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Intuition as a Capacity for a Priori Knowledge*



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Abstract

This article lays the groundwork for a defense of rational intuitions by first arguing against a prevalent view according to which intuition is a distinctive psychological state, an “intellectual seeming” that p , that then constitutes evidence that p . An alternative account is then offered, according to which an intuition that p constitutes non-inferential a priori knowledge that p in virtue of the concepts exercised in judging that p . This account of rational intuition as the exercise of conceptual capacities in a priori judgment is then distinguished from the dogmatic, entitlement and reliabilist accounts of intuition’s justificatory force. The article concludes by considering three implications of the proposed view for the Experimental Philosophy movement.

Keywords: intuition, rationality, experimental philosophy, non-inferentialism, epistemology

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Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; - but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting, which lies at the bottom of the language game.

--L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*¹

No experiment can either justify or straighten out a confusion of thought; if we are in a muddle when we design an experiment, it is only to be expected that we should ask Nature cross questions and she return crooked answers.

--P. Geach, *Mental Acts*²

I. Introduction

Recent controversies concerning the ontology, epistemic source, epistemic reliability and epistemic role of philosophical intuitions, and any methodology that avails itself of them, intersect with debates surrounding analyticity and the a priori, and in some cases metaphysical modality. The current locus of many of these debates is the Experimental Philosophy (or X-Phi) movement, which uses methods from the empirical social sciences to explore, ascertain and analyze people's intuitions regarding various philosophical questions.³ From these activities and the data collected have arisen in turn metaphilosophical questions surrounding preferred methods of surveying respondents for their intuitions when presented with a thought experiment or asked about the validity of an inference rule. Skeptics and "restrictionists" (Alexander and Weinberg, 2007) argue against the evidentiary role intuitions are typically taken to play in "standard philosophical practice" in part because intuitions' epistemic source is mysterious (Cappelen, 2012), but chiefly because the results of experimental philosophical surveys reveal diversity in responses. For example, experimental results suggest that responses vary according to factors in cultural and educational background⁴, that intuitions are unduly influenced by affective content,⁵ contextual conditions in the sequential ordering of scenarios (Swain, Alexander, and Weinberg, 2008), and in general that intuitions are fallible and hence unreliable.⁶ In turn, neo-rationalists seek to answer these skeptical challenges in ways that secure the epistemic dignity of philosophical intuitions and their continued use in what Bealer (1993) calls "the standard justificatory procedure" of analytic philosophy.

In this article, I lay the groundwork for a defense of rational intuitions, where a *rational intuition* is a self-conscious or reflective judging of a proposition to be necessarily true and a priori. By *a priori* I mean that the justification or knowledge of the proposition is obtained independently of sense experience or contingent facts of nature.⁷ My defense focuses on the question of rational intuitions' non-inferential, a priori justification: that is, given that one has the intuition that P, how does that intuition justify, or explain, the likelihood that the proposition that P is true? More strongly, if the logical space can be discerned for an account of how an intuition that P constitutes a priori *knowledge* that P, then at least the prospect of intuitive judgments serving as bona fide evidence in philosophical practice will be established.⁸ The account I shall defend holds that a thinker can know, via a priori rational intuition, that P, in virtue of her possessing the concepts involved in the judgment that P, where

such possession includes the conceptual capacities exercised in judging that P. This account is general enough to remain agnostic regarding the explicit explanation of what such exercise of conceptual capacities involves in the judging of conceptually necessary a priori truths, e.g. whether it be understood as the grasping of truth-conditions, or canonical conceptual role, or some other variety of explanation; the purpose here is to demarcate the logical space for such an account.

In section **II** I consider the ontology of rational intuitions and criticize two arguments put forward by Bealer and others to justify a conception of intuition as an *experience*, a sui generis psychological state or “intellectual seeming” that P (for some proposition P), that in turn carries some justificatory force, or can serve as evidence, for the belief that P. Against this view I argue that intuitions should be considered a priori, non-inferential, fallible judgments: exercises of conceptual capacities rather than a distinct kind of psychological state that stands in some justificatory or evidentiary relation to a proposition. In section **III** I expand my criticism to include the genus of which Bealer’s view is one species, namely the “seeming-*qua*-evidence” view, and contrast it with my view of intuitions as fallible exercises of conceptual capacities. I describe how my account of rational intuition as the exercise of conceptual capacities in a priori judgment differs from the dogmatic, entitlement, and reliabilist accounts of rational intuition’s justificatory force. I conclude in section **IV** by outlining briefly three implications of my account for the Experimental Philosophy movement.

I. Intuitions are Not Distinctive Psychological States

Two of the most important arguments for the conclusion that intuitions are distinct psychological states can be called the *phenomenology argument* and the *epistemic recalcitrance argument*. I will raise doubts about each of these arguments, because doing so makes room for my alternative account, namely that intuitions are a priori judgments.

Several philosophers hold that intuitions can be identified by their distinctive phenomenology. Bealer (1998) claims that an intuition is “a *sui generis*, irreducible natural (i.e., non-Cambridge-like) propositional attitude that occurs episodically,” a special kind of “intellectual seeming” (p. 207); much subsequent literature, e.g. Tucker (2013) treats intuitions as “intellectual seemings.” When S has the intuition that P, the proposition that P “just seems” true to S.⁹ Similarly Peacocke speaks of such propositions being “primitively compelling” (Peacocke 1992) and Sosa holds that rational intuitions are “intellectual attractions,” such that [w]hen such attraction is exerted by one’s entertaining a proposition, with its specific content, then the attraction is intuitive. But the entertaining is not the intuition, not what is distinctively characteristic of *intuitive* justification. After all, conscious entertaining is always there in conscious belief, even when the belief is not intuitive, but introspective, perceptual, or inferential. What is distinctive of intuitive justification is rather *its being the entertaining itself of that specific content that exerts the attraction*. (Sosa, 2007a, p. 54)¹⁰

An intellectual seeming is *intuitive* when it is an attraction to assent triggered simply by considering a proposition consciously with understanding. (Of course, one may so much as understand the proposition only through a complex and prolonged process that includes perception, memory or inference). (Sosa, 2007b, p. 60-61)

Neo-rationalists like Bealer, Peacocke, and Sosa therefore invoke specific phenomenal characters by which to distinguish intuitions from other forms of doxastic mental states, to conclude that intuitions are a distinct kind of psychological state with a distinct kind of psychological content.¹¹ By contrast, Williamson denies the existence of any particular cognitive phenomenology for intuitions:

Although mathematical intuition can have a rich phenomenology, even a quasi-perceptual one, for instance in geometry, the intellectual appearance of the Gettier proposition is not like that. Any accompanying imagery is irrelevant. For myself, I am aware of no intellectual seeming beyond my conscious inclination to believe the Gettier proposition. (Williamson, 2007, p. 217)

Other philosophers also report no distinctive cognitive phenomenology for their intuitions.¹² Given the divergence in reported experience of intuitions, it seems prudent to maintain that rational intuitions exhibit no specific and defining phenomenology, and in that regard are indistinguishable from the genus to which they belong: Fregean thoughts or judgments.¹³ The central idea I shall explore in this paper is that an intuition that P is the disposition to judge that P upon being queried “P?” and that basic intuitions are exercises of conceptual capacities: specifically, the concepts involved in the judgment that P. The *intuiting* is the judging that P, understood as the exercise of the conceptual capacities involved in judging that P, and the *intuited* is the resulting judgment that P. Intuitive judgments on my view are thus the achievements of conceptual capacities, proper exercise of which is part of what it means to possess the concepts in question.¹⁴

Perhaps the strongest argument in the literature for distinguishing intuitions from judgments or beliefs is due to Bealer.¹⁵ According to Bealer intellectual seemings, like perceptual seemings, exhibit what can be called *epistemic recalcitrance*: they can elicit a *prima facie* belief despite settled belief or even knowledge to the contrary. Thus one might have a persistent inclination to believe the naïve comprehension axiom—that for any property F there is a set {x: x is F}—despite knowing that such a belief is false in the light of Russell’s paradox. Here the analogy is to optical illusions such as the Müller-Lyer illusion, in which one line seems longer than the other, even after one has confirmed that the lines are equivalent in length. Thus, similar to such optical illusions, one’s intuition or “intellectual seeming” that P persists even after one comes to believe conclusively or know that not-P. It is this epistemic behavior that distinguishes intuitions from beliefs, which do not persist despite knowledge that they are false.

Roderick Chisholm helpfully distinguishes three different functions of utterances of the statement “It seems to me that P” (Chisholm, 1989, p. 20-22):

- (i) To report one’s belief. In this sense “It seems to me that P” is logically equivalent to “I believe that P,” and adds nothing of epistemic significance to the report of one’s belief.
- (ii) “To provide the speaker with a way out,” that is, to hedge the report of one’s belief. In this case it is the contrary of Austin’s performative utterance “I know that p.” If “I know that P” implies that the speaker, if asked, could provide the reasons for taking himself to know that P, then “it seems to me that P” implies that the speaker is not in fact certain of his reasons for believing that P. This function is akin to Wilfrid Sellars’s “looks talk,” where “it looks green” logically presupposes and qualifies the “is green” statement, and indicates that the speaker is withholding endorsement of the claim.¹⁶
- (iii) Lastly, an utterance of “It seems to me that P” may function in a phenomenological, descriptive way, describing a certain state of affairs that is not itself a belief.

Now Bealer, and other neo-rationalists who endorse the Bealerian view that intuitions are intellectual seemings, hold that the statement “it seems to me that P” in cases of rational intuition is being used in the third sense, to describe a psychological, mental state: an “intellectual seeming” that is a *sui generis* propositional attitude towards the proposition that P. We’ve seen one reason for doubting this view, namely that many philosophers report no distinctive or uniform phenomenology when they reflect on their intuitions. Another worry for this view is that it raises the question of how a statement with psychological content—the report of an intellectual seeming *qua* intuiting—can provide justification for the non-psychological content of the intuited, i.e., for the proposition that P. I’ll address that question directly in section III, but for now note that neither sense (i) nor sense (ii) is subject to that worry, for neither is an empirical description of an episode or state, but rather both are reports of judgments that are already, to speak with Sellars, in “the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says” (Sellars, 1997, p. 76).

For present purposes the key claim by Sellars regarding “looks talk” is that, for any color C, “looks C” logically presupposes “is C,” that is “that the concept of *looking green*, the ability to recognize that something *looks green*, presupposes the concept of *being green*, and that the latter concept involves the ability to tell what colors objects have by looking at them – which in turn, involves knowing in what circumstances to place an object if one wishes to ascertain its color by looking at it” (Sellars, 1997, p. 43). Contrary to the empiricists’ claim that a visual seeming is presupposed by both illusory and veridical perceptual claims – which then raises the question of how one can move from a visual seeming that P to the perceptual knowledge that P – the logic of looks presupposes the acquisition of concepts and the practice of assertively predicating them of objects, and the self-conscious knowledge of conditions favoring the reliability of such assertions, such that one might on

occasion hedge the assertion of a perceptual claim because of doubts regarding the favorability of those conditions.

We can now specify how the analogy between visual seeming and intellectual seeming should be understood. Corresponding to the logical priority of “x is C” vis-à-vis “x looks C” is the logical priority of the assertion that “P” vis-à-vis “it seems that P”. In both cases the latter claim is a weakening or retraction of the endorsement of the assertion in question. The retreat to “it seems that P” is a latecomer to the discursive practice in question, rather than its epistemic *arché*. “It seems to me that P,” I suggest, functions analogously in the case of epistemic recalcitrance proposed by Bealer: the content of the intuition is the proposition (Fregean thought) that P, but intuiting that P is more tentative than asserting that P. If this explanation is persuasive, then we are not required to accept that an intuiting is a sui generis “seeming” or “attraction” conferring some kind of justificatory warrant on its propositional contents.¹⁷

In the case of looks talk, someone asserting “x looks C to me” has learned that seeing that x is C is subject to defeaters: undermining defeaters including fallible perceptual and conceptual capacities, unfavorable environmental circumstances, etc.; rebutting defeaters including contrary expert testimony, evidence of hallucination, etc. Analogously, someone asserting “it seems to me that P” has learned that simply asserting that P is subject to defeaters, but in the case of rational intuitions, which are a priori, defeaters might be such things as: failure to completely or sufficiently understand the concept in question, failure to take into account background or side constraints affecting the circumstances of application of a concept (for instance, there may be gaps or underdetermination in the applicability of a specific concept), and so on. Similarly, as *acts* of a priori judging, contingent empirical matters (being tired, distracted, depressed, eager to please or anxious regarding the questioner, etc.) can obviously affect the reliability of resulting judgments. In these cases too one might retreat to the weaker commitment of “it seems to me that P.” Knowing that not-P while yet prima facie judging that P, as in Bealer’s case of the naïve comprehension axiom, would be a case where thorough reflection and episodic judging—understood as the exercise of fallible conceptual capacities—diverge.¹⁸

So the picture I am suggesting is one in which, when soliciting an intuition whether P, the questioner requests an assertion that P or an assertion that not-P, and this is simply a judging, a self-conscious, spontaneous (in the Kantian sense) exercise of one’s conceptual capacities (in applying a concept, in endorsing an inference rule, etc.). The “phenomenological” difference, if any, between an intuition or “intellectual seeming” that P (“it seems to me that P”) and assertively judging that P (“P.”) is merely the expression of different degrees of confidence in one’s judgment that P. As we’ll see in section III, clarifying the picture along these lines prevents making the move analogous to the argument from illusion, namely to claim that the intuition that P functions as an *experience* that somehow provides (some degree of) justification that P. On the picture I am proposing, it is not some phenomenologically distinctive mental state or propositional attitude, to which ‘intuition’ refers, that justifies

the proposition that P, but rather the fact that the judging that P issues from normatively “good” or “rational” dispositions to use the concepts involved in the proposition that P. On this view, the judgment that P is justified non-inferentially and a priori in virtue of the judger’s understanding the concept(s) involved in the proposition that P, that understanding itself being a manifestation of the dispositions or capacities to deploy correctly the concept(s) involved in the proposition that P. By *non-inferential* I mean the following. For some propositions, one has “inferential” justification to believe them because they are epistemically supported by other propositions one has justification to believe. If these latter propositions proved to be false, their epistemic support for those former propositions would vanish. On the other hand, when one’s justification to believe P does not derive from one’s justification to believe other propositions, this justification is “non-inferential,” or “immediate” or “direct.” Rational intuitions are like this; as Weinberg (2007: 320) states, “Although they are used to provide evidence, one does not, and need not, provide further evidence for them.”¹⁹ By *justification*, I mean the minimal notion that person S has justification to believe that P if and only if S is in a position where it would be epistemically appropriate for S to believe that P, that is, a situation in which the proposition that P is epistemically likely to be true for S.²⁰ I will have more to say about justification in section III.

If rational intuitions justify a priori propositional knowledge, then that justification is not a seeming, nor is it propositional. This is a central Wittgensteinian claim in the overall account of rational intuitions I offer here. The claim is that the *disposition* to infer correctly, say according to modus ponens, is more basic than the *belief* that the inference rule modus ponens is valid. Likewise the claim is that the practice of using the concept *knowledge*, and the disposition to use the predicate “has knowledge” correctly, say, is more basic than the belief that, say, “Knowledge is not justified true belief,” and Gettier-style thought experiments and X-Phi surveys are meant to get a grasp on such practices and dispositions. Paul Boghossian offers two arguments for denying that some kind of propositional knowledge grounds our basic inferential practices. The first argument is that children acquire the disposition to reason according to modus ponens long before—if ever—they acquire the belief that modus ponens is necessarily a valid rule of logical entailment, a sophisticated belief that requires mastery of modal and logical concepts. The second argument flows from Lewis Carroll’s famous essay “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles.” If our most fundamental a priori knowledge is propositional in nature, then in order to infer correctly by modus ponens one would have to know the inference rule modus ponens and know that it is necessary, truth-preserving, etc. But the representation of modus ponens (either logically, as: $\Box p \rightarrow ((p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow q)$; or metalogically, as: if p and (if p then q) are true, then q is true) itself presupposes modus ponens, and justification thus becomes an infinite regress. Boghossian concludes from these arguments “that at some point it must be possible simply to *move* between thoughts in a way that generates justified belief, without this movement being grounded in the thinker’s justified belief about the rule used in the reasoning.”²¹

My account seeks to develop this view along the lines of concept possession and conceptual competence grounded in dispositions. On this account, understanding and mastery of words (in a natural language) and concepts (in mentalese) is the epistemic source and justification for rational intuitions conceived with the features outlined above. One's mastery of the concepts in question confers authority upon the exercise of those conceptual capacities in intuitive (a priori, non-inferential) judgments.

III. Intuiting by Judging

The previous section was intended primarily as stage-setting: to raise doubts regarding two prevalent arguments in the literature for considering intuitions *sui generis* psychological states (the intuiting) that stand in some justificatory or evidentiary relation to a proposition (the intuited). In this section, I will continue my alternative account by arguing directly that intuitional judgments, as a priori spontaneous exercises of reason, are justified in virtue of their source, understood as fallible conceptual capacities. That is, the question is, given an intuition by S that P, what justification does the intuiting provide S that the proposition that P is true? If that question can be given a convincing answer, then the use of intuitions as evidence in philosophical arguments will at least be in some measure justified in the face of skeptical conclusions drawn by X-Phi advocates.

My account is intended to answer skepticism regarding the epistemic soundness and value of intuitions that has been raised by experimental philosophers as well as by Williamson (2007, p. 211), who frames the problem in terms of what Brown (2011) calls "the gap objection." In typical thought experiment scenarios, intuitions function as evidence for or against a given theory. For instance, the intuition that a subject in a Gettier scenario has a justified true belief but lacks knowledge is interpreted as evidence for the view that knowledge is something more than justified true belief. The question is: How does a psychological occurrent state (it seeming or striking or attracting one that P) or a psychological proposition ("it seems to me that P") provide justification or evidence for the belief that P or the non-psychological proposition that P? That is, given that I have a rational intuition—a (controversially) phenomenologically distinct, occurrent mental state, often called an "intellectual seeming"—that P, why should I believe that P, or *a fortiori* know that P? I will briefly consider three accounts, two internalist and one externalist, all of which attempt but ultimately fail to bridge the "gap," before turning to my positive account.

The first internalist account—*dogmatism*—claims that the experience of such an intellectual seeming that P provides *prima facie*, that is, *defeasible* justification for believing that P. Michael Huemer states this view in broad form, for the genus of appearance—of which intellectual seeming is a species—with his Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism: "If it seems to S that p, then, in the absence of defeaters, S thereby has at least some degree of justification for believing that p," which "holds that it is by virtue of having an appearance with a given content that one has justification for believing that content."²² Elijah Chudnoff defends a similar view, restricted to intuitions: "If it intuitively seems

to you that *p*, then you thereby possess some *prima facie* justification for believing that *p*” on the basis of the “presentational phenomenology” of the intuition such that “when in it you both seem to fact-*intuit* that *p* and seem to be *intellectually* item-aware of an item that makes it the case that *p*” (Chudnoff, 2011a, p. 322-323), that is, an item which serves as evidence for the proposition that *P*. Both Huemer and Chudnoff draw explicitly on the analogy with visual appearances and their role in providing evidence or justification for perceptual judgment. Huemer, e.g., argues against Bonjour’s (1998) view that introspective beliefs can provide justification by rehearsing a version of the argument from illusion on the plausible assumption that introspection is fallible. Given the possibility of false but *prima facie* justified introspective beliefs, there must be a “highest common factor” conferring *prima facie* justification that is present in such introspective experiences, regardless of whether the experience is veridical or illusory, namely an “appearance” or “seeming”²³:

Similarly [just having rehearsed the argument from illusion], I argue that a false introspective belief may have the same sort of justification as a correct introspective belief. But a false introspective belief is not justified by virtue of one’s having direct awareness of the putative fact that it represents; instead, it is justified by virtue of its seeming to the subject that there is such a fact, or that he is directly aware of such a fact. Therefore, correct introspective beliefs are also not justified by virtue of one’s having direct awareness of the facts they represent; instead, they are justified by the appearances. (Huemer, 2007, p. 36)

After denying any specific features of intuition that could epistemically affect this picture, he concludes that intuitions, like introspection, perception, and so on, provide justification for their contents in virtue of their appearances. That is, Huemer assumes that even if an intuitional state is not veridical—even if the seeming of “it seems to me that *P*” is illusory—it nevertheless provides for the related *P* (which is false if the intuitional state is not veridical) an instance of the kind of justification that intuitional states in general provide for beliefs. This “highest common factor” implies that the justification provided by an intuitional seeming cannot in principle guarantee the truth of the belief it justifies, for had one been deceived by the illusory appearance, one would have believed the intuitive judgment based on the same grounds upon which one believes the intuitive judgment when not deceived by a veridical appearance: the appearance constitutes the same justification or evidence for the false and the true judgment. But this entails that that justification or evidence cannot establish the truth of one’s intuitive judgment, and hence cannot provide one with knowledge.²⁴ This assumption that experience—in this case, the experience formulated as “its seeming to one that *P*”—cannot provide better than defeasible justification for the belief that *P*, I shall call rather infelicitously the “seeming-*qua*-evidence” assumption, and it follows directly from the “gap” objection raised by Williamson. The assumption underlies the dogmatic view of Huemer and Chudnoff, and it also underlies the second internalist account, conventionally called the “entitlement” view.

The *entitlement* view derives from Tyler Burge's (1993 and 2003) work on the philosophy of perception and has been developed in the context of the epistemology of logical laws by Crispin Wright (2004a and 2004b) and generalized for intuitions in David Enoch and Joshua Schechter (2008). This view concedes that there is no evidence for believing that P, given that it seems to one that P, but concludes that one has a priori justification without evidence, so long as one has no evidence to the contrary, viz., no evidence that the seeming is illusory. Thus this account too assumes what I called the "seeming-*qua*-evidence" assumption, that is, the assumption that the intellectual seeming that P must stand in a logical relationship to the proposition (the Fregean thought) that P that is *weaker* than a constitutive relation, and is thus in a sense *accidental*, and hence liable to epistemic luck, so that the justification provided is at best *prima facie*, defeasible.²⁸ The entitlement account accepts this assumption regarding intuitions, finds that nothing can provide more than such defeasible evidence, and so retreats to a weaker epistemic claim, not of justification or evidence, but rather of provisional epistemic entitlement, where epistemic entitlement denotes "a kind of warranted acceptability which originates quite otherwise than in the existence of *evidence* for the truth of the proposition accepted," and which constitutes "an unavoidable kind of risk" (Wright, 2004b, p. 163, n. 5 and p. 164). Thus regarding the use of our cognitive faculties, Wright says:

Our cognitive faculties are merely abilities and, like all abilities, their successful exercise depends upon the co-operative nature of the prevailing circumstances. That circumstances are appropriately co-operative is clearly a presupposition of any cognitive project in the sense we defined, namely, that to have a reason to doubt it in a particular case would indeed be to have reason to doubt the significance or competence of the project in question. It is thus an entitlement of project [sic] to take it that the prevailing circumstances are indeed appropriately co-operative in any case where there is no antecedent reason to suppose that they are not, and where to attempt to investigate the matter nevertheless would throw up further, no safer presuppositions of the same sort. (Wright, 2004b, p. 165)²⁶

Thus this weaker epistemic status regarding, for instance, knowledge of logical laws, rests on the distinction between being rationally entitled to proceed on certain suppositions, and the having of evidence that those suppositions are actually true... It would be wonderful to be in the second situation, of course, but it is by no means useless if we are merely in the first. (Wright, 2004b, p. 166)

So here too, as with dogmatism, the entitlement view presupposes the "seeming-*qua*-evidence" assumption, but while the former view attempts to vindicate it, the latter view offers us a weaker epistemic status as compensation, as it were, for denying that it can be vindicated.

Externalist accounts, such as Goldman and Pust (1998), Goldman (2010), and Brown (2011), likewise accept the "seeming-*qua*-evidence" assumption, and seek to vindicate it typically by means of some empirical *reliabilist* theory. Here

the defeasibilist relation is upheld by arguing that cognitive science will explain why there is a *statistically* high probability or likelihood that intellectual seemings that P correlate with the truth of the proposition that P. Thus Brown envisages how Williamson's 'gap' might be bridged:

Suppose that, in fact, the method of forming beliefs about the nonpsychological subject matter of philosophy on the basis of the relevant psychological propositions is reliable. Combining this supposition with a reliabilist approach to justification has the result that beliefs formed in this manner are justified. (Brown, 2011, p. 513)

Goldman and Pust, and also Goldman on his own, similarly advocate an empirical, process-reliabilist account of the justificatory relation between the intellectual seeming that P and the likelihood that P is true, and offer their account specifically in answer to a skeptical challenge based on the fallibility of intuition:

[I]nspection of empirically based theories of categorization suggests that infallibility of judgment is not to be expected. It is therefore perfectly appropriate to worry about the level of reliability of categorization. This process cannot be assumed, *a priori*, to have a high enough reliability level (whatever "high enough" amounts to) to escape skeptical challenge. (Goldman, 2010, p. 20)

This brief survey of epistemic accounts that offer justification for an intuitive judgment demonstrated that they all rest on the "seeming-*qua*-evidence" assumption, and—as Goldman above explicitly states—suggests that what motivates that assumption is the belief that whatever mental state or capacity that generates an intuitive judgment is fallible, and *therefore* unreliable; and that therefore, the accounts emphasize how confidence in an intuitive judgment can be secured through dogmatic credence in the reliability of the appearance, default entitlement to assume reliability, or empirical study of the process that produces the judgment with a statistically high level of reliability.

But fallibility of judgment, the likely motivation for the "seeming-*qua*-evidence" assumption, does not entail unreliability. Fallibility is a property of capacities, including conceptual capacities, and there is a conception of capacities available to us according to which the fact that a capacity is fallible does not entail that its non-defective exercise is unreliable.²⁷ It is possible, and quite commonsensical, to consider the non-defective exercise of a capacity to φ as necessarily resulting in φ being done. Thus my capacity to add two numbers, when exercised non-defectively, necessarily results in the correct sum being produced; it is not an *accident* that the sum produced is correct if I have exercised my capacities non-defectively. This general account holds for intuitive judgments as spontaneous exercises of our conceptual and reasoning capacities, capacities self-consciously possessed and exercised by mature rational thinkers. For example, the rational capacity to infer according to modus ponens, when exercised non-defectively, does not accidentally result in the correct inference being made: the capacity to φ and its proper, non-defective exercise is internally related to φ where φ is defined as what the capacity is a capacity to do. The

proponents of the dogmatic, entitlement and empirical reliabilistic accounts commit a fallacious inference, from the true statement that one's intuitive judgment that P might be defective, hence false, to the incorrect conclusion, that therefore one does not know that P when one non-defectively intuitively judges that P.

This is a claim about the *logical* relation between a capacity or ability and its non-defective exercise, namely that the relation is a *constitutive*, rather than an *accidental*—that is, statistical or probabilistic—relation. This latter relation belongs to the logic of reliability, not capacity on the conception advocated here. The non-defective exercise of a capacity is the actualization of a disposition, constitutively defined as the disposition to φ : that is, the disposition or capacity is constitutive of the acts that manifest it. That the disposition is fallible, sometimes failing to manifest itself in φ -ing, does not affect the definition or identity of the disposition as a capacity to φ ; rather, judgments attributing a capacity or disposition to a person (e.g., “She knows how to add”) acknowledge exceptions, countervailing circumstances, defective actualizations of the disposition.²⁸ To be sure, as Wright states above, our cognitive abilities, like any capacity, depend upon “the co-operative nature of the prevailing circumstances.” On our conception of capacity, this must be understood as the claim that there are circumstances that hinder, prevent, or otherwise interfere with the successful exercise of the capacity.²⁹ To return to my example of performing an addition, the conditions conducive to the proper exercise of my capacity might include being well-rested, focused, calm, my memory and calculating faculties etc., working well, and so on. Any of these conditions for the exercise of my capacity might be absent or insufficient and result in the defective exercise of the capacity. But when the relevant conditions are cooperating, then the exercise of my capacity fully, that is, conclusively explains the success of my activity. Likewise, when prevailing circumstances are cooperating, and I exercise my rational capacities non-defectively, I have *indefeasible* justification for my intuitive judgment, as a case of what the capacity is specified as a capacity to do. If knowledge is factive, then it is an added advantage of my account of the constitutive relation between the non-defective exercise of a capacity and the resulting Fregean thought that it can adequately explain the source of a priori intuitional *knowledge*, rather than merely accidental—statistically, probabilistically, reliable—belief. And since Fregean thoughts are judgments about facts understood as the possible layout of reality, when I have a priori intuitional knowledge of a Fregean thought I have a priori knowledge of the layout of reality; there is no “gap.”

This argument against the view that an intuition that P constitutes reliable evidence that P (including its entitlement version attributing presumptive justificatory force to the judgment in the absence of evidence) works by analogy with the disjunctivist denial of the presence of evidence such as “appearances” for perceptual knowledge, and suggests that talk of intuitions as “intellectual seemings” or “intellectual appearances” gives rise to an intellectual (rather than perceptual) version of the argument from illusion, as we saw with Huemer. But if we suppose that warrant for one's intuition that P cannot be better than *prima facie*, hence inconclusive, there are only two positions one can adopt regarding

the possibility of a priori intuitional knowledge. On the one hand is skepticism, that is, the denial that there is such a thing as intuitional knowledge. And on the other hand there is the triad dogmatism-entitlement-reliabilism: dogmatism, the claim that *prima facie* warrant can be sufficient for a belief to count as knowledge; its weaker cousin entitlement, the claim that one is permitted to believe as though one had such warrant; and reliabilism, the claim that a statistically high enough probability is sufficient for belief to count as knowledge. But this dilemma issues from a single, common assumption of at best defeasible justification for one's intuitional judgments, for the dogmatic-entitlement-reliabilist position, like the skeptical position, in acknowledging that one's justification for belief is merely *prima facie*, leaves open the possibility that one's judgment is false. And this seems to amount to the concession that despite the believer's best evidence, her intuitional judgement might nevertheless be false. The way to avoid the apparent dilemma is to give up the assumption that the best justification possible for one's intuitional judgments is *prima facie*, to give up the assumption that the logical relation between intuiting and intuited is merely accidental rather than constitutive. Treating rational intuitions as Fregean thoughts about which the thinker possesses indefeasible justification when her fallible conceptual capacities and rational competences are functioning non-defectively, exercises of which stand in a constitutive relation to the Fregean thoughts they produce, averts the fall back into that assumption that in turn elicits the dogmatic, entitlement and reliabilist accounts in the attempt to secure ourselves against skepticism while watching the genuine possibility of a priori knowledge slip from our rational grasp.

An objection might be raised on the basis of Jonathan Weinberg's distinction between a hopeful fallibility and an "unmitigated" or "hopeless" fallibility. The latter is characterized as "a fallibility uncompensated by a decent capacity for detecting and correcting the errors that it entails," whereas the former is a fallibility that does allow for such "checkability" and improvement. Weinberg adduces four features that increase the trustworthiness of an epistemic source: external corroboration, internal coherence, detectability of margins ("the practices are sensitive to the conditions in which the device is less likely to give good results"), and theoretical illumination ("as to how [the devices] work [or fail] when they do"). He can then reject rational intuitions because they are unmitigatedly fallible and untrustworthy: "it is our capacity to detect and correct errors that makes the difference between the trustworthy and untrustworthy [epistemic] source" (Weinberg, 2007, p. 325). The force of this objection is dissipated, however, by our conception of the non-defective exercise of a fallible capacity, say for a priori intuitive knowledge, which *is* a trustworthy epistemic source by virtue of the constitutive relation between the capacity's proper functioning and what it is a capacity to do.

The objector might, in response, shift the ground of her objection, in the following way. Granted that the non-defective exercise of one's conceptual capacities provides indefeasible warrant for the intuitive judgment produced, the skeptic may ask how one knows that a given act of intuitional judgment is a case of non-defective exercise? If one does not know which case—the defective

or non-defective—obtains, how can she claim to know the judgment, and know that it is true? Granted that the capacities in question are not infallible, how can one tell when one's capacities are working correctly? Here Weinberg's distinction has traction, in that purely conceptual capacities delivering a priori judgments are less liable to the means of correction and improvement than say, perceptual capacities that are cross-modally checkable.³⁰

The conceptual competencies whose non-defective exercise deliver a priori intuitional knowledge are, like all fallible capacities, liable to defective performance, uncooperative conditions, and so on. The self-conscious mature reasoner, in considering the possibilities of mitigating or defeating conditions, might withdraw her assertion of the judgment, or hedge it with "it seems to me that P," as was suggested earlier. And certainly advances in empirical psychology and cognitive science regarding the workings of conceptual competencies might add further auxiliary conditions, consideration of which the mature, self-conscious reasoner should take into account before asserting her judgment. And inferential, consistency and coherence relations among her intuitive judgments and her other beliefs will also factor into those auxiliary conditions.³¹ But none of these considerations vitiates the claim that when her conceptual capacities are working non-defectively, they provide indefeasible warrant for her claim to know a priori the intuitional judgment that they produce.

IV. Conclusion

Intuitions play an important, often foundational role in philosophical argumentation, but at least in the case of rational intuitions, it is a mistake to conceive of them as a distinctive psychological or mental state, an "intellectual seeming" that P which provides some kind of evidentiary force for the truth of P. Rather, I have argued that a rational intuition that P is best conceived as non-inferential a priori indefeasible knowledge that P in virtue of the concepts exercised non-defectively in judging that P. As opposed to the three rival accounts of the justificatory role of intuitions – the dogmatic, entitlement and reliabilist accounts – only this account explains how rational intuitions can yield knowledge. However, this account should not be taken as a wholesale rejection of Experimental Philosophy. The account of the justificatory force of rational intuitions sketched out here has several interesting implications for critical treatments of the evidential status of philosophical intuitions by contemporary proponents of X-Phi.

This account of rational intuition implicitly reintroduces a version of Hilary Putnam's division of linguistic labor. Those thinkers who are less likely to be defective in the self-conscious, reflective exercise of their conceptual capacities should provisionally be accorded greater authority regarding the deliverances of the a priori exercise of those capacities. The expertise of accomplished self-conscious thinkers should here also encompass self-reflection upon the conditions favoring the non-defective exercise of one's conceptual capacities. Furthermore, the authority accorded a thinker extends to that thinker's self-conscious self-relation: "epistemic self-trust" is a basic reason a thinker must have in order to think that some proposition P is true.³²

Most importantly, this account of rational intuition implicitly accords a significant role to X-Phi in future research: the conditions under which conceptual capacities are exercised should be incorporated into the design and implementation of experimental-philosophical experiments. As McGee (1985), and Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky (1982), and others have demonstrated, experiments can be conducted which reveal and often increase the propensity for error in judging and reasoning. The account proposed here certainly allows for the deleterious influence of such conditions on the exercise of conceptual capacities, as well as what might be called the persistent or endemic fallibility of some capacities, to explain epistemic recalcitrance involved in phenomena like the gambler's fallacy, the Monty Hall fallacy, the false intuition that the naïve comprehension axiom is true, and so on. Moreover, since conceptual capacities include inferential relations of varying complexity and intricacy, one's background theory is in principle also one of those conditions. There is an important role for X-Phi here, namely to devise and conduct experiments that aim to identify empirically and theorize factors that conduce to such insufficiencies in the exercise of rational capacities. Such studies do not impugn the apriority of the judgments formed by those capacities, rather "in studying our intuitive capacities, [experimental philosophers] are learning contingent truths about our ability to learn necessary ones" (Weinberg, 2013, p. 102; cf. also Ichikawa, 2013)

The account of the logic of capacity offered in section III implies that in principle some experimental-philosophical intuition-pumping experiments may well produce non-convergent results, but such non-convergence would not necessarily impugn the justificatory force of rational intuitions, understood as the fallible exercise of conceptual capacities. In this sense the empirical orientation of Experimental Philosophy does not ipso facto threaten, but rather can go some way towards explaining, the a priori knowledge that rational intuitions can provide.

Notes

1. (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 28)
2. (Geach, 1957, 19)
3. See Alexander (2012) and Knobe and Nichols (2017) for a helpful overview and bibliography.
4. On, e.g., epistemic intuitions, see Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich (2001). On semantic intuitions, see Machery, Mallon, Nichols, and Stich (2004). And on gender, see Zamzow and Nichols (2009); Stich and Buckwalter (2011); and Buckwalter and Stich (2014).
5. See, e.g., Knobe, (2003) on intuitions regarding intentional action and Nichols and Knobe (2007) on compatibilist and incompatibilist intuitions.
6. See, e.g., Cummins (1998) and Weinberg (2007). Several of these experimental attacks on intuitions, along with a defense claiming that such attacks incorrectly assume that prompted answers express intuitions, are discussed in Bengson (2013). For an overview of the debates attending the X-Phi movement, see Alexander et al. (2010), Alexander (2012), and Knobe and Nichols (2017).
7. This understanding of the a priori relates to *propositional justification* (where for a subject S, P is propositionally justified just if S has warrant for P) and not *doxastic justification* (where S's belief that P is doxastically justified just if S is

warranted in believing P); these can come apart. And this understanding comports with Kant's formulation in the *Critique of Pure Reason* B2-3 (1997: 136-37; see Hanna 2001: chapters 1, 2, 5.) and the distinction between a (possibly a posteriori) *enabling* role for experience (e.g. concept acquisition, etc.) in a priori knowledge and the *justificatory* role of experience in a posteriori knowledge. See Williamson (2007), chapter 5.

8. Cf. Cappelen (2012), on the distinction between on the one hand, intuitions as evidence and on the other, intuitions as sources of evidence: "On the first view it is *A has the intuition that p* that serves as evidence. On the second view, *p* is the evidence and the source of that evidence is *that A has an intuition that p*" (p. 13). Goldman (2010) helpfully distinguishes the first from the second view as follows, in the context of challenges posed by skeptics of experimental philosophers: "Experimental philosophers should be understood to be presenting *second-order evidence* in support of the proposition that intuitions, or intuitive judgments, lack *first-order* evidential status" (p. 123). My task is to offer an account of Cappelen's second conception of intuition as a source of evidence, and thus to answer experimental philosophers' skeptical challenge regarding the second-order evidentiary status of intuitions. I do so directly in section III. For an extended account and defense of rational intuitions, from which this article derives, see Chapman et al. (2013).
9. See, e.g., Bealer (1992): "... when you first consider one of De Morgan's laws, often it neither seems to be true nor seems to be false. After a moment's reflection, however, something happens: it now seems true; you suddenly 'just see' that it is true" (p. 5).
10. Cf. also Sosa (2006) and Sosa (2013), where he distinguishes seemings from experiences by their phenomenal qualities.
11. So too does Plantinga (1993), who claims that a priori justification is provided by an intellectual, non-sensuous, non-perceptual "seeing" with a distinctive cognitive phenomenology: "that peculiar form of phenomenology with which we are all well acquainted, but which I can't describe in any way other than as the phenomenology that goes with seeing that such a proposition is true" (p. 105-106).
12. Seconded by Cappelen (2012, p. 80 and p. 117-118). Lynch (2006) denies any felt attraction: "When I look inward I don't find any conscious attraction to believe this proposition [that two and two are four], pulling me, as it were, towards its truth. Rather, what I find is simply that I believe that two and two are four" (p. 228-229). So too Goldman (2010) doubts the existence of any single distinctive cognitive phenomenology for intuitions: "If one weren't a rationalist philosopher with prior theoretical commitment to such a distinctive phenomenological unity, what are the chances that one would expect to find such a common thread across precisely these domains: mathematics, classification judgment, etc.? I regard the phenomenological unity thesis as a piece of highly 'creative' speculation" (p. 139-140). Weinberg (2007) claims the existence of only a phenomenological difference that is coarse-grained enough to distinguish intuition from other epistemic sources: "a sort of intellectual seeming, phenomenologically distinct from perception (including proprioception and the like), explicit inference, and apparent memory traces. But this construal includes a rather large and motley class of cognitions" (p. 319-320).
13. Note that this divergence in reported experience of intuitions, across the board, does not preclude the possibility that a specifically demarcated proper subset

consisting of, say, central or foundational rational intuitions might uniformly exhibit a characteristic cognitive phenomenology. My thanks to Robert Hanna for this thought, which is pursued in Chapman et al. (2013). Cullison (2013) argues that intuitions are seemings with Russellian rather than Fregean content, a position I cannot address here.

14. By “judge” I mean to indicate, as stated above, that it is a taking things to be thus and so, in keeping with Frege’s view that “a thought is already to the effect that things are thus and so. It does not acquire its bearing on the world when someone affirms it inwardly in judgment or outwardly in assertion... Judging, in Frege’s account, is advancing from a thought to the truth-value true. Such advance is correctly undertaken if the thought is true, incorrectly if not” (McDowell, 2009a, p. 177-178 and 180).
15. See, e.g., Bealer (1998, p. 207). This is endorsed by Pust (2000, p. 32-33), by Huemer (2001, p. 99-100), by Sosa (2006) and by Chudnoff (2011b).
16. “Now the suggestion I wish to make is, in its simplest terms, that the statement ‘X looks green to Jones’ differs from ‘Jones sees that x is green’ in that whereas the latter both ascribes a propositional claim to Jones’ experience *and endorses it*, the former ascribes the claim but does not endorse it” (Sellars, 1997, p. 39-40).
17. This is a description of the “gap” between a psychological state (an “intellectual seeming”) or psychological proposition (“it seems to me that P”) on the one hand, and a philosophical fact or nonpsychological proposition (“that P”) on the other, that I discuss in section III, and the epistemic bridging of which is often subject to debate between negative and positive advocates of X-Phi. On “intuitive” and “it seems that P” as different kinds of hedge, i.e. “an expression that functions, at least in part, to weaken the speaker’s commitment to the embedded sentence,” see Cappelen (2012, p. 36-38, 42-47 and *passim*). Compare Chisholm (1989): “‘It seems to me that I see light,’ when uttered on any ordinary occasion, might be taken to be performing one or the other of two quite different functions. (1) The expression might be used simply to report one’s belief; in such a case, ‘I seems to me that I see light’ could be replaced by, ‘I believe that I see the light.’ Taken in in this way, the ‘seems’ statement expresses what is self-presenting, but since it is equivalent to a belief-statement it does not add anything to the cases we have already considered. (2) ‘It seems to me’ – or better, ‘It seem to *me*’ – may be used not only to report a belief, but also to provide the speaker with a way out, a kind of hedge, in case the statement prefixed by, ‘It seems to me,’ should turn out to be false. This function of, ‘It seems,’ is thus the contrary of the performative use of, ‘I know,’ to which J. L. Austin had called attention. In saying, ‘I know,’ I give my hearers a kind of guarantee and, as Austin said, stake my reputation, but in saying ‘It seems to *me*,’ I play it safe, indicating that what I say carries no guarantee at all, and that anyone choosing to believe what I say does so at his or her own risk” (p. 21).
18. See Weatherson (2003), who argues that in some cases of conflict between settled theory and contradictory intuitions, the intuitions should be abandoned. For a general account of the a priori as a fallible epistemic source, see Casullo (2003).
19. This definition comes from Pryor (2000, 2005), while Cappelen (2012, p. 112) speaks of an intuitive judgment’s “default justificatory status”. Examples of non-inferentially justified beliefs that are not rational intuitions (at least as commonly understood) include the following: (i) beliefs grounded in sensations (“I’m tired”); (ii) teleological action explanations/intentions for action (“I’m crossing the road to get to the other side”).

20. Notice that this conception of justification, which I borrow from Pryor (2005), does not require the justifier to be a proposition.
21. Boghossian (2001, p. 639) deploys these arguments against Bonjour (1998), who accepts the conclusion that a priori “rational insights” are not “propositional in form.... Instead, I suggest, the relevant logical insight must be construed as non-propositional in character, as a direct grasping of the way in which the conclusion is related to the premises and validly flows from them. And once the need for this non-propositional conception of *a priori* insight is appreciated in the context of deductive inference, it seems to me in fact plausible to extend it to many other cases as well” (Bonjour, 2005, p. 100). In my view Bonjour’s response merely restates the problem rather than articulating an explanatory account of such insight.
22. See Huemer (2001, p. 98-115), Huemer (2007), and Huemer (2013).
23. I owe the formulation of the notion of a “highest common factor” to John McDowell, in the context of perceptual experiences: “The skepticism I am considering purports to acknowledge that experiences have objective purport, but nevertheless supposes that appearances as such are mere appearances, in the sense that any experience leaves it an open possibility that things are not as they appear. That is to conceive the epistemic significance of experience as a highest common factor of what we have in cases in which, as common sense would put it, we perceive that things are thus and so and what we have in cases in which that merely seems to be so—so never higher than what we have in the second kind of case” (McDowell, 2009b, p. 231).
24. White (2006) argues for this conclusion using confirmation-theoretical principles. Here is a quick overview of White’s criticism of dogmatism, as applied to the case of intuition (see also Brown, 2011, p. 507, n.18). Confirmation theory holds that evidence E confirms hypothesis H if and only if the conditional probability of H on E is greater than the prior probability of H, that is, if and only if $P(H/E) > P(H)$. And according to probability theory, if H entails E, then E confirms H, and therefore if H entails E, then E disconfirms not-H. According to dogmatism, the experience of its appearing that P is evidence for the hypothesis that the appearance is veridical. Now consider the hypothesis H* that the appearance that P is illusory, i.e., not veridical. H* entails that it appears to one that P. Therefore its appearing to one that P *disconfirms* the hypothesis that the appearance is veridical. On the assumption that evidence which disconfirms a hypothesis cannot justify it, it follows that having the experience of its appearing to one that P cannot justify the hypothesis that the appearance is veridical, i.e., that P. White thus rejects dogmatism and instead endorses the entitlement or “default justification” view.
25. For this formulation of an “accidental” epistemic relation I am indebted to Kern (2012).
26. Wright also rejects the classical account of a faculty of intuition because “rational insight seems to hold out no prospect of integration within the broad body of scientifically accountable knowledge – accountability within the explanatory resources of a broad scientific naturalism” (2004b, p. 156-157). But requiring this particular type of externalist, empiricist explanation seems to doom any self-conscious a priori non-inferential exercise of rational competencies (intuition, introspection, practical intention) by stipulation.
27. See McDowell (2011) against Burge’s entitlement view in the case of perceptual judgment: “When we acknowledge that a capacity is fallible, we acknowledge that there can be exercises of it that are defective, in that they fail to be cases of

what the capacity is specified as a capacity to do. That does not preclude us from holding that in non-defective exercises of a perceptual capacity subjects get into perceptual states that provide *indefeasible* warrant for perceptual beliefs” (p. 38). Cf. also McDowell (2010, p. 245), and Kern (2012).

28. My suggestion here, development of which would extend beyond the confines of this article, is that the logical form of these judgments – generic or “Aristotelian categorical” judgment – is characterized by alethic and inferential behavior that – unlike universally quantified judgments – allow of exceptions. On this see Thompson (2008) and my essay in Chapman et al. (2013). Note that this conception of the logical relationships between a fallible capacity and its exercise, and the reliability of the capacity’s non-defective exercise, distinguishes my account from neo-rationalist accounts such as Bealer’s and Ludwig’s that overlook these relationships and therefore conclude that determinate understanding of a concept (Bealer, 1998 and 2000) or concept mastery (Ludwig, 2007 and 2010) entails the infallibly correct application of the concept in question.
29. See, e.g., Nancy Cartwright’s claim that the central idea of a capacity is that “If the capacity is triggered properly and *is not interfered with*, then the canonical manifestation will result” (Cartwright, 2007, p. 10).
30. Weinberg (2007) concedes that “logic and mathematics are excellent examples of domains with hopeful intuitions” due to “the successful integration of mathematics and logic into other ongoing scientific concerns” (p. 339), but one would like more discussion here. A glaring example is the fate of Euclidean geometry in relation to Kant’s rationalism, and one might argue that international courts and human rights indicate a certain amount of “integration” of moral and metaphysical intuitions. Moreover, the criterion of internal coherence may be invoked to appraise rational intuitions, and likewise detectability of margins, in that more recondite and fantastical hypothetical scenarios are more apt to result in divergent concept applications. Lastly, accounts of the possibility and reliability of a priori knowledge aspire to provide the theoretical illumination that Weinberg desires.
31. An a priori, non-inferential intuitive judgment is similar to an a posteriori, non-inferential perceptual judgment, in that both judgments occur “in the space of reasons,” such that those judgments stand in inferential relations to other judgments answerable to norms of rationality. See, e.g., Sellars (1997): “in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says” (p. 76).
32. “If an epistemic reason is a state in virtue of which it is reasonable to think that some proposition is true without succumbing to doubt, then epistemic self-trust is a reason, and no other reasons, whether deliberative, or what I take to be theoretical, are epistemic reasons for me to believe something unless epistemic self-trust is a reason. Epistemic self-trust is the most basic epistemic reason, and it is irreducibly first personal” (Zagzebski, 2013, 275).

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