Replies to Wright, MacFarlane and Sosa

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1 Reply to Wright

The main impetus for my book came from the widespread acceptance of relativistic views about truth and knowledge within the Academy, especially within the humanities and the humanistic social sciences. In its introductory sections, though, I noted that there is one discipline within the humanities in which the influence of relativistic views is quite weak—namely, within analytic philosophy itself.

Ironically, no sooner had the ink dried on the final version of my manuscript sometime in mid-2005—although, of course it had been in the works for a number of years prior to that—than I began to become aware of a huge interest in certain kinds of relativistic views that was beginning to build *within* analytic philosophy. That interest—which is ongoing as I write—has been fueled to a considerable extent by the work of a younger generation of philosophers including John MacFarlane, Max Kölbel and Peter Lasersohn.[1]

Now, as we shall see, the sort of relativistic view that has been attracting attention of late—the sort that Crispin Wright mischievously dubs "New Age" relativism—is different from the sort of view that I was criticizing. I do not just mean that the relativisms at issue concern different domains (though that might also be true); but rather that New Age relativism uses a different *template* for generating a relativistic view of a given domain than I do. And this naturally raises the question whether my critical arguments against a relativistic view of the epistemic domain would continue to be effective were such a view given a New Age (NA) formulation rather than the formulation I gave it.

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[1] See the references in Wright's bibliography.

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Wright's welcome contribution is all about this question. As he very nicely summarizes, he argues for three main claims:

(I)   That when relativism about epistemic justification, and about morals, is couched in the form canonical for NA relativism, they still remain within range of the "artillery" that I develop in Chap. 6.

(II)   That there is evasive action that they can take.

But

(III) That when they take it, they effectively have nothing to offer over other well-established forms of anti-realism and that the play with specifically relativist ideas becomes nugatory.

To these claims explicitly identified by Wright, we may add a fourth:

(IV)   That the NA template for generating a relativistic view of a given domain is *better* than the template I provided in the sense that it gives the relativist a more playable hand and better conforms to his intentions intuitively understood.

Now, since I am called upon to respond critically to Wright's contribution, I find myself in a bit of a bind because I am in full agreement with Wright's claims (I) through (III) and with his final conclusion:

> The crucial, load-bearing idea in the views about moral and epistemic justification that Boghossian is attacking is that of the rationally unconstrained acceptance of (propositions articulating) basic moral and epistemic standards. This … has long been explored and debated under various 'non-cognitivist', 'non-factualist' and 'minimalist' rubrics. The main point I have been arguing here is that these debates are not furthered at all by superimposing the New Age relativist semantic template onto the discourses concerned. If it is insisted that assessment-relative truth is the only notion of truth that engages those discourses, the effect of the template is to throw a spanner in the works when we seek to say something coherent about applications of the truth predicate to statements of general standards. If it is not so insisted, the effect is to construct an idle wheel.

I will, therefore, concentrate on issues relating to claim (IV). These will have to do with the proper characterization of NA relativisms, the proper characterization of relativism intuitively understood and the question which of them gives the relativist the most playable hand and best conforms to his intentions.

1.1 New Age relativisms

Let us start with NA relativisms. Wright focuses on a simple *assessment relativism* of a kind that has figured prominently in recent discussions. Consider a token utterance, U, of the sentence type

(1)   "Copernicanism is justified by Galileo's observations,"

uttered on some particular occasion by a particular speaker. According to a simple assessment relativism about this utterance, even in a single world, this very same token claim can take different truth-values when considered in different *contexts of assessment*. For example, U might be true as assessed by Galileo and false as assessed by Bellarmine. And, crucially, there is no further fact of the matter as to whether U is "really" true or false. It has no absolute truth-value, but only a truth-value relative to a context of assessment.

As Wright notes, the basic semantical idea was anticipated in David Lewis' (1980) treatment of a sentence like

(2)   "It is raining."

According to Lewis's treatment in that paper,[2] an utterance of a token of (2) need make no mention of a place, not even via an unarticulated constituent. Nevertheless, such an utterance receives a truth-value only when a value for a parameter of place is fixed, presumably by some aspect of the context of utterance.

Let me elaborate on this a bit. The standard view is that the sentence type (2) does not itself have truth conditions. It no more expresses a complete truth-evaluable proposition than does the sentence type "Tom is taller than…" Individual tokens of (2) typically do express complete propositions but that is because, when produced, they express a proposition of the form *It is raining at l at t,* where the values of l and t are determined by the context of utterance. (This may or may not be because a token of (2) can properly be said to be elliptical for the sentence "It is raining at l at t.").

On this standard treatment, then, the truth of a token of "It is raining" is relative to the context of utterance because the full propositional content expressed by any such token is determined by the context in which it is uttered. Thus, one token, when produced in NYC at t would express the proposition *It is raining in NYC at t* and so would be true: it was raining in NYC at t; and another produced in Chicago at t' would express the proposition *It is raining in Chicago at t'* and so would be true iff it was raining in Chicago at t'.

Lewis suggested that it was also possible to give a non-standard treatment of "It is raining" along the following lines. We can say that the sentence type (2) does express a context-invariant complete proposition, namely, the proposition *It is raining*, and that every token of that type expresses exactly the same proposition. If we embrace this non-standard account, how do we explain how it is that if I utter a token of (2) in NYC when it is raining there I say something true, whereas if you utter it in Chicago when it is not raining there you say something false? If we said exactly the same thing, how come you said something true and I said something false?

The answer is a relativistic view of the truth of the proposition expressed by (2). The proposition expressed by (2) does not have an absolute truth-value, but only a truth-value relative to the context of utterance: the truth of the proposition I

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[2] Lewis (1998).

expressed was relative to *my* context of utterance, whereas the truth of the very same proposition that you expressed was relative to *your* context of utterance.

As Wright notes:

Assessment-relativism for a region of discourse is what results when you construe the semantics of its claims as relevantly like that of "It is raining" on the Lewis treatment, —but then incorporate the idea that the truth-values of utterances of *these* claims are dependent upon a new kind of index whose value is not settled once and for all by the context of utterance—the circumstances and occasion in which the claim takes place—but varies with certain variable characteristics of (hypothetical) assessments.

With all of this, then, Wright and I are very much in agreement. There is, however, one central aspect of NA relativisms that Wright does not sufficiently emphasize, it seems to me. And that is that New Age relativisms are intended to be *semantical* or *linguistic* theses. The fact that a particular sentence only has assessment-relative truth-values is something that is supposed to be part of a speaker's *competence* with that sentence and to be reflected in his usage. That is why NA relativisms are invariably supported by considerations about how competent speakers of the sentences of a given domain use those sentences.[3] This feature will be important below when we look at the difference between traditional and NA relativisms.

Armed with this understanding, let us ask what a NA relativism of the epistemic domain would look like. Presumably something along the following lines: A token utterance of

(1)   "Copernicanism is justified by Galileo's observations," is

    (a)   not true or false absolutely, but only relative to the epistemic standards of an assessor.

    (b)   This is because while such an utterance expresses a proposition that can be given by disquotation, that proposition only has assessment-relative truth-values and no absolute truth-values.

    (c)   These standards can vary from assessor to assessor.

    (d)   And all of this is part of the competence of users of epistemic sentences.

In contrast, my own formulation of epistemic relativism (illustrating what for lack of a better name I shall call "Boghossian-relativism" or "B-relativism" for short) construes it not as a semantical thesis but as a *factual* thesis, given by the following three clauses:

    A   There are no absolute facts about what belief a particular item of information justifies [but only relational facts of the form 'Information E justifies belief B relative to epistemic system, C][4] (Epistemic non-absolutism)

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[3] See, for example, the papers collected in Brogaard (2007).

[4] The material in the square brackets is left implicit in the official formulations, because it is clear and is also brought out in clause B. But in the present discussion it is best to spell it out.

B   If a person, S's, epistemic judgments are to have any prospect of being true, we must not construe his claims of the form

    "E justifies belief B"
as expressing the claim

    E justifies belief B
but rather as expressing the claim:

    According to the epistemic system C, that I, S accept, information E justifies belief B (Epistemic relationism)

C   There are many fundamentally different, genuinely alternative epistemic systems, but no facts by virtue of which one of these systems is more correct than any of the others. (Epistemic pluralism)

Which of these templates best expresses a relativistic thesis intuitively understood?

1.2 What is relativism?

This issue is somewhat complicated by the fact that, in my view, there have been *two* different root ideas that have played an important role in traditional relativistic thought.

The first idea is best illustrated by the case of the classic examples drawn from physics—the examples of motion, mass and time order. These are classic examples of what I call "thoroughgoing relativisms." The second idea is illustrated by the case of etiquette and is an example of what I call "absolutist relativisms."

Following Gilbert Harman's lead, my own formulation of relativism about the normative domain was based on the classic examples of thoroughgoing relativisms drawn from physics.[5] In the book, I briefly explain why they could not be modeled on the sorts of absolutist relativism that are illustrated by the case of etiquette. In the discussion of MacFarlane below, I will say more about absolutist relativism; for now, let me assume that traditional relativism is well illustrated exclusively by the physics cases and let me turn to asking how they should be understood.

Let us assume (what in any event is widely accepted) that Einsteinian relativism about simultaneity is true. Which of the two templates best captures what the relativist about simultaneity wants to say?

If we apply the NA template to this case, we would get the following view:
An utterance of the sentence

(3)   "e1 is simultaneous with e2"

    (a′)   is not true or false absolutely but only relative to a frame of reference F.

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[5] See Harman and Thomson (1996). I follow Harman in looking to the physics cases; but I disagree with him on how those cases should be described.

(b′)   This is because while such an utterance expresses a proposition that can be given by disquotation, that proposition only has frame of reference relative truth-values.

(c′)   Frames of reference can vary from context to context.

(d′)   All of the above is part of the competence of users of the word "simultaneous."

By contrast, B-relativism would give the following account of relativism about simultaneity:

(A′)   There are no facts of the form

e1 is simultaneous with e2,
but only facts of the form

e1 is simultaneous with e2 relative to frame of reference F.

(B′)   If a thinker's utterances of the sentence "e1 is simultaneous with e2" are to have any prospect of being true, they must not be construed as expressing the disquoted proposition

e1 is simultaneous with e2
but rather as expressing the proposition

e1 is simultaneous with e2 relative to frame of reference F.

(C′)   There are many different frames of reference but no facts by virtue of which some of them are more correct than any of the others insofar as facts about simultaneity are concerned.

There is a decisive reason, it seems to me, for preferring B-relativism to NA relativism, at least in this classic case.

We are assuming that a relativism about simultaneity is true. If it is true, it was true before Einstein discovered it. But if we look at time order discourse before Einstein, and our only model for relativism is NA relativism, then we would have to judge simultaneity relativism to be false. For it simply was not true *then* that all competent users of simultaneity discourse used it in such a way as to respect a relativistic view of it. If that had been true, Einstein could have discovered his view by doing semantics.

By contrast, B-relativism seems to get all this just right, by construing relativism to be an essentially factual thesis. There are no frame-independent facts about simultaneity, but only frame-relativized ones, with no frame being more correct than any of the others. *If* you want to speak truly you must not assert such frame-independent facts, but only frame-relativized ones. Einstein could not have discovered the truth of simultaneity relativism by doing semantics but only by coming up with a better overall theory of the world that incorporated it.[6]

And all of this seems to be true not merely about the classic examples from physics but could equally be said about moral or epistemic relativism. In those cases

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[6] For much more detail, see Boghossian (2006).

as well, it would be incorrect to think that the relativist's basic thought is captured by some thesis about the semantics of moral or epistemic sentences. Moral relativism would no more be falsified if our moral language were absolutist through and through, than relativism about mass is falsified by the fact that we used to be absolutists about mass.

For these reasons, I cannot see agreeing with Wright's claim (IV) that NA relativism is better than B-relativism at expressing the root idea behind classic examples of relativistic theses.

I think part of the reason that Wright makes claim (IV) is that he *underestimates* the difference between B-relativism and NA relativism. He seems to think that they agree on my clauses (A) and (C) but that they differ only in what to put in for the semantical clause (B).

This way of thinking about the two views, however, underestimates the extent to which NA relativism is meant to be a *purely semantical* thesis. It is to think of it more as a semantical *auxiliary* to a relativistic thesis factually construed: an account of the *semantics* of the sentences in question, once a basically factualist relativism about the domain in question has been accepted. This way of thinking about NA relativism concedes that the root idea behind relativism is a factual not a semantical thesis, as I have been insisting; but sees it as offering an alternative account to the one I gave of how we should talk if we are to respect the relativism that we have accepted.

1.3 Relativism with a new age semantical auxiliary

Of course, nothing prevents us from considering this hybrid view that Wright has cobbled together, namely, the combination of my (A) and (C) conjoined not with my (B) but with a NA semantical substitute (B*)? What are its merits as an expression of relativism?

What should we put in for (B*)? The details do not matter. Instead of recommending that the relativist talk only in explicitly relativized terms about what his epistemic system allows or forbids, the hybrid view would allow him to utter sentences that look unrelativized, but would insist that they now be treated as having only assessment-relative truth-values and no absolute truth-values.

Is AB*C a prima facie better version of a relativistic view of the normative domain than the ABC model that I worked with?

Wright says that certain problems with (B) make the ABC model obviously completely unworkable. He mentions the three main problems that I presented: the problem of normativity; the problems of agreement and disagreement; and the problem of the potentially regressive unpacking.[7] Wright's point, though, is that

> All this would be grist to Boghossian's mill if something along the lines of clause B were indispensable to the epistemic relativist view. But the more plausible assessment is that these are the troubles of an avoidable misformulation.

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[7] For the last, see Boghossian (2006).

The question whether these objections are merely the troubles of an avoidable misformulation depends on how much more playable AB*C is as compared with ABC.

Recall: Wright and I are agreed that both models ultimately succumb to objections that have to do with the (A) and (C) clauses; so the question is only whether (B*) is a better semantical option for the relativist than (B), reducing the load of problems that he faces.[8]

Even on this fairly narrow question, though, it not at all clear to me that AB*C is better than ABC. We have already seen some of the problems engendered by (B); here, though, are the problems faced by (B*):

First, (B*) requires a new notion of propositional content—of a complete thinkable thing—one that, unlike Frege's or Russell's, does not have its truth conditions either essentially or intrinsically. One and the same thinkable will have different truth conditions depending on the context in which it is assessed. But can we make sense of such a notion of content? When a similar issue arose in connection with the notion of "narrow content," a notion that some philosophers wanted to introduce in response to the Twin Earth thought experiments, many philosophers were of the view that we could not make sense of a thinkable that did not have context of acquisition independent truth conditions.[9]

Second, even if we could make sense of such a notion of propositional content, it would not *in general* be true that a relativistic view would need it in order to be understood. No one reacted to Einstein's discoveries about mass or time order by claiming that we now needed a new notion of propositional content in order to properly understand what he had achieved. Why should matters stand differently with a relativistic view of the normative domain?

Third, even with (B*) substituting for (B), we will continue to get versions of the disagreement and agreement problems that Wright thought were so obviously destructive of (B). If, when I judge, "S ought to f" I am judging something to be true by my standards and if when you judge "S ought not to f" you are judging something to be true by your (different) standards, then we are clearly not disagreeing in any significant sense. Nor are we necessarily agreeing in any significant sense when we affirm tokens of one and the same sentence type.

This should be obvious, but is occasionally denied. Suppose we adopt the Lewis treatment of "It is raining," so that the content I express by "It is not raining" is the *negation* of the content that you express by "It is raining." Still if I uttered my token in NYC and you uttered yours in Chicago, then no matter how much our semantics allows us to say that my content is the negation of yours; we are clearly not disagreeing in any significant sense. Perhaps not even in any sense.

Fourth, if you and I cannot disagree by my saying "S ought to f" and by your saying "S ought not to f" how can we claim to have captured the normative content of normative sentences?

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[8] Though, of course, which semantical option one chooses will affect how (C) itself gets formulated, as Wright's discussion illustrates.

[9] See Burge (2008); Stalnaker (1999).

So, there seem to be just as many problems facing (B*) as there are facing (B)—indeed, many of the same problems. Perhaps it will eventually be shown that (B*) gives the normative relativist a more playable hand. But it is not obvious that it does.

And, however, we feel about that issue, there is simply no question of saying that New Age Relativism is a better model for relativism than the model I was working with because there is no question of saying that relativism, intuitively understood, is a purely semantical thesis.

2 Reply to MacFarlane

John MacFarlane's most important claim is that I made a fundamental mistake in the way I set up the issue about epistemic relativism, in particular in the assumptions I made about how the notion of a "fundamental epistemic principle" should be understood. According to him, my central error lay in assuming that fundamental epistemic principles are both knowable a priori and capable of giving us definite verdicts about which beliefs are justified on the basis of what evidence.

But, he objects,

it is quite implausible that there *are* any systems of fundamental epistemic principles that meet both these conditions. Principles that give definite verdicts about justification are generally not knowable a priori, and principles that are knowable a priori are generally too schematic to yield definite verdicts.

He illustrates his point here by considering the principle I called "Observation" and that I formulated thus:

(Observation) For any observational proposition p, if it visually seems to S that p and circumstantial conditions D obtain, then S is prima facie justified in believing p.

MacFarlane says that this principle is knowable a priori only if we can know a priori that visual perception is reliable when conditions D hold. But, he continues, that is surely an empirical matter.

Moreover, he points out, Observation gives us only *prima facie* verdicts about justification.

To convert these into unqualified verdicts, we need to know how to balance them against the prima facie verdicts of other principles. Do we know a priori how to do *that*?

Having satisfied himself that no epistemic principle can be both a priori and specific enough to yield determinate verdicts about justification, MacFarlane concludes:

If this is right, then we have two options. One is to embrace a strong kind of externalism about justification, according to which the fundamental principles governing justification are not discoverable simply by a priori reflection. As I have mentioned, there are indications that Boghossian would not be happy

with this option. At any rate, no one who *is* happy with it would be gripped for even a second by the argument for epistemic relativism that Boghossian presents as having some prima facie appeal. The other option is to accept a kind of relativism about justification, saying that whether someone is justified in believing p in light of evidence E depends crucially on their background beliefs or credences. This is, of course, exactly what subjective Bayesians say.

MacFarlane's thought, then, is that my approach faces a dilemma: either epistemic principles yield determinate verdicts but are externalist, in which case my prima facie argument for epistemic relativism fails rather too obviously; or they are a priori but incapable of yielding determinate verdicts, in which case we have to embrace a "kind of relativism about justification"—namely, the kind of relativism that results from a form of subjective Bayesianism (SB), according to which what one is justified in believing always depends on the rationally unconstrained prior probabilities with which one begins.

He asks why I do not discuss views of the latter sort—the kind of view I call "absolutist relativisms", in contrast with the "thoroughgoing relativisms" that I do discuss. After all, he asks, are not the former just as able to underwrite a form of Equal Validity as the latter?[10]

He remarks that I say in a footnote that I will not bother discussing absolutist relativisms on the grounds that they are hard to motivate. But he disputes that I am right about this. Given his dilemma, he seems to be thinking, we face a choice between externalism and subjective Bayesianism. But externalism is likely to be at least as problematic as subjective Bayesianism, so it is at least as plausible a contender as externalism. Hence, it ought to be considered.

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[10] Having promised to do so let me make a brief remark about the distinction between absolutist and thoroughgoing relativisms. Relativism about simultaneity is thoroughgoing because, on such a view, there are simply no unrelativized facts about simultaneity, period. There are only frame-relative facts. It is natural to think, however, that we are relativists about *etiquette* as well, yet it seems wrong to say that there are no absolute facts about how we ought to behave, if we are to behave politely. Rather, the correct account of etiquette seems to be that there is a universal moral norm that requires us to behave differently, depending on our location. That is the norm that we usually express by saying: *When in Rome do as the Romans do!* More precisely, the norm is: *With respect to a certain range of behaviors (eating manners, but not the torture of children) defer to whatever is the local custom in the location in which you find yourself.* This norm is not itself relative to anything but is absolute. However, what it calls for is different behaviors under different geographical or cultural circumstances. My point was that, while it is easy to motivate a thoroughgoing relativism about morality (or epistemic justification)—how could there be absolute moral facts built into the fabric of the universe and how could we know about them—it is hard to motivate an absolutist relativism about them. Any such version of moral relativism would commit itself to there being at least one universal moral fact—namely, that you are required to match local behaviors, whatever that behavior might be, even if it is Nazi Germany that you find yourself in.

What makes the Rome dictum the only dictum you need for etiquette is that it is plausible—indeed, morally plausible—that when it comes to such matters as whether or not to slurp one's noodles, all that really matters is what the local conventions are. But that is definitely not what we think when it comes to the question whether it is alright to harm children or cleanse a region of a particular ethnic minority. Once we allow that there are some absolute normative facts, our usual procedures for determining what such facts there are kick in. And it is very implausible that these procedures will yield the result that what it is morally correct to do in a given situation will depend on which norms are accepted in that situation, or what the agent's inclinations happen to be. As we shall see, similar remarks apply to an absolutist version of epistemic relativism.

We may summarize MacFarlane's interesting argument as follows:

1. No epistemic principle can be both specific enough to yield determinate verdicts about particular beliefs and a priori.

Therefore,

2. Either Externalism about epistemic principles is true or Subjective Bayesianism is true.
3. If Externalism were true, then my prima facie argument for epistemic relativism would not be gripping "even for a second."
4. If subjective Bayesianism were true, then we would get a form of epistemic relativism that is capable of underwriting Equal Validity, but which I do nothing to refute.

Therefore,

5. Either way, my project fails.

    I will take each claim in turn.

2.1 Premise 1

It should go without saying that questions concerning the content of epistemic principles are hugely complex and controversial. There is no consensus among epistemologists about how epistemic principles ought to be formulated. In writing *Fear*, I hoped that I could raise the problem about epistemic relativism that I was interested in without prejudging too many of these issues about the proper formulation of epistemic principles. That is why I formulated the specific epistemic principles that I discuss in the schematic form in which they appear. Of course, one cannot get very far without prejudging at least some of these issues.

One of the assumptions to which I committed myself is that we can think of some epistemic principles as laying down conditions under which a belief would be *prima facie* justified. To say that a belief p is prima facie justified by evidence E is to say that, unless the thinker possesses even stronger evidence for rejecting p, the thinker would be justified in believing that p on the basis of E.

Of course, once epistemic principles are thought of in this way, we also need epistemic principles that tell us when a piece of evidence for p is stronger than another piece of evidence that we might have for rejecting p. We need principles that will *adjudicate* between the potentially conflicting deliverances of the different sources of evidence. Let us call the first sort of principle *prima facie principles* and the second kind *adjudicating principles*.[11]

Now, MacFarlane, as we have seen, claims of *both* sorts of principle that it is impossible for them both to be specific enough to yield determinate verdicts and to be knowable a priori. He illustrates his claim with Observation.

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[11] One of the many simplifications in *Fear* (intended to make the book more accessible) is that I didn't explicitly delineate the distinction between prima facie and adjudicating principles. As we shall see below, this omission on my part misleads MacFarlane into an incorrect reading of my discussion of Bellarmine and Galileo.

(Observation) For any observational proposition p, if it visually seems to S
that p and circumstantial conditions D obtain, then S is prima facie justified in
believing p.

He says that we can know that Observation is true a priori "only if we can know
a priori that visual perception is reliable when conditions D hold." He presents this
claim as though it were obvious. But it does not seem so to me. In fact, it seems
false.

First, an epistemic principle, like Observation, is supposed to specify the
conditions under which visual experience provides *prima facie justification* for a
particular belief. It does not have to guarantee that the belief will be *true* under those
conditions. It does not even have to guarantee that the belief would be justified *tout
court* under those conditions. All it has to do is correctly specify the conditions
under which the belief would be prima facie justified. Assuming that I now occupy a
non-skeptical scenario, if I were now to become surreptitiously envatted, it would be
crazy for me to give any less weight to observation than I currently do. Observation
would still supply just as much prima facie support for p as it did in the non-
envatted world, no matter what conditions D are taken to be. So the escape clause,
condition D, is not a reliability requirement. A fortiori, it is not a reliability
requirement that can only be known a posteriori.

The reason that I included an escape clause in the formulation of Observation is
that I wanted not to prejudge the debate between liberals and conservatives about
perceptual justification.[12] That debate is about whether a visual experience as of p
provides prima facie justification for the belief that p all by itself or whether it does
so only in the presence of a further justified background belief. This background
belief may well be *about* the reliability of our observational faculties; but it is still
not a reliability condition. We need to distinguish between what a theorist would
have to know in order to know that the principle is true and what the subject that the
principle is about would have to know in order to apply the principle. The theorist's
debate, if it is resoluble at all, is resoluble a priori.

So I have no idea why MacFarlane thinks it so clear that a determinate version of
a prima facie principle like Observation will have to be a posteriori.

The same points could be made about MacFarlane's remarks about Induction.

(Induction) If S has often enough observed that an event of type A has been
followed by an event of type B, then S is [prima facie] justified in believing
that all events of type A will be followed by events of type B.[13]

He points to I. J. Good's famous article, "The White Shoe is a Red Herring," to
make the point that knowing "how many is enough" is broadly empirical
knowledge about the world.

But this seems confused. Good presents the following case: Imagine that you
know in advance (perhaps God told you) that you are in one of two worlds, W1 or
W2. In W1, there are 100 crows all black, no non-black crows and a million other

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[12] See Pryor (2000) and Wright (2007).

[13] The word "prima facie" was inadvertently omitted from the printed version, though it's clear that it
was intended and MacFarlane assumes that it was.

birds; and in W2 there are a 1,000 black crows, one white one and a million other birds. Now suppose a bird is selected at random and it turns out to be a black crow. This confirms that you are in W2 and hence in a world in which not all crows are black. So the observation of one black crow confirms that not all crows are black.

From this MacFarlane wants to conclude that the prima facie principle of Induction cannot yield determinate verdicts without having its enumerative condition specified empirically.

But there look to be several mistakes being committed here. First, and again, Induction is a *prima facie* principle, not an all-things considered verdict about what it would be reasonable to believe. Of course, if you have strongly confirmed background knowledge, as in Good's example, this will affect what you have *most* reason to believe, no matter how you understand the prima facie principle—a point that Hempel himself made in a response to Good in 1967. No one ever doubted that background knowledge can affect what you have most reason to believe.

Second, even if Induction were not merely a prima facie principle but delivered all-out verdicts about what to believe, Good's example still would not show that Induction is a posteriori. To think otherwise would be once again to conflate what the *theorist* needs to know in order to know that the principle is true with what the *subject* mentioned in the principle needs to know in order to apply the principle.

Finally, and as David James Barnett pointed out to me, far from showing that Induction is a posteriori, MacFarlane's argument inadvertently confirms the specificity of a priori knowable epistemic principles.

Suppose you are in fact in one of Good's two worlds, and that which world you are in was determined by a coin toss. Suppose also that you do not yet have a posteriori evidence that this is your situation. If so, then you would be justified in making the inductive inference that all crows are black on the basis of particular instances. So when you learn a posteriori evidence that you are in the situation described by Good, you are not learning a posteriori about whether you antecedently were justified in making the inference; you're just learning evidence about your situation, whose epistemic significance you could have appreciated a priori ahead of time if you had thought about it.

MacFarlane's first premise is clearly false when applied to the prima facie principles. Does it do better when it is applied to the adjudicating principles, those that look at how to resolve conflicts between the prima facie verdicts delivered by the prima facie principles?

There is even more controversy about what the correct adjudicating principles are than there is about what the correct prima facie principles are. That is not at issue. What is at issue is whether this is a controversy that can only be settled empirically.

What do we know about the adjudicating principles? We have this vague idea that Observation can often trump the verdicts of the other principles, but not always. Sometimes, when some background view is very well confirmed, it makes more sense to think that a recalcitrant observation is misleading than to allow one (or a few) observation(s) to overthrow a well-established view.

But just like with Induction, we can ask, how many is enough? It is easy to believe that the answer to this question is going to be complex and variegated. It is hard to believe that it is going to be empirical. In fact, it is impossible to see how it

could be empirical. If we can only think of ourselves as having epistemic principles that deliver determinate verdicts if they are a posteriori, then it is hard to see how we could *ever* figure out what the correct adjudicating principles are. To figure them out from the evidence, it would seem you would antecedently have to know what they are.

2.2 The inference from 1 to 2

We next come to the inference from this premise to MacFarlane's second claim, that if premise 1 is true then either Externalism about justification is true or a certain kind of relativism is true, namely, the kind illustrated by subjective Bayesianism.

How does premise 2 *follow* from premise 1? The argument, I take it, is supposed to go something like this. We have established that we cannot know by reflection alone under which *specific* conditions our beliefs would be justified. And there are two salient pictures of justification that respect this fact. The first is an externalism about justification and the second is some species or other of subjective Bayesianism.

Let's grant premise 1 for the purposes of argument. I can see how the first picture would be consistent with it. I take it that "externalism about justification" means the sort of view that would be illustrated by a simple reliablism about epistemic justification: a belief is justified if and only if it is the result of some reliable belief-forming process. This counts as "externalist" because, on such a view, the justificatory status of a belief would not necessarily be available to reflection alone. We would know a priori in general terms that justificatory status depends on reliable process; but we would not know a priori exactly *which* processes are reliable and so would not know in any determinate way which conditions generate them. Even in our own case, we would not know, by reflection alone, which of our beliefs are justified.

The other alternative MacFarlane puts forward is "subjective Bayesianism" which states that what someone is justified in believing depends upon the prior probabilities that he assigns to his beliefs, where these prior probabilities are themselves rationally unconstrained. Since Bellarmine starts out by assigning a very high prior probability to the literal truth of the Bible, a Bayesian updating norm will require him to have stronger evidence than Galileo would need to be justified in giving up his geocentric view. "And this is so whether his high credence in an interpretation of the Bible is the result of induction from historical evidence or an article of faith. In this way a Bayesian can accept a form of Equal Validity claim: Bellarmine is no less justified, given his starting points, than Galileo is given his."

Now, in this case, it seems to me, we can know by reflection alone which beliefs are justified, at least in our own case. For, surely, I can know what prior probabilities I have assigned to various propositions, and Bayes's Rule, if knowable at all, is knowable a priori.

So I am not seeing at all how MacFarlane gets from 1 to 2, even granting 1, which I do not. The inference looks to be a non-sequitur.[14]

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[14] The conflation between theorist and subject might be at work here again.

2.3 Premise 3

This brings us to premise 3, to the effect that if we opt for the Externalist option, then we would not be gripped "for even a second" by the prima facie argument for epistemic relativism that I presented.

The argument that I presented turns on the fact that if we were called upon to justify our view about which epistemic principles are true, we would inevitably have to appeal to those very principles and that this causes a problem because norm-circular justifications seem non-probative.

MacFarlane's claim seems to be that no one who was an externalist about justification would be in the least worried about this argument. As in the case of his other claims, one wished he had said more.

But even without hearing more, it seems as though his claim has been refuted *empirically*.[15] For are there not reliabilists out there, who have both noticed that "bootstrapping" arguments are licensed by their views, but who worry about the rationality of those arguments?[16]

Second, it seems to me that even if the problem about norm-circularity were not to arise on an externalist view of justification that would not make the whole problem go away. For we could reformulate the challenge I was interested in, in terms of the notion of 'what one is in a position to claim,' as opposed to formulating it in terms of an externalist notion of 'what one is justified in believing.'[17]

2.4 Premise 4

Finally, there is MacFarlane's claim that SB is a plausible form of epistemic relativism that I do not refute.

As I explained in the book, SB is a form of absolutist relativism that I consider to be not only very implausible but also to be to have very hard to motivate (unlike the thoroughgoing relativisms that I discuss in the book, which I consider to be implausible but easy to motivate).

I take it that it is not in dispute that SB is implausible. The idea that you are rationally permitted to assign whatever priors you please is extremely implausible. It would lead to the craziest beliefs counting as justified. It would conflict with whatever hold we have on the intuitive extension of 'justified.'

MacFarlane seems to think, though, that, implausible as it may seem, we are forced to take it seriously by his argument for premises 1 and 2, combined with the dissatisfaction that it would not be unreasonable to have with Externalism.

However, as we have seen, his argument for premises 1 and 2 is fallacious.

Part of what may be contributing to SB seeming less implausible to MacFarlane than it actually is may derive from the fact that he misdescribes it from a normative point of view. He says:

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[15] Another observation I owe to David James Barnett.

[16] Jonathan Vogel raised the bootstrapping problem for reliabilists in his (2000). James van Cleve (2003) tries to defend bootstrapping. For further discussion see Jose Zalabardo (2005).

[17] See Wright (2007) for the distinction.

I am not sure whether this kind of view, which accepts only a very formal kind of objective epistemic norm, falls within Boghossian's target area in *Fear of Knowledge*.

I do not know what MacFarlane means by a "very formal kind of objective epistemic norm" but if he thinks that SB is committed only to the objective correctness of Bayes's rule, he is wrong. SB is also committed to the following objective epistemic norm:

For any contingent proposition p and credence value X, there exists a probability function f which assigns X to p, and S is rationally permitted to have that functions as his initial credence function.

That is a whole load of normative commitment and, as I have been saying, not a very plausible one either.

2.5 Bellarmine and Galileo

My main argument against epistemic relativism consists of the sorts of considerations that Wright discusses—considerations that attempt to show that we cannot make sense of the idea that epistemic judgments are relative to epistemic frameworks, frameworks that can conflict with one another but without there being any facts that make one of them more correct than any of the others.

Rorty claimed that Bellarmine and Galileo represented the acceptance of fundamentally different, genuinely alternative epistemic frameworks; and I initially went along with him. However, I eventually argued that in fact it was questionable whether the confrontation between Galileo and Bellarmine could really be understood in this way. I claimed that Bellarmine's reliance on revelation is better understood as a *derived* principle, rather than as a fundamental one. I also argued that the role of epistemic principles in meaning constitution is an obstacle to our describing genuine alternatives to our ordinary epistemic system. The overall point was to argue that it is much harder than one may initially be inclined to think to describe fundamentally different, genuine alternatives to our ordinary epistemic system.

MacFarlane disputes my finding in the case of Bellarmine and Galileo. His objection rests on a misunderstanding of what I said (although I wish I had said it more clearly). He cites the relevant passages. They begin by discussing the fact that Bellarmine uses our ordinary epistemic principles in connection with daily life:

Yes, the Cardinal consults his Bible to find out what to believe about the heavens, rather than using the telescope; but he does not divine what the Bible itself contains, but rather reads it using his eyes. Nor does he check it every hour to make sure that it still says the same, but rather relies on induction to predict that it will say the same tomorrow as it does today. And, finally, he uses deductive logic to deduce what it implies about the make-up of the heavens. (p. 103)

Given this, I argued:

If Bellarmine's Vatican were to be a genuine example of a coherent fundamentally different epistemic system, he would have to hold that whereas ordinary epistemic principles apply to propositions about objects in his immediate vicinity, Revelation applies to propositions about the heavens. (p. 104)

So, finally, I concluded:

On pain of attributing to Bellarmine an incoherent epistemic system, we had better regard his system as differing from ours only in some derived sense, attributing to him that view that there is evidence of a perfectly ordinary sort, that the Holy Scripture is the revealed work of the Creator if the Universe. (p. 104)

MacFarlane cites all of this as well, but he neglects to cite the sentence which immediately follows:

And it is only natural for someone with that belief to place a great deal of stock in what it has to say about the heavens – *enough, perhaps, to override the evidence provided by observation*. (pp. 104–5, italics added)

As this sentence plainly indicates, the view that I was attributing to Bellarmine is not that Revelation is the *sole* principle that is *relevant* to belief about the makeup of the heavens, but only that it *trumps* or *overrides* the evidence provided by observation. To put it in the terminology I introduced earlier, I was attributing to Bellarmine an epistemic system with the *adjudicating* principle that has Observation trumping Revelation for objects close at hand, but that has Revelation trumping Observation for objects that are in the sky. And I was suggesting that there was something incoherent about such a system. I will return in a moment to what that something might be, but I first want to correct MacFarlane's misreading of what I said. Here is how he reads me:

But why should we agree with Boghossian that an epistemic system containing Revelation as a fundamental principle alongside Observation, Deduction, and Induction can be coherent only if the verdicts of Revelation are confined to a special domain (say, heavenly goings-on) about which the other three principles have nothing to say? Boghossian seems to think that if the principles comprising an epistemic system can have divergent verdicts about the same domain, the resulting epistemic system is incoherent. But if that were so, we could "show" that *Induction* is not a fundamental epistemic principle. After all, its verdicts depart from, and sometimes even conflict with, those of Observation and Deduction alone.

So, instead of seeing me as worrying about the coherence of a system with the adjudicating principle I described above (call it "Bellarmine's adjudicating principle"), MacFarlane reads me as supposing that an epistemic system will be incoherent provided that two of its *prima facie* principles yield conflicting verdicts about a given domain, surely a bizarre reading.

The mistake Boghossian is making here is to suppose that the principles that make up an epistemic system operate in complete isolation from each other. … [but] crucially, the principles yield only *prima facie* claims of justification. This is explicit in Boghossian's formulations of Observation and Revelation …

If I say that the justification provided by a particular source is only prima facie, surely I am doing that in order to allow that that justification can be overridden by other evidence, from other sources. Why would I then go on to assume that a system will be incoherent if its prima facie principles conflict?

Having saddled me with this obviously unintelligible view, MacFarlane then informs us that:

An epistemic system is incoherent only if its *unqualified* verdicts about justification are incompatible; the fact that its constituent principles yield incompatible *prima facie* verdicts is not enough to make it incoherent. When Induction is in play, the prima facie deliverances of Observation are sometimes dismissed as illusory. Conversely, prima facie compelling inductive arguments may be dismissed in the face of strong observational evidence against their conclusions. We should expect similar negotiations in a system containing Revelation.

I see in retrospect that I should have highlighted the difference between adjudicating principles and prima facie principles more clearly. But that is not enough to excuse such a distorted reading of what I said.

The important issue is: Is there anything "incoherent" about the adjudicating principle that I attributed to Bellarmine—that Observation trumps Revelation for ordinary life, but that Revelation trumps Observation when it comes to the make-up of the sky. How, you might wonder, could *that* be incoherent?

MacFarlane says (see above) that a system can be incoherent only if two of its unqualified verdicts about justification are incompatible. This assumption of his may have contributed to his misunderstanding my argument. For I had explicitly argued that there were *other* ways for an epistemic system to be incoherent:

Beyond these relatively obvious norms, the requirement of coherence extends considerably further, reaching, for example, to issues concerning the uniformity with which belief in various propositions are treated. We have what we might call a *no arbitrary distinctions principle:*

If an epistemic system (or its user) proposes to treat two propositions a and q according to distinct epistemic principles, it must recognize some epistemically relevant difference between p and q. (p. 98)

And my point was that this "no arbitrary distinctions principle" did not sit well with Bellarmine's adjudicating principle, which lets Observation have sway over objects on earth while Revelation has sway over what is happening in the sky, for

… this would only make sense if he believed that propositions about the heavens are different in kind from propositions about earthly matters, so that

vision might be thought to be an inappropriate means of fixing beliefs about them. But does not he use his eyes to note that the sun is shining, or that the moon is half full, or that the clear night-time Roman sky is littered with stars? And does not he think that the heavens are in a physical space that is above us, only some distance away? (p. 98)

MacFarlane may not like this argument any better than the one he attributed to me; but at least it is the one I gave.

3 Reply to Sosa

Sosa concentrates on my attempt to defuse the prima facie plausible argument for epistemic relativism. He makes several interesting points.

Let me say right at the outset that the question how correctly to respond to the problem posed by norm-circularity is, in my view, the hardest that is discussed in the book and the one about which I harbor the most uncertainty. It is a classical problem of great subtlety and it would be presumptuous to think that it has been definitively solved in this short book. I have no such illusions. My aim in Chap. 7 was very modest—to show that there is a promising line of thought by which the pro-relativist argument could be resisted.

That argument rests on the following two premises:

Possible: If there are absolute epistemic facts, it is possible to arrive at justified beliefs about what they are.

Justification: It is not possible to arrive at justified beliefs about what absolute epistemic facts there are.

I argued that an epistemic objectivism that rested on rejecting *Possible* would be uninteresting. In Chap. 7, therefore, I attempted to show that we could reject *Justification*, that we could show that there are *possible* circumstances under which we have justified beliefs about what the absolute epistemic facts are, despite the fact that our justification would in some sense have to be norm-circular: it would have to rest on the very principles that it was trying to justify.

My basic idea was that the most we were in a position to claim was not *Justification* but rather:

Justification*: If a legitimate doubt were to arise about the correctness of our ordinary epistemic principles, we would not be able to arrive at justified beliefs about their correctness. (p. 101)

Justification* was itself supported by the claim that the only condition under which the existence of genuine alternatives to our own epistemic system would threaten our ability to say that we are justified in endorsing our epistemic system, is captured in:

Encounter**: If we were to encounter an *actual,* coherent, fundamental, genuine alternative to our epistemic system, C2, whose track record was

impressive enough to make us doubt the correctness of our own system C1, we would not be able to justify C1 over C2, even by our own lights. (p. 101)

The idea was that we would have a legitimate doubt about our own epistemic system only if we encountered an alternative, coherent, fundamental alternative to it whose achievements were impressive enough to make us doubt the correctness of our own system.

Sosa's first objection is that, for all I have shown, Justification** is also true.

*Justification***: If a legitimate doubt were to arise about the correctness of our own principles, based on encounter with a genuine alternative, then we would not be able to sustain a *differentially* justified belief in the correctness of our own system.

As Sosa explains, given two systems C1 and C2 that clash over the truth of an epistemic proposition E, the holder of C1 is differentially justified in his attitude to E just in case he is justified and his opponent is not also justified in his conflicting attitude to E. And now he imagines a particularly stubborn and blinkered Bellarmine who entertains no doubts whatsoever about Revelation. In that case, asks Sosa rhetorically, would he not be as justified in preferring his system over ours as we are in preferring our system over his?

Sosa now combines his new Justification principle with

*Possible***: If there are absolute epistemic facts, and legitimate doubts were to arise about their correctness, it *would* be possible to sustain differentially justified belief in their correctness.

to produce a new argument for Epistemic Relativism that is not vulnerably to my strategy.

The trouble with this new argument, as I see it, is that *Possible** is not nearly as firm a commitment for an objectivist as *Possible* is. I think that if we really did harbor a legitimate doubt about our most basic epistemic principles, based on an encounter with an alternative system that seemed superior to ours, that we may well be unable to differentially justify ours over the alternative; but that this need cast no doubt about the objectivity of epistemic facts.

In the book, I did not sufficiently emphasize that, if we were to be subject to such legitimate doubt, we would probably end up in a crippling *skepticism* about epistemic justification rather than in a relativism about it; but that is another matter. The important point for present purposes is that it is simply not as intuitively plausible that an objectivist about epistemic justification is committed to the view that, if we were to encounter an arbitrary genuine alternative to our epistemic system that gave rise to reasonable doubts within us about our most fundamental epistemic commitments, that we would always be able to differentially justify our system over the alternative.

Sosa goes on to raise further objections to my attempted resolution of our paradox that are independent of his first argument.

The first of these objections alleges that it is not only under conditions where we actually have a legitimate doubt about our system that we are deprived of

justification for our epistemic beliefs, but also under conditions where there is a *reason* to doubt that system that is "somehow in our ken" but of which we have not yet become aware. As Sosa says:

> Whether anyone actually hosts such doubts seems irrelevant. After all, no-one gains any epistemic advantage by being intellectually blinkered or stubborn. What really matters is whether *there are* legitimate *reasons to doubt* in the offing, or in one's ken … Whether or not one appreciates their bearing may matter in some ways, but cannot be what most matters fundamentally.

I think that Sosa is right here and that I was unclear about this in the book (I oscillate between saying that we actually need to have a legitimate doubt and saying that all we need is a reason to doubt). Intuitively what matters are whether I have reason to doubt my system, not whether I actually have such doubt. How, exactly, to draw the distinction between my having a reason somehow "in my ken" versus my being aware of that reason is unclear. But I am willing to acknowledge that it is a distinction that we need to make.

I am not sure, though, if this concession changes anything that matters to my argument. As long as it is true that there are non-remote conditions under which I am not rationally required to have doubts about my system, my argument against *Justification* goes through. And, surely, there are such conditions, are there not?

Sosa, it seems, is not so sure. He seems to think that the paper skeptics, familiar to us from the history of epistemology, provide grounds for such doubt.

> At almost every turn we meet a skeptic eager to tell us why we go wrong in trusting one or another of our epistemic principles, whether about other minds, or the external world, or the future, and so on.

I think we need to distinguish between skeptics who doubt whether we are capable of *living up* to the epistemic principles we accept, such as those who are known as skeptics about our knowledge of the external world; and those who, like Hume on induction, raised questions about the *correctness* of the principles themselves.

The first sort of skeptic does not deny that we know perfectly well what it would take for us to be justified in believing something about the external world. He might, for example, endorse a conservative view of perceptual justification according to which for an experience as of p to justify our believing p we need to be in possession of a justified belief to the effect that our senses are reliable. His brief is to point out that we can never *acquire* a justified empirical belief on that basis.

By contrast, Hume questioned our right to believe that justified beliefs about the unseen are properly acquired via inductive methods. In any case, he laid down a challenge that needs to be met.

We are not now concerned with the first sort of skeptic, but only with the second. But the second sort of skeptic is precisely the sort who has to rely on doubting the legitimacy of norm-circular justifications (there can be no inductive justification of induction, he will say, nor a deductive justification of deduction). But it is precisely the legitimacy of that species of justification that is presently at issue.

This brings us to what Sosa regards as his most fundamental objection. My explanation for why *Justification* is false relied on the idea that, on pain of vicious regress, each thinker is "blindly entitled" to his own epistemic system—that is, entitled to *use* it without first having provided an antecedent justification for it. If this were not so, the road to skepticism would be very short indeed.

Sosa does not object to this. But he rightly points out that it does not *follow* from this that, in the absence of a reason to doubt one's system, one is entitled to use it. Perhaps other conditions need to be satisfied as well before such entitlement is in place.

I agree with Sosa that there is no inference from "you are entitled to use x without antecedently justifying x" to "you are entitled to use x provided you do not have any reason to doubt x." Indeed, in two more technical papers I myself advocate the view that there are further conditions that epistemic principles must satisfy if one is to be blindly entitled to them.[18]

However, let me consider the sparer view that Sosa criticizes, that a thinker is blindly entitled to use his fundamental epistemic principles, to reason according to them, without antecedent justification, provided he has developed no legitimate reason to doubt them.

Sosa objects:

> The problem with this is that an inadequate epistemic system might satisfy the requirement specified without being properly upheld. In that possible world there would be a true believer in, say, the gambler's fallacy, or there would be someone who thinks they can always tell when other people are lying (whereas in fact they have no such ability, nor any good reason to self-attribute it), or someone who thinks they can always predict the next week's weather just by looking outside. …We would need to be sure that there are no *possible* deeply irrational thinkers—*somewhat* like Bellarmine, perhaps, or like the Azande—who would uphold epistemic systems unchallenged by any genuine alternative systems yielding reasons to doubt that are "legitimate" *by their lights*.

Now, the objection here seems to have the form of a counterexample—or, at least, the observations that it looks as though there could be counterexamples to my view and that I have not provided sufficient guarantee that there could not be.

But we should be careful about what kind of counterexample is being alleged. On the one hand, Sosa's thought might be that there could be deeply irrational thinkers whom I would have to deem *rational*. On the other hand, his thought might be that there could be deeply irrational thinkers whom I would have to deem *justified in believing that their epistemic systems are correct*. Let me start with a discussion of the second allegation.

First, a minor point. When we talk about genuine alternatives to our epistemic system we need to be talking about alternative systems that disagree with ours on the *fundamental* principles, not on the derived ones. That is, they would involve

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disagreement on such principles as Modus Ponens and Observation and not on the sorts of derived principles that Sosa mentions in the passage quoted above.

Furthermore, a point that I emphasized in Chap. 7 but which most of my commentators tend to ignore, is that there are certain built-in limits to the extent to which we can coherently describe systems that differ on the fundamental principles and which genuinely disagree with one another, because of the role that fundamental principles play in the constitution of meanings or concepts. As even Quine came around to saying, the deviant logician seems merely to change the subject. This is a big and controversial view, I am aware, but I stand by it.

The Achilles' heel of all such views, however, has always been Induction. Whereas it is very plausible that if someone were not to endorse either Observation or Modus Ponens they would not be genuinely disagreeing with us, there seem to be no distinctive concepts that operating with Induction serves to fix. So, for all that concept constitution can get you, it is possible that there are thinkers who use intuitively incorrect inductive principles and who nevertheless genuinely disagree with us.

The question before us, then, is whether the combination of blind entitlement and norm-circular justifications will deliver for us the verdict that such thinkers would have to be deemed to have beliefs about their epistemic principles that are just as justified as ours are, despite their having fundamentally incorrect inductive principles.

And the answer to this question is: It depends. It depends on whether they are also in possession of the correct epistemic principles by which epistemic principles themselves are to be assessed.

Now, suppose, as I am inclined to think, that the question whether an inductive principle is correct is itself an a priori matter. So we now have to imagine that our incorrect inductive thinker has principles by which he settles the plausibility of a priori propositions. And these principles will themselves either be correct or incorrect.

If they are incorrect, then when our thinker with the bad inductive principle reflects on that principle, he will continue to believe it on grounds that would not justify.

If, however, he is in possession of a principle about a priori matters that is in fact correct, and it yields the result that his inductive principle is correct, (maybe the correct principle of the a priori is that you are justified in believing p, for some a priori p, if p seems correct to you, and our thinker's inductive principle continues to look correct to him), then he would be justified in holding it to be correct.

So, on at least this second way of reading Sosa, he is right: there could be deeply irrational inductive thinkers whom I would have to deem *justified in believing* their inductive principles to be correct.

But there is nothing *problematic* about this. Just as there can be justified and false empirical beliefs, so there can be justified and false a priori beliefs, including beliefs that are about principles of epistemic justification. My aim was not to show that there could not thinkers who had justified belief in false epistemic principles; just that there could be thinkers who had justified beliefs in true ones.

What would be a real threat to my view is not this second way of reading Sosa, but the first—not the mere possibility of deeply irrational inductive thinkers who were justified in believing that their principles were correct, but the possibility of deeply irrational inductive thinkers that I would have to deem rational.

But Sosa has not shown that this a real possibility for someone who holds the combination of views that I have put forward.

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