by-acquaintance of Q itself; whereas S\* lacks this additional knowledge (see Giustina 2022 for details).

It may be objected that in the circumstances described, there is perforce also the following difference in propositional knowledge: S knows that Q has *this nature* (demonstratively ostended), whereas S\* does not. But what does “this nature” refer to? Presumably, to that which S knows-by-acquaintance and S\* does not. Thus even if there is this difference in propositional knowledge between S and S\*, it is a difference that *flows from* a difference in KbA; it is not a difference that can *supplant* or *make redundant* KbA in explaining S's superior epistemic standing. All it does dialectically is to shift our focus from KbA of qualities to KbA of qualities' *natures*.

Moreover, as Giustina (2022: 16) points out, we can also imagine conscious creatures too cognitively simple to have the kinds of concept required to grasp a proposition of the form “Q has *this nature*”; and if we imagine a pair of these creatures, one of whom has direct awareness

of Q and one of whom doesn't, the intuition remains (perhaps even strengthens) that the former is in an epistemically better position than the latter with respect to Q.

Consider next an argument due to Emad Atiq (2021). According to David Chalmers (2006), our color experience presents colors in our environment as monadic, homogeneous, categorical qualities – “Edenic” qualities. Sadly, thinks Chalmers (2006: 66-7), such qualities are not in fact instantiated in our world. Atiq argues that a possible world – call it “Eden” – where colored objects instantiate primitive Edenic properties, and where color experience is the same as in the actual world, has a special epistemic appeal: Our counterparts there are epistemically better off (with respect to colors) than we are. Atiq then argues that the best account of this epistemic-value difference is that in Eden subjects have KbA that in the actual world we don't (Atiq 2021: 14041).

Crucially, this KbA-based explanation is superior, claims Atiq, to a propositional-knowledge-based explanation according to which in Eden color experience tends to lead to propositional knowledge about the character of colors (whereas in our world color experience leads at most to false belief). To establish the superiority of the KbA-based explanation, Atiq points out that subjects in Eden are also epistemically better off than subjects in a possible world I will call “Semi-Eden.” Semi-Eden has three characteristics: (1) colored objects have the same monadic, homogeneous, categorical color properties as in Eden; at the same time, (2) colored objects have the same imperceptible microphysical structural properties that colored objects have in the actual world (e.g., reflection and refraction properties); and (3) the former are grounded in the latter somewhat as phenomenal qualities appear to be grounded in neural properties in our world. I call the world satisfying (1)–(3) Semi-Eden because, as Atiq (2021: 14040) points out, it is epistemically possible that we are *in* that kind of world. Regardless, thinks Atiq, intuitively Eden is still more epistemically appealing than Semi-Eden: in Eden *all* is revealed, so to speak, whereas Semi-Eden is half hidden. Subjects in Eden are epistemically better off than Semi-Eden subjects, who are “blind” to a whole layer of color reality. Significantly, however, in both worlds conscious experience tends to lead to propositional knowledge about the character of colors. What accounts for the superiority of Eden, claims Atiq, is that it is fully “KbA-able” (when it comes to color).

One way to think of the situation is as follows. Where knowledge is an epistemic good, unknowability makes the world an epistemically worse place. While both Eden and Semi-Eden include the epistemic good provided by KbA of colors, in Semi-Eden there is also an “un-KbA-ability” associated with colors that makes it an epistemically worse place than Eden. Crucially, the microphysical grounds of Semi-Edenic colors are not *propositionally* unknowable: we have plenty of knowledge about reflection and refraction, for instance. The issue with those microphysical grounds is only that they are *acquaintance*-unknowable (un-KbA-able). Thus it is the epistemic

value associated with KbA, rather than propositional knowledge, that explains Eden's greater appeal.

As with Giustina's argument, a possible objection to Atiq's is that Edenites have propositional knowledge of the form "color C has *this* nature" that we don't. But the same responses are available here as well, notably that such propositional knowledge *presupposes* KbA of colors' natures and that creatures too cognitively simple to obtain *any* propositional knowledge are still epistemically better off when they have perceptual KbA of colors.

As proponents of KbA often point out, once we embrace KbA of qualities, sensible or phenomenal, it is natural to interpret Jackson's (1982) Mary case as involving complete propositional knowledge of red (or alternatively: phenomenal red) without KbA of it. The knowledge Mary lacks in her room, and gains upon release, is knowledge-by-acquaintance. This diagnosis of Mary was offered relatively early on by Earl Conee (1994), and is explicitly adopted by Duncan (2020: 3578 fn#24) and Atiq (2021: 14043).

### 3.2. Irreducible Epistemic Value

One important line of thought, which arguably irrigates much of the KbA tradition, is that KbA simply delivers a distinct type of intrinsic, "final," or nonderivative epistemic good.<sup>6</sup> Knowledge that *p* entails true belief, and truth is an undeniable intrinsic epistemic good. But debates flare as to whether it is the *sole* intrinsic epistemic good, as so-called veritists hold (Goldman 2001), or there are other, distinct and irreducible intrinsic epistemic goods. One view, of venerable history, is that something like *direct contact with reality* is such a distinct epistemic good. Indeed, the notion that this kind of epistemic good is *greater* than the "merely intellectual" or "discursive" knowledge of truth is a recurring theme in the history of philosophy, arguably all the way down to Plato and Aristotle (on this see Hayner 1969: 426-7).

Arguably, what KbA delivers that propositional knowledge doesn't is precisely this kind of contact with reality. We can appreciate this by adapting an argument due to Ranalli (2021), who asks why we have the clear intuition that knowing that *p* on the basis of perception is *mutatis mutandis* epistemically more valuable than knowing that *p* on the basis of testimony. Suppose that S and S\* both believe that there are parrots on campus, but S believes it on the strength of extremely reliable testimony whereas S\* actually *saw* the parrots. We may even suppose that S's sources are so reliable that forming campus-parrot beliefs on the basis of their testimony would lead to an equal preponderance of true beliefs (say, 92%) as forming them on the basis of "the testimony of one's eyes." The intuition is that S\*'s overall epistemic position is nonetheless better – of higher value, epistemically speaking – than S's. S\* actually *saw* the parrots, whereas S\* believes it "blindly." Ranalli (2021: 131-2) argues that this intuitive difference is best explained by the supposition that perception, unlike testimony, affords a distinct and irreducible

epistemic good beyond truth, namely cognitive contact with reality. While perceptually based knowledge and testimonially based knowledge that  $p$  are equally valuable qua knowledge that  $p$ , the former implicates the occurrence of KbA, whereas the latter does not.

What reason do we have to take the kind of epistemic value delivered by KbA to be intrinsic, or final, as opposed to merely instrumental? The standard method here is the one Ranalli's thought experiment employs. When the value borne by  $x$  is merely instrumental, there must be a  $y$  that bears value which is final, and  $x$  must be instrumental in bringing about  $y$ . Accordingly, if we can describe two situations that differ in overall value, but where *other* sources of final value are held fixed, so that the difference in overall value cannot be explained in terms of the bringing about of value from those sources, we create at least a presumption in favor of a new source of final value. In the present case, what is held fixed is the epistemic value borne by propositional knowledge, so that the extra value in the perceptual case must come from the very difference between perceiving and receiving testimony. It is then an open question what the key difference between the two is, and Ranalli's reasonable conjecture is that it has to do with the presence of acquaintance.

There is a somewhat subtler way to make the case for the finality of KbA's epistemic value, pursued by Atiq (2021: 14042). When value is instrumental, it can always be traded with other instrumental value. Final value, in contrast, is at least sometimes incommensurable and non-fungible. Thus when a kind of value  $V$  is shown to be non-fungible in this way, this indicates its likely status as a final or intrinsic value. Atiq points out that Eden's greater epistemic appeal compared to Semi-Eden survives the fact that Semi-Eden offers opportunities for much propositional knowledge that Eden does not (e.g., knowledge that green corresponds to light with wavelength in the 500–565 nanometer range); which suggests, he argues, that the value of KbA cannot be traded against the value of propositional knowledge.

If all this is right, then quite independently of whatever relationship(s) it bears to propositional knowledge, we need KbA in our epistemology to capture certain facts about epistemic value.

### 3.3. *Explaining Behavior*

Matt Duncan – perhaps the leading contemporary proponent of KbA – is motivated primarily by explanatory considerations.<sup>7</sup> His main argument for KbA goes roughly as follows (Duncan 2020: 3570-1).

Much intentional action is standardly explained through belief-desire pairs: Umberto took an umbrella because he believed it might rain and desired to stay dry. But there is a type of explanandum twice removed from this that calls for a twice-removed explanans. First, if we want



to explain not just why Umberto behaved as he did, but why his behavior was *successful*, the fact that he believed it was going to rain is insufficient; we need to invoke the fact that Umberto *knew* it was going to rain. In other words, *successful* intentional action is something we explain through *knowledge*-desire pairs, not *belief*-desire pairs. Secondly, if we want to explain not just a discrete coarsely individuated action such as taking an umbrella, but a continuous process of highly fine-grained activity, such as Umberto making his way from the entrance to a bustling restaurant to his party's table (in Duncan's favorite example), we might find it implausible to invoke a fast-changing series of propositional-knowledge states with content so fine-grained that it is doubtful Umberto has the conceptual resources to grasp the propositions involved; it is more plausible to invoke instead his ongoing non-propositional knowledge of his surroundings. (Moreover, it is non-propositional knowledge in its logical independence from propositional knowledge that we need to invoke here, since it is precisely *in its capacity as non-propositional* that this knowledge is explanatorily efficacious in this context.)

Taking both these elements into account, Umberto's behavior at the restaurant is to be explained in terms of KbA-desire pairs, rather than belief-desire pairs. What we have on our hands here is an argument by inference to the best explanation for the existence of KbA. The explanandum is successful highly fine-grained behavior, and the proposed explanans is a series of KbA-desire pairs featuring the same desire ("get *there*") but a succession of different KbA states.

I am not primarily interested here in evaluating whether this is a *good* argument for KbA. I am interested in this argument merely as indicative of the kind of theoretical role prominent proponents have assigned to KbA.

To summarize, we have identified three main theoretical jobs for which KbA has been recruited by new-generation supporters: accounting for the apparent dissociation between knowing that qualities are so-and-thus and knowing the qualities themselves; delivering the distinctive intrinsic epistemic good of "contact with reality"; and explaining successful fine-grained behavior. The question I want to raise next is whether a non-classical conception of KbA as fallible and grounded in a representational state could perform these roles just as well. After developing this alternative conception (§4), I will argue that it can (§5).

#### 4. Lightweight Knowledge by Acquaintance

Recall that in the classical conception, KbA is knowledge consisting in acquaintance, that is, in unmediated *awareness*; and awareness is a primitive non-representational relation. What I want to do in this section is offer a *representational account* of awareness. That is, I want to

characterize awareness in a way that avoids any primitive “real relation,” instead starting with a garden-variety representational state and adding to it characteristics which would make it qualify as awareness. In this approach, when S is aware of  $x$ , S has a mental representation of  $x$ , a representation which underlies S’s awareness of  $x$  and which qualifies as awareness because it exhibits certain additional characteristics. The question is what those characteristics are.

In the first half of this section, I construct such a representational notion of awareness, and define a notion of KbA in terms of it (§4.1). In the second half, I consider two crucial objections (§4.2).

#### 4.1. Construction

What I want to propose, as a sort of “philosophical hypothesis,” is that an *awareness* of  $x$  is a mental representation of  $x$  that exhibits (i) veridicality, (ii) subjective indistinguishability, and (iii) what I call “presence phenomenology.”

(i) *Veridicality*. If awareness is to constitute knowledge, we must construe it as factive. As noted in §2.2, for a representation with a propositional content like  $\langle a \text{ is } F \rangle$ , there are two ways to fall short of representational success: through referential failure (when there is no  $a$ ) and through predicative failure (when  $a$  is not  $F$ ). Veridicality is achieved, for such representations, when there is both successful reference and successful predication. In a representation with *objectual* content, in contrast, no predication is involved. There is still a difference between representational success and failure, however, though consisting entirely in successful reference. We might say that while propositional representation admits of two kinds of bad case (“illusion” and “hallucination”), objectual representation admits of only one (hallucination). I call hallucinatory objectual representations non-veridical, and non-hallucinatory ones veridical. The term may be to some extent unhappy, given the absence of predication, but it’s just a term! You can replace “veridical” with “representationally successful” if it helps.

(ii) *Subjective indistinguishability*. For every awareness of  $x$ , I want to insist, there is a subjectively (or “experientially”) indistinguishable state which is *not* an awareness of  $x$ , for the simple reason that it is non-veridical. This feature is crucial for ensuring fallibilism downstream in the dialectic. When S’s mental representation of  $x$  is non-veridical, S at most *seems* to be aware of  $x$ , but is not *actually* aware of  $x$ . So this condition is that for any state of awareness there be a subjectively indistinguishable state of *seeming-awareness* that is nonveridical – a state of *mere seeming-awareness*.

(iii) *Presence phenomenology*. Not any old mental representation is eligible to constitute seeming-awareness, however. A mental representation qualifies as seeming-awareness, I suggest, when it exhibits a certain phenomenal characteristic, one that invests it with a *feel of contact with reality*. I will call this characteristic “presence phenomenology.”<sup>8</sup> On my view,

presence phenomenology is a “phenomenal primitive”: a sui generis phenomenal feature irreducible to any (combination of) others. We cannot analyze it or “get underneath” it in any way. What we can do, as theorists, is use indirect devices to focus the mind on the right feature; I will now offer four such.

The first is phenomenal contrast with content-matched thought.<sup>9</sup> Compare the experiences of seeing vs. thinking about a Coyoacán-blue Ganzfeld. I have the concept of Coyoacán-blue, as well the concept of a Ganzfeld; so I can, in the right circumstance, form the thought or belief that there is a Coyoacán-blue Ganzfeld in front of me. I may also, in the same circumstance, have a perceptual experience as of a Coyoacán-blue Ganzfeld in front of me. With sufficiently many additional stipulations, we may ensure that the belief content and the perceptual content are exactly alike. But *something* feels very different. With the perceptual experience, but not with the belief, the Coyoacán-blue Ganzfeld feels *directly present to us*. As Husserl put it, in the perceptual experience the Coyoacán-blue Ganzfeld feels present *in the flesh* (“in persona”); this feature is absent in the belief. Note well: this is not simply a difference between a representation of the blue Ganzfeld that comes with phenomenology and one that does not. Even a person who believes in cognitive phenomenology would recognize a striking phenomenological difference between what it’s like to consciously think about a Coyoacán-blue Ganzfeld and what it’s like to perceptually encounter a Coyoacán-blue Ganzfeld: the cognitive phenomenology will lack the kind of “presence in the flesh” element.

A related phenomenal contrast is with matching imagination. In ordinary circumstances, a visualization of a Coyoacán-blue Ganzfeld would differ in various ways from a perceptual experience of one. But I am interested in non-ordinary circumstances in which many such difference, including in precision and determinacy, go away. Alex Byrne has once argued that “it should be possible in principle to create a physical picture of a strawberry such that viewing the picture in certain conditions exactly reproduces the felt quality of visualizing” (Byrne 2010: 17). I agree that the strawberry-ish qualities of the two experiences could be matched in this way. But I submit that the perceptual experience of the strawberry picture would still feature an element of (the picture’s) *presence in the flesh* that an imagining would lack. Michael Huemer makes a similar point, but about tomatoes:

Even if you have a very vivid, very detailed imagination, or you have very poor eyesight, you still would never confuse seeing a tomato with imagining one... When you have a visual experience of a tomato, it thereby seems to you as if a tomato is actually present, then and there. When you merely imagine a tomato, it does not thereby seem to you as if a tomato is actually present. (Huemer 2001: 77)

Thus many aspects of cognitive and imaginative phenomenology can in principle match the phenomenology of perception; but there is one feature they cannot reproduce – the feature I call presence phenomenology.

In addition to phenomenal contrasts, we can sometimes use *correctness conditions* to bring out subtle aspects of phenomenology. I claim that the full correctness conditions of a perceptual experience include this presence-in-the-flesh (“then and there”) of what the experience represents. Suppose that, under the influence of strong hallucinogens, I become entirely disconnected from reality and hallucinate a strawberry exactly a yard away from the tip of my nose, at exactly 90° angle. This is a non-veridical perception: there is no strawberry there. Suppose next that someone brings a strawberry into the room and places it exactly a yard away from the tip of my nose, at exactly 90° angle – and that this real strawberry is qualitatively indistinguishable from the unreal one I’m hallucinating. Intuitively, this does not render my experience veridical. John Searle (1983 Ch.2) has argued, on the basis of such cases, that the complete contents of perceptual experience specify that the represented strawberry is causally responsible for the occurrence of that very experience. Perhaps the phenomenology of causal connection is precisely the phenomenology of being in touch with reality. Perhaps the causal requirement is *de trop* and demanding that the represented strawberry be *actually present here and now* is sufficient. Either way, the problem with my hallucination is that the represented strawberry is not the strawberry actually present a yard away. I am not “in touch” with the actually-present strawberry, and this ensures my experience is non-veridical. This suggests that the actual presence of the item represented in perceptual experience is part of the experience’s overall veridicality conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, consider that the “real relation” the naïve realist posits is, quite crucially, *phenomenology-generating*: in virtue of standing in this relation to an object, the subject *experiences* direct awareness of that object. I would like to borrow the phenomenology the naïve realist has in mind, without borrowing their view of the underlying metaphysics. Views about underlying metaphysics are perforce speculative to some extent, but the relevant phenomenology is there regardless. In characterizing the kind of experiences that can constitute seeming-awareness, I would like to focus the mind on experiences that exhibit *this* phenomenology. This is, in a way, the *phenomenology of acquaintance*; and when it is veridical, what we get is *acquaintance*.

Keep in mind, please, that none of these four characterizations are intended to provide an *analysis* of “presence phenomenology.” As I think of it, presence phenomenology is a phenomenal primitive and does not admit of analysis. These are just devices intended to help focus the mind on the right phenomenal feature.

Putting together (i)–(iii), we obtain that an awareness is a veridical mental representation with presence phenomenology that allows for subjectively indistinguishable nonveridical counterparts. More precisely:

[**Aware**] S is *aware* of x iff S is in a mental state M that represents x, such that (i) M is veridical; (ii) possibly, there is a mental state M\*, such that (a) M\* is subjectively indistinguishable from M and (b) M\* is non-veridical; and (iii) M exhibits presence phenomenology.

It is also possible to formulate **Aware** only in terms of (i) and (iii), leaving (ii) out. In that form, **Aware** would *leave open* the possibility of awareness being representational rather than relational; whereas our indented formulation *requires* awareness to be representational and not relational. In some respects, the looser, more permissive formulation is superior: it's unclear why awareness should be *required* to be non-relational. On the other hand, since our **Thesis** as stated in §2.3 already leaves the door open to a KbA pluralism that admits both a representational and a relational variety, it is also useful to have a notion of awareness that is *mandatorily* representational, in terms of which the representational notion of KbA could be defined. Moving forward, I will move seamlessly between the official (indented) formulation and the looser, (ii)-less one, as the difference will not matter for our purposes.

In **Aware**, conditions (i)-(iii) are used to analyze the notion of awareness. But these conditions can also be used to analyze the related notions of *seeming-awareness* and *mere seeming-awareness*: A seeming-awareness is a mental state that meets (ii) and (iii); a mere seeming-awareness is one that meets (ii) and (iii) *and does not* meet (i). Seeming-awareness is in many respects the most important notion in this family. It is seeming-awareness that is sometimes veridical and sometimes non-veridical. When seeming-awareness is veridical, it constitutes awareness; when it is non-veridical, it constitutes mere seeming-awareness. Thus seeming-awareness is precisely the promised representational state that underlies awareness in our account.

With this representational notion of awareness as mental-representation-with-presence-phenomenology, we can now construct a non-classical notion of KbA. Recall that KbA-def-2 defined KbA in terms of awareness unmediated either by other awareness or by conceptualization. If we integrate into this the representational conception of awareness expressed in **Aware**, we get something like:

[**KbA-Lite**] S knows-by-acquaintance x iff S has a veridical mental-representation-with-presence-phenomenology of x that is not mediated (i) by any veridical mental-representation-with-presence-phenomenology of some y or (ii) by any process of conceptualization C.<sup>11</sup>

Note that **KbA-Lite** entails **KbA-Representationalism**, the thesis that there is a representational state type R, such that if S knows-by-acquaintance x, then S has a token R that represents x. KbA-

Lite simply tells a specific story about what R is: a veridical presence-phenomenology-endowed experience that admits of subjectively indistinguishable non-veridical counterparts.

Note also that if anything satisfies this analysis of KbA, **KbA-Infallibilism** would be false of it. Suppose I have a suitably unmediated veridical experience-with-presence-phenomenology of a triangle. Per Clause (ii) of **Aware**, this veridical experience-with-presence-phenomenology is subjectively indistinguishable from some possible *non-veridical* experience as of an indistinguishable triangle. And nothing rules out my having such a non-veridical experience in addition to all the other perceptual experiences, recollections, and introspective impressions I have in actuality. Indeed, for all we have said there certainly is a possibility in which all my (other) perceptual experiences, recollections, and introspective impressions are the same as in actuality but my presence-phenomenology-endowed triangle experience is non-veridical. That possibility remains uneliminated by my having the *veridical* presence-phenomenology-endowed triangle experience that I do. Thus **KbA-Infallibilism** is false if KbA is constituted by the kind of veridical presence-phenomenology-endowed experience described in **Aware**.

#### 4.2. Two Objections

Before closing this section, I want to discuss two pertinent objections which we may express somewhat brusquely as follows: (1) How is this *knowledge*?, and (2) How is it by *acquaintance*?

The first objection is that if KbA truly involves no predication, consisting in awareness of something that is not awareness of it *as* anything (not even *as a thing*), it's unclear how it can pretend to the qualification "knowledge."

The first thing I want to say about this objection is that it does not distinguish between the representationalist conception captured in **KbA-Lite** and the Russellian classical conception. It does not represent an embarrassment specifically for the representationalist conception; if to anything, it is an embarrassment to the very notion of KbA.

The natural reaction for Russell, of course, is that KbA is knowledge in *a different sense* from that in which knowing *that p* is knowledge. The point is not merely terminological: acquaintance with *x* does constitute a properly *epistemic* achievement. Stripped of all predication, *S*'s bare acquaintance with *x* puts *S* in contact with reality, and this is an epistemically meaningful accomplishment. In the next section, I will argue that my representational construal of KbA recovers this accomplishment. If I am right, then proponents of **KbA-Lite** could avail themselves of the same move.

Indeed, there is a respect in which the representationalist is better positioned to make sense of the epistemic achievement in KbA. Corollary to the representationalist approach here is the idea that the same representational state which constitutes KbA in one case can fail to do so

in another (e.g., because it is non-veridical). Arguably, it is precisely because there is always the epistemic possibility of semantic failure that rising to the status of knowledge constitutes an epistemic *achievement*. Without this kind of epistemic jeopardy, it is less clear how we could speak of epistemic achievement.

The second objection I want to consider here is that the kind of knowledge described in *KbA-Lite* does not deserve to count as knowledge *by acquaintance*. For “acquaintance” as used in philosophical discourse denotes precisely the kind of primitive “real relation” that *KbA-Lite* attempts to do without. As I put it in §1.3, the relational construal has by now ossified into the very notion of acquaintance as used in philosophical discourse. It is strange to defend knowledge by acquaintance but reject acquaintance in the philosophical sense.

My response is twofold. First, while it is possible to hear “knowledge by acquaintance” as just *meaning* knowledge consisting in acquaintance construed as a primitive non-representational relation, recall that Russell’s first way of homing in on “knowledge by acquaintance” was as non-propositional knowledge that is logically independent of propositional knowledge. There is nothing remotely incoherent about a representational analysis of non-propositional knowledge logically independent of propositional knowledge. If we allow that awareness of *x* as the mayor, or as one’s neighbor, or whatever, involves as a logical constituent awareness of *x* simpliciter, we should not find any greater difficulty in the idea that a mental representation of *x* as the mayor should involve as constituent a mental representation of *x* simpliciter.

But there is a more basic point to make here. Acquaintance with *x*, recall, is just awareness of *x* that is not mediated by (not had in virtue of) any other awareness and any conceptualization. The question is what awareness is. The relationalist construes awareness as a primitive non-representational relation; the representationalist as a veridical representation with presence phenomenology. Now, a primitive non-representational relation and a veridical representation with presence phenomenology, whether or not either exists, are certainly conceptually distinct notions. We may call the former “heavyweight awareness” and the latter “lightweight awareness.” In terms of these two notions we can then construct a “heavyweight” and a “lightweight” notion of acquaintance (as unmediated heavyweight or lightweight awareness), as well as a “heavyweight” and a “lightweight” notion of KbA (as knowledge *consisting in* heavyweight or lightweight acquaintance). The latter is, in a way, all that *KbA-Lite* does.

It is a separate question, of course, whether anything in the world *satisfies* any of these notions. I take it, however, that proponents of *KbA-Relationalism* have no special reason to deny that there exist veridical mental representations endowed with presence phenomenology (which have subjectively indistinguishable nonveridical counterparts). The only question, then, is

whether such representations deserve to be called “knowledge by acquaintance.” To avoid the issue devolving into a verbal quibble, I propose that we understand the substantial question here as follows: Can veridical mental representations endowed with presence phenomenology perform the theoretical jobs earmarked for KbA? I will now argue that they can. If I am right, then the representationalist can gladly say that KbA is indeed knowledge consisting in acquaintance – *lightweight* acquaintance.

## 5. Theoretical Role

In §3, I identified three main roles for KbA: as implementing our grasp of qualities’ natures, as delivering a distinctive epistemic value of “contact with reality,” and as explaining successful fine-grained behavior. Working my way backwards, I will now consider the suitability of lightweight KbA for playing these three roles.

### 5.1. Explaining Successful Fine-Grained Behavior

Recall Duncan’s (2020) KbA-invoking explanation of Umberto’s successful fine-grained behavior as he makes his way to his party’s table in a bustling restaurant. Suppose for the sake of argument that this really is one of the reasons we need KbA: to explain such successful fine-grained behavior. It is unclear why veridical experience with presence phenomenology of the many objects in Umberto’s way would be any less suitable for explaining such behavior than a primitive awareness relation to these objects. After all, the reason we needed KbA-desire pairs here, rather than *belief*-desire pairs, was twofold: because the behavior is successful (so we need knowledge rather than belief), and because it is fine-grained (so we need KbA rather than propositional knowledge). Now, the success of the behavior is something that the *veridicality* of an experience-with-presence-phenomenology can speak to. And the fine-grained-ness of the behavior is something that the veridical experience’s *fine-grained content* can speak to.

It is worth dwelling on this point about fine-grained representational content. It might be thought that ***KbA-Relationalism*** is particularly well positioned to account for fine-grained behavior, because what it claims we are related to is the concrete object itself, in all its fully determinate glory. But recall from §1.1 that KbA is distinguished from knowledge by description in involving no conceptualization whatsoever. Accordingly, any mental representation that constituted KbA would bear *maximally fine-grained content*, in which an individual item is presented in its glorious complete determinacy (compare Giustina 2022: 9 fn18 on the fact that KbA of x “implies having the maximal amount of information that can be acquired about x”).

In one respect, veridical-experience-with-presence-phenomenology has an explanatory *advantage* over a primitive awareness relation: it can feature in a unified explanation of



successful *and unsuccessful* fine-grained behavior. Suppose Twin-Umberto goes into a restaurant run by an evil demon, who implants in Twin-Umberto a visual experience subjectively indistinguishable from Umberto's, but ensures the actual arrangement of tables and chairs in his restaurant differs just deviously enough to result in a series of embarrassingly clumsy near-misses. Why this unsuccessful but otherwise identical fine-grained behavior? A natural explanation is that although Twin-Umberto's experience is subjectively indistinguishable from Umberto's, it is *nonveridical*. In Russell's classical conception of KbA, we can certainly explain Twin-Umberto's lack of success by the failure of acquaintance to obtain, but this by itself does not provide any explanation of why Twin-Umberto is behaving (moving) at all, let alone why his behavior is identical to Umberto's. Plausibly, the identity of behavior here is best explained by the identity of causally antecedent experience-with-presence-phenomenology; with the difference between success and failure explained by the difference between veridicality and non-veridicality.

### 5.2. *The Epistemic Value of Contact with Reality*

Suppose it's true that, as Ranalli (2021) argues, states of propositional knowledge deliver the intrinsic epistemic good of truth, but states of KbA deliver a distinctive and irreducible intrinsic epistemic good in "contact with reality." This may seem like something that a "real relation" is more fit to deliver than veridical-representation-with-presence-phenomenology. After all, a real relation with something would really relate us to that thing! It would thus put us *in contact* with that thing.

I will argue that the relationalist's apparent advantage here is merely apparent.

I start by observing that the expression "contact with reality" may work well as a *label*, but is far from transparent qua *description*. Now, as long as the expression is used merely as a label, it will label KbA states whatever their underlying metaphysics, and so will not discriminate between a relationalist and a representationalist conception. The only hope for the relationalist, therefore, is to use the expression "contact with reality" not merely as a label, but descriptively, in a way that describes a cognitive achievement which veridical-representation-with-presence-phenomenology is less apt to secure than a primitive awareness relation.

What exactly might "contact with reality" *describe*? When I hit a volleyball, I make contact with the volleyball part of reality. But that, I take it, is not the kind of contact proponents of KbA have in mind. They have in mind a *cognitive* kind of contact with reality – though they also recognize that the mind doesn't leave the body to *touch* the volleyball in any way resembling how my hand does. Moreover, in the sense of "contact" relevant to Ranalli, believing that *p* – even *knowing* that *p* – is not supposed to qualify as contacting the *p* part of reality; so it is not

any old cognitive achievement that constitutes “contact with reality.” What, then, does “contact with reality” exactly mean?

One thing that might be meant by “contact with reality” is precisely that a real relation holds between the subject and the object, one which cannot occur unless both relata exist. It is important to appreciate, however, that a veridical representation of a triangle, say, *also* involves a real relation to the triangle, namely, the veridical-representation relation. The *veridical-representation* relation, too, can occur only if the triangle exists: “S has a veridical representation of x” entails “x exists.” It is just that, unlike in the relationalist model, in the representationalist model the real relation occurs in virtue of the relevant experience being veridical rather than in virtue of it being the experience it is. The mere occurrence of the experience does *not* guarantee contact with reality; but when the experience is veridical, it does constitute contact with reality. And in our representational account, KbA always involves a veridical experience.

For this reason, I don’t think we can leverage the expression “contact with reality” to separate a relationalist from a representationalist account of KbA. Nonetheless, there is clearly an intuitive difference between believing there are parrots on campus on the strength of extremely reliable testimony and seeing the campus parrots with one’s own eyes. The ***KbA-Relationalist*** proposes to account for this in terms of a “real relation” between the knower and the parrot. However, the ***KbA-Representationalist*** has their own account. Recall from our discussion of the strawberry hallucination in the presence of a qualitatively indistinguishable strawberry that the presence phenomenology characterizing the relevant mental representation is precisely a phenomenology as of being in the presence of the object represented. Accordingly, for the relevant strawberry representation to be veridical, it is insufficient that a strawberry (of the right sort) really exist; the strawberry that exists must be the strawberry of which we have a seeming-awareness. We would then be “in contact” with the strawberry represented in our experience. Thus for the ***KbA-Representationalist***, the normative difference between testimonially and perceptually based true (and equi-reliable) beliefs comes down to the latter’s implication of a veridical presence phenomenology. The mere occurrence of presence phenomenology is not an intrinsic epistemic good, on their view, but the occurrence of *veridical* presence phenomenology *is* an intrinsic good (that goes beyond the good of veridicality).

There is one last comment I want to make on Ranalli’s argument. It is not my goal here to *evaluate* the arguments I have surveyed, but only to show that they are supported equally well by a representational as by a relational conception of KbA. Nonetheless, I think Ranalli has not identified perfectly the value difference between perceptually and testimonially based true (and equi-reliable) beliefs. To see why, consider that while the perceptually based belief implicates KbA of the parrot, and thus contact with the parrot part of reality, the testimonially based belief implicates KbA of the testimony (the sounds coming from the testifier’s mouth, e.g.), and thus

involves its own contact with a portion of reality. The real difference is not, therefore, that one implicates KbA while the other does not. The real difference, it seems to me, is that one implicates KbA *of the very truthmaker* of the belief based on that KbA. Since the campus parrot makes true the belief that there are parrots on campus, KbA of the parrot is KbA of that which makes the belief true; whereas KbA of the testimony-sounds is not KbA of the parrot belief's truthmaker. Thus the new intrinsic epistemic good Ranalli's case brings out is not simply KbA, but KbA of truthmakers of beliefs based on that KbA.

### 5.3. Knowledge of Qualities

The main contemporary motivation for KbA, I noted in §3.1, is the fact that propositional knowledge regarding qualities appears to leave out an epistemic achievement with respect to these qualities – an epistemic achievement best characterized as KbA of the qualities themselves (or of their natures). We considered arguments due to Atiq and Giustina that try to isolate the relevant epistemic achievement for perceptual KbA of color qualities (in Atiq's case) and for introspective KbA of phenomenal qualities (in Giustina's). Here I would like to argue that subjects who have veridical-experiences-with-presence-phenomenology of the relevant qualities (or natures) exhibit the kind of epistemic superiority over subjects who don't that Atiq and Giustina correctly identify.

Let's start with Atiq's argument. This had two parts: first, Eden is more epistemically appealing than the actual world, and this is best explained by Edenites enjoying KbA that Actualites don't; second, Eden is more epistemically appealing than Semi-Eden, and that is best explained by Semiites suffering un-KbA-ability that Edenites don't. Again, our task here is not to *evaluate* this argument. Our question is not whether Atiq's really are the best explanations. Our question is only whether KbA needs to be construed relationally to underwrite the relevant explanations, or a representational construal would do just as well.

To address this question with respect to the first part of Atiq's argument, I propose that we imagine *two* possible worlds in which colors really do have the Edenic natures they appear to us to have – call them Eden<sub>1</sub> and Eden<sub>2</sub>. In Eden<sub>1</sub>, not only are Edenic colors instantiated, but our counterparts bear to them a primitive awareness relation unanalyzable in terms of any underlying representation relation. In Eden<sub>2</sub>, in contrast, people have veridical presence-phenomenology-endowed experiences of the Edenic colors instantiated around them. There are two points I would like to make. First: Intuitively, our counterparts on Eden<sub>2</sub> are epistemically better off than we are, and the most natural explanation of this is that they have veridical presence-phenomenology-endowed experiences of (the natures of) color qualities (whereas our own representations, although subjectively indistinguishable, are non-veridical). So to the extent that explaining this kind of epistemic superiority is what we need KbA for, lightweight KbA consisting in veridical presence-phenomenology-endowed experiences will do. Secondly: There is

no reason to think the inhabitants of Eden<sub>1</sub> are epistemically better off than those of Eden<sub>2</sub> *given the argument of §5.2*. It's not clear that it would be dialectically relevant if they were, incidentally, but anyway, as we saw in §5.2 veridical experiences also involve a "real relation" to the world – they just do so in virtue of being veridical rather than in virtue of being the experiences they are.<sup>12</sup>

Consider next the second part of Atiq's argument: Why is a world where the Edenic colors known-by-acquaintance are grounded in microphysical properties which *cannot* be known-by-acquaintance less appealing, epistemically, than a world where the known-by-acquaintance Edenic colors are primitive and ungrounded? Here I confess it's unclear what would be epistemically bad about the non-occurrence of a veridical representation-with-presence-phenomenology; but I note that it is no clearer what would be so bad about the non-occurrence of real relation R. It is not at the level of underlying metaphysics, I think, that we will find the epistemic evil polluting Semi-Eden but not Eden, but only at the supervenient epistemic level: it is only insofar as the underlying metaphysical structure (whatever it is) grounds an irreducible form of knowledge (KbA) that its non-occurrence becomes epistemically bad. Here too, then, nothing in the argument discriminates between a relationalist and a representationalist underlying metaphysics.

Similar remarks apply to Giustina's argument for KbA, which involved two subjects who know all the same truths *about* the phenomenal quality of mango-tasting experience, but only one of whom has *immediate awareness* of it. *If* we imagine that one (and only one) of them (i) enjoys an introspective impression of the relevant phenomenal quality, (ii) that introspective impression is veridical, and (iii) the impression is endowed with a presence phenomenology as of being in direct contact with the quality, then what we seem to be imagining is precisely two subjects one of whom is epistemically better positioned than the other with respect to the phenomenal quality of mango-tasting experience. So, to the extent that the reason we need KbA is to capture this kind of epistemic superiority, the lightweight construal of introspective KbA in terms of veridical presence-phenomenology-endowed introspective impressions should suffice.

Giustina might reply that unlike in the case of perception, there are independent reasons to suspect that the introspective awareness underlying introspective KbA really is infallible (see, e.g., Giustina 2021: 425); and that this favors a relationalist account of its metaphysics. To this I have three responses. The first and most tentative is that introspective infallibility is obviously a very controversial matter. The second is that such infallibility could in principle be the result of representations which prove, for whatever reason to do with the way our world is set up, immune to misrepresentation. In that scenario, such representations would have no *nomologically possible* tokens that misrepresent, despite the fact that there are *metaphysically possible* such tokens. My third and most committed response, however, is to remind that my

*Thesis* left the door open for a KbA pluralism admitting two varieties of KbA: a relational-cum-infallible variety, perhaps most natural for certain rarified forms of introspective KbA, and a representational-cum-fallible variety for all other KbA.

I conclude that the representational construal of KbA is fit to underwrite the theoretical role assigned to KbA by Atiq and Giustina. More generally, for all three of KbA's proposed theoretical roles, it seems to make strictly no difference what the underlying metaphysics of KbA states is – in particular, whether they consist in (a) veridical experiences with presence phenomenology potentially subjectively indistinguishable from some nonveridical experiences, or (b) primitive real relations the occurrence of which depends on the existence of both relata. So: mental states conforming to (a) are just as suitable for performing the theoretical roles for which we need KbA.

## Conclusion

I have argued that a representational construal sustains the serviceability case for KbA just as well as the classical relational construal. My own motivation for arguing this is that I don't think you need to be a naïve realist about perception to believe in perceptual knowledge by acquaintance; other motivations are possible too.

Representational KbA is constituted, I have suggested, by veridical mental representations with "presence phenomenology" that have subjectively indistinguishable non-veridical counterparts. It is worth noting that only phenomenally conscious mental states have any phenomenology and a fortiori any *presence* phenomenology. It follows that only phenomenally conscious states can constitute KbA.

This marks an important difference between knowledge by acquaintance and propositional knowledge. Unlike propositional knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance is an ineluctably conscious phenomenon: there is no such thing as "standing," "tacit," "latent," or otherwise non-conscious knowledge by acquaintance. There may well be, of course, standing propositional knowledge *based on* acquaintance – but as noted in §1.1 that is not what knowledge-by-acquaintance is.

This is doubly significant given that some philosophers, starting with Russell himself, have argued that the capacity to acquire propositional knowledge *depends* on a capacity for knowledge by acquaintance:

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

This is not the place to evaluate the all-things-considered plausibility of this claim (see Kriegel 2024 for my defense of it). I only note that against the background of the account of KbA defended here, it generates the following straightforward piece of reasoning: no propositional knowledge without knowledge by acquaintance; no knowledge by acquaintance without phenomenal consciousness; therefore, no knowledge whatsoever without phenomenal consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

## References

- Atiq, Emad 2021. 'Acquaintance, Knowledge, and Value.' *Synthese* 199: 14035-14062.
- Brentano, Franz 1911/1973. 'Klassifikation der psychischen Phänomene, Anhang,' in *Psychologie von empirischen Standpunkt*, ed. O. Kraus. Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1924. English translation 'Appendix to the Classification of Mental Phenomena,' in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A.C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell, and L.L. McAlister. London: Routledge, 1973.
- Byrne, Alex 2010. 'Recollection, Perception, Imagination.' *Philosophical Studies* 148: 15–26.
- Chalmers, David 2003. 'The Content and Epistemology of Phenomenal Beliefs.' In Q. Smith and A. Jokic (eds.), *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chalmers, David 2006. 'Perception and the Fall from Eden.' In T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds.), *Perceptual Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chudnoff, Elijah 2011. 'What Intuitions Are Like.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 82: 625-654.
- Conee, Earl 1994. 'Phenomenal Knowledge.' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 72: 136-150.
- Duncan, Matt 2017. 'Two Russellian Arguments for Acquaintance.' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 95: 461-474.
- Duncan, Matt 2020. 'Knowledge of Things.' *Synthese* 197: 3559-3592.
- Duncan, Matt forthcoming. *Present to the Mind: Acquaintance and Its Significance*.
- Fumerton, Richard 2016. 'The Prospects for Traditional Internalism.' In B. Coppenger and M. Bergmann (eds.), *Intellectual Assurance: Essays on Traditional Epistemic Internalism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Giustina, Anna 2021. 'Introspection without Judgment.' *Erkenntnis* 86: 407-427.
- Giustina, Anna 2022. 'Introspective Knowledge by Acquaintance.' *Synthese* 200:128.
- Giustina, Anna 2023. 'Introspective Acquaintance: An Integration Account.' *European Journal of Philosophy* 31: 380-397.
- Giustina, Anna 2024. 'Inner Acquaintance Theories of Consciousness.' *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Mind* 4: 334-379.

- Goldman, Alvin 2001. 'The unity of the epistemic virtues.' In A. Fairweather and L. Zagzebski (eds.), *Virtue Epistemology: Essays on Epistemic Virtue and Responsibility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hayner, Paul 1969. 'Knowledge by Acquaintance.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 29: 423-431.
- Hellie, Benj 2007. 'Higher-Order Intentionality and Higher-Order Acquaintance.' *Philosophical Studies* 134: 289-324.
- Horgan, Terry and Uriah Kriegel 2007. 'Phenomenal Epistemology: What is Consciousness that We Should Know It so Well?' *Philosophical Issues* 17: 123-144.
- Huemer, Michael 2001. *Skepticism and the veil of perception*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Johnston, Mark 2004. 'The Obscure Object of Hallucination.' *Philosophical Studies* 120: 113-183.
- Kriegel, Uriah 2019. 'The Perception/Cognition Divide: One More Time, with Feeling.' In C. Limbeck-Lilienau and F. Stadler (eds.), *The Philosophy of Perception*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.
- Kriegel, Uriah 2024. 'Knowledge-by-Acquaintance First.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 109: 458-477.
- Lewis, David 1996. 'Elusive Knowledge.' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74: 549-567.
- Ranalli, Christopher 2021. 'The Special Value of Experience.' *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Mind* 1: 130-167.
- Ranalli, Christopher forthcoming. 'Knowledge of Things and Aesthetic Testimony.' *Inquiry*.
- Recanati, François 2007. *Perspectival Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Russell, Bertrand 1910. 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description.' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11: 108-128.
- Russell, Bertrand 1912. *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York: Holt and Co. and London: William and Norgate.
- Schwitzgebel, Eric 2008. 'The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection.' *Philosophical Review* 117: 245-273.
- Searle, John R. 1983. *Intentionality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sellars, Wilfrid 1963. 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind.' In his *Science, Perception, and Reality*. Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Press.
- Siewert, Charles forthcoming. *Subjectivity and Understanding*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tulving, Endel 1972. 'Episodic and Semantic Memory.' In E. Tulving and W. Donaldson (eds.), *Organization and Memory*. New York: Academic Press.

---

<sup>1</sup> We understand what it means for one awareness to be caused by another awareness, or even (at least in part) by a belief (e.g., in case of cognitive penetration). But it is less clear what it means for an awareness to be *inferred from* another awareness (or a belief).

---

<sup>2</sup> Note that on some views, while it's possible to represent  $x$  even if  $x$  doesn't exist, there is always *something* that must exist and that the subject must bear a "real relation" to represent  $x$ . For instance, it has been suggested that for  $S$  to represent  $x$  (e.g., Bigfoot) when  $x$  does not exist, there must exist some uninstantiated universal (Bigfootness) that  $S$  has a real relation to (Johnston 2004). Nonetheless, to count as a representationalist, one must *not* require a real relation to  $x$  itself.

<sup>3</sup> For an illuminating discussion of the relationship between KbA and certainty and indubitability, see Duncan 2017 and Duncan forthcoming Ch.3. Unlike Russell, Duncan takes the indubitability of  $x$ 's existence to be a sufficient but not necessary condition for our having acquaintance with  $x$ .

<sup>4</sup> I prefer the term "recollection" because "memory" is ambiguous between so-called episodic and semantic memory (Tulving 1972): a concrete recollection of an event from one's personal past vs. a belief about some fact stored in long-term memory (compare "I remember seeing a panda at the zoo" vs. "I remember that Clovis was the first king of the Franks"). Only the former is the kind of memory Lewis has in mind, and the term "recollection" is natural for it (see Byrne 2010).

<sup>5</sup> We should note that in more recent writings Duncan has sounded a less committal note, allowing that acquaintance may turn out to have any number of different underlying metaphysics (see especially Duncan forthcoming Ch.1-2).

<sup>6</sup> I use these expressions interchangeably. In particular, I will *not* use "intrinsic value" to mean value had in virtue of intrinsic or non-relational properties, but rather to mean value that does not derive from another kind of value.

<sup>7</sup> Actually, Duncan (2020) has *two* main arguments for KbA, or more precisely for knowledge of things. One is the explanatory argument I will focus on here; the other takes as its starting point the existence of *awareness* of things and argues that this awareness has many hallmarks of knowledge, such as contact with reality, relationship to evidence, justification, and reasoning, as well as susceptibility to epistemic praise and blame (see Duncan 2020: 3571-3). I focus on the explanatory argument because I find it stronger when applied specifically to KbA, as opposed to knowledge-of-things more generically. As is clear from the literature on the so-called myth of the given (Sellars 1963), the relationship of acquaintance to evidence, justification, and praise/blame is highly problematic (I offer my own defense of KbA from the myth of the given in Kriegel 2024).

<sup>8</sup> I give it my own name to make sure I don't take on the philosophical baggage associated with other notions, but without any claim to have made a philosophical discovery. I am very open to the possibility that various notions in the extant literature, from Eli Chudnoff's (2011) "presentational phenomenology" all the way back to Kant's "*Anschauung*" (and before), target the same phenomenon.

<sup>9</sup> As I think of them, phenomenal contrasts are mental exercises in which we juxtapose in "reproductive imagination" two experiences that are supposed to differ only in that one exhibits the relevant feature while the other does not.

<sup>10</sup> Although Searle construed his causal requirement as internal to perceptual *content*, the correctness conditions of a mental state are fixed by the combination of content and *attitude*, and François Recanati (Recanati 2007 Part 2) has argued plausibly that the causal requirement ought to be "placed" in the *attitude*. The same issue arises with respect to presence phenomenology, and I think there are very good reasons to see it as an aspect of attitude (see Kriegel 2019).

<sup>11</sup> In §2.3, I left the door open for a KbA-Pluralism that would allow relational-cum-infallible KbA *in addition to* the representational-cum-fallible KbA I insist exists (I did so, recall, in case certain types of introspective KbA were better accounted for through the relational metaphysics). If such a pluralism ends up being embraced, we would need to restrict *KbA-Lite* to one kind of KbA, or perhaps more simply, demote it from a biconditional to a sufficient condition.



---

<sup>12</sup> As noted, though, how the inhabitants of Eden<sub>1</sub> and Eden<sub>2</sub> compare epistemically may be “epidialectical” in the present context. What really matters is that *if* we imagine a world where people have experiences-with-presence-phenomenology of Edenic colors, such that these experiences are veridical, because colors really are Edenic, then what we seem to imagine is precisely the kind of epistemically better world that Atiq’s thought-experiment enjoins us to envisage.

<sup>13</sup> I have benefitted from presenting the paper at the College de France in Paris and in a conference at the University of Valencia, and from discussing the paper with my colleagues at Rice University’s philosophy department during a memorable dinner at an Ethiopian restaurant in Houston. I am grateful to Marc Artiga, Amy Berg, Sam Coleman, Alexandre Declos, Matt Duncan, Francesco Franda, Anna Giustina, Steven Gubka, Robert Howell, Michelle Liu, Brian Miller, Tim Schroeder, George Sher, Charles Siewert, and Jacques-Henri Vollet. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Matt Duncan and Anna Giustina, who over the years have made me see the importance of knowledge by acquaintance.