On the Status and Sources of the A Priori

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Debating the A Priori
By Paul Boghossian and Timothy Williamson
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A priori knowledge or a priori justified belief[1] is standardly conceived as knowledge or justified belief that can be achieved just by lucid thinking, broadly understood, without any kind of reliance on empirical evidence. Is there any such thing?

Traditional forms of rationalism and empiricism in epistemology famously offer 'Yes' and 'No' answers respectively – indeed, are to an extent defined by those opposing answers. But those are not, or not exactly, the answers offered by the protagonists in this debate, extending over 20 years and documented in the papers herein included. It is true that Paul Boghossian offers a staunch defence of the a priori throughout, though his conception of how a priori justification may be achievable undergoes significant development in the course of his chapters. Timothy Williamson's official position, however, is officially more subtle than a simple negative. He does not deny the existence of the a priori – perhaps better, the existence of a range of cases where knowledge may be achieved by exercises of reason and imagination and which are customarily so captioned. But he disputes that the label, 'A Priori', captures a theoretically interesting and explanatory epistemological kind. In particular, in addition to argument aimed at undermining Boghossian's attempts to explain how a priori justification may be achieved, he argues that there is no interesting epistemological difference between the way we justify some thoughts that are paradigms of the traditional a priori and the way we can justify others that would not normally be so classified. I will return to this – what has come to be known as Williamson's Central Argument.

The volume contains 18 chapters in all, the second nine previously unpublished. With one exception, they divide into three broad phases:

Chapters 1–7 centre on Boghossian's recommended rehabilitation, after Quine's attack, of a notion of *epistemic* analyticity, and his suggestion that the idea of assent to a proposition or principle of inference that is informed purely by the understanding can play a core role in the a priori justification of basic logic. Williamson in response disputes

1 Except where the distinction between knowledge and justified belief matters, I will refer simply to 'a priori justification' throughout.

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that there are any epistemically analytic propositions or inferences in Boghossian's proposed sense.

Chapters 8–11 focus on Williamson's Central Argument, that the distinction between the a priori and the a posteriori is epistemologically superficial.

Williamson's chapter 12 is the exception noted above. It offers some interesting reflections on the general phenomenon of knowledge achieved via the imagination. However, since Boghossian does not, in the chapters that follow and constitute the third phase of the discussion, offer any comment on it, I will not discuss it further in this review.

The remaining chapters introduce Boghossian's most recent thoughts about the role of *intuition* in the epistemology of the a priori. Previously one of the more energetic critics of the form in which it features in the writings of, for instance, Lawrence BonJour (e.g. BonJour 1998), Boghossian now argues that epistemic analyticity can take us only so far, and that intuition is involved in our justification of a wide range of traditional examples of the a priori. Williamson is predictably sceptical.

It is fair to say that the views Williamson's further fusillade in argued for in Boghossian's chapters are of a piece with, and motivated by, a generally internalist outlook in epistemology, where – this is my characterization, not Boghossian's – that involves conceiving of justification as conferred by states of mind of the individual of a kind within the ambit of distinctively first-personal access. Williamson's overall epistemological outlook is, familiarly, robustly externalist. He claims, however, that the objections he develops against Boghossian's ideas do not depend on this. I shall lodge a doubt about that claim in §2.

As one would expect from these authors, the debate is of signally high quality throughout, marshalling numerous subtle, interesting and original arguments on both sides. There are many points worthy of detailed consideration which here, for reasons of space, I must pass over. I will, however, comment on one aspect of each of the three phases, namely Boghossian's attempt to bring the notion of epistemic analyticity to bear on the putatively a priori justification of a wide range of traditional examples; Williamson's Central Argument; and Boghossian's recent 'intuitionistic turn'.

1. Blind inference, understanding and assent

Boghossian's chapter 2 raises the following interesting question: if a subject infers a conclusion from certain justified beliefs, under what conditions do

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they thereby acquire justification for their conclusion? In short, when does their justification *transmit?*[2]

He contrasts and dismisses two polar answers:

Simple Inferential Externalism: It is necessary and sufficient for transmission of justification from premises to conclusion that the inference be valid.

Simple Iinferential Internalism: It is necessary and sufficient for transmission that the inference be such that the subject is able to know by reflection alone that their premises provide them with a good reason for believing the conclusion.[3]

Neither of these answers passes muster. The simple externalist answer, Boghossian observes, inherits the most telling type of counter-examples to simple reliabilism in general – what we may term *irresponsibility counter-examples*. A pattern of inference can be valid although the grounds of its validity are sufficiently arcane that no normal subject could responsibly rely on it in reasoning. The simple internalist answer, by contrast, *over-intellectualizes* the target phenomenon. Agents can be altogether innocent of concepts in the family of 'good reason to believe' yet can still naturally extend their knowledge by sound inference.[4] Such inferences – rational, valid movements of thought unschooled by reflective appreciation of their reason-giving character – are, in the terminology introduced by Wittgenstein ((1953) 2009: §219), *blind*.

It is an excellent problem, and I do not know that anyone clearly formulated it before Boghossian did. We have to reckon with and explain these two quite different kinds of case: there are token inferences – the blind ones – where it does suffice for transmission merely that the transition be valid; and there are token inferences where it is necessary, in addition, that the agent have justification for certain relevant beliefs about the character of the transition. What we basically want to know is: what explains the difference between the two types of case?

Chapter 2 proposes the answer that a blind inference is justification-transmitting just in case it proceeds in accordance with a rule which constitutes a *non-defective concept*, where a concept is non-defective just in case,

2 One class of cases where justification does not transmit – even across a valid inference – is when possession of justification for the conclusion is already a precondition for having a justification for the premises in the first place. Transmission-failures of this kind are various and sometimes quite subtle, and are worth describing in detail. A recent discussion is Wright 2023. But for present purposes, I will follow Boghossian and set them aside.

3 Boghossian's actual formulation is at page 30 of *Debating the A Priori*. Except where otherwise stated, all page number references following are to *Debating the A Priori* (Boghossian and Williamson 2020).

4 Think of very young children and Chrysippus' legendary disjunctive-syllogism-practising dog.

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roughly, possessing it does not require a subject to hold any additional defeasible belief about the world. Boghossian's underlying idea seems to have been that when a subject infers in accordance with such a rule, they are simply doing what a grasp of the concept in question requires, so cannot be blamed for that; and – because the concept in question is non-defective – they are also open to no further reproach. Such a subject is accordingly in no way irresponsible. Since the important counter-examples to the simple externalist account were irresponsibility counter-examples, there is no obstacle to the idea that inference, even blind inference, in accordance with such a rule is justification-transmissive.

The suggestion is interesting and ingenious. However, it confronts various issues. To begin with, there is still a residual worry about over-intellectualization. That an agent is merely performing in a way that a concept mandates entails blamelessness only if the subject has the concept in the first place. Should we suppose, accordingly, that Chrysippus' dog has the concept of disjunctive syllogism? Second, once the possibility of various kinds of defective concept is registered, there is a question why that does not 'up the ante' as far as responsible inference is concerned: that is, why fully epistemically responsible inference should not now require that the agent do whatever they can to ensure that the concepts associated with the pattern of inference involved *not* be defective. Something needs to be said about why this is not in general so. And third, what is delivered is in any case only *non-irresponsible* inference. That is less – or anyway overtly different from – inference that transmits evidential reason to believe. How exactly does Boghossian's suggestion get us a connection with the possibility of reason-to-believe-transmitting but blind inference? True, it was stipulated that the inference be licensed by a non-defective concept. But a connection still needs to be made between that notion and the idea of inheritance of the evidential pedigree of the premises.

These are all good questions, to which I am not here going to question whether there may not be good answers. Somewhat surprisingly, however, none of them feature in Williamson's critique of Boghossian in chapter 3. Williamson characterizes Boghossian's central suggestion thus:

> A deductive pattern of inference P may be blamelessly employed, without any reflective appreciation of its epistemic status, just in case inferring according to P is a precondition for having one of the concepts ingredient in it.[5]

He then proceeds to critique the idea by arguing that, for various reasons, compliance with a pattern of inference is *never* a necessary condition for a

5 These are Boghossian's words from his original (2003) Joint Session paper. They are not, if my search engine is to be trusted, replicated in the version reprinted in *Debating the A Priori*.

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grasp of the principal logical concept it features. He continues: Boghossian's explanation (of why inference in accordance with a concept-constituting rule can be liable to no accusation of irresponsibility)

> depends on the idea that one is blameless because one has no option: one cannot so much entertain the inference unless one is willing to make it. If one can entertain the inference while unwilling to make it, provided one has a defeasible disposition to make it, no such account of blamelessness is forthcoming.(49)

As the authors mention in their joint Introduction, this exchange originally took place under my Chairmanship during the Joint Session of the Mind Association and the Aristotelian Society held at Queen's University, Belfast in 2003. It is customary that the Chair on these occasions presents twenty minutes or so of comments on the exchange by way of introduction to the general Q&A, but on this occasion the initial remarks of the main speakers were so protracted and intense that I felt I had to waive that and go straight to questions from the floor. Now at last, almost 20 years later, I have an opportunity to raise the question of why Williamson should have supposed – and Boghossian should, to the extent he did then and has since, have gone along with the idea – that if its mandate of certain patterns of inference, or assent, are constitutive of a concept, that must entail that anyone who grasps the concept must be exceptionlessly participant in those patterns whenever the occasion arises. Surely it should have been an open question from the start whether falling in with the usage that a concept constitutively mandates is simply not, in general, a requirement of one's grasp of it. One wonders what reason Williamson may have had to assume otherwise, other than his enthusiasm for the critique that the assumption enabled.

To elaborate a little. Understanding – grasping a concept – is, loosely, a matter of *knowing* what constitutes its proper employment. Such knowledge may, however, be manifested in different ways and to varying degrees. At one extreme, it may be manifested as explicit *knowledge that* – displayed, for example, in the ability to characterize the proper application in general terms and to construct examples of it – and, at the other, as *knowledge how* – for instance, a practical ability to discriminate competent use of an expression of the concept in question. But nowhere in this spectrum is it a necessary condition of understanding concepts in general that one responds robotically with assent to any perceived instance of the concept in question. Much can intercede between the understanding and such assent, including, as Williamson goes on to emphasize, both theoretical doubts about the integrity of the pattern of use the concept defines, and moral distaste for the relevant practice, as he emphasizes for the case of pejoratives – and no doubt various other causes that may spawn an unwillingness to make use of the concept, or a proprietary expression of it, in question. The basic inferentialist idea that Boghossian is here championing, that basic logical concepts are identified by

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the patterns of inference they mandate, simply carries no evident implication that grasping such concepts requires, and can be manifest only in slavish compliance with, such patterns whenever the occasion arises.

What is the significance of this point for the dialectic between Williamson and Boghossian? 'None', a supporter of Williamson might rejoin, 'since if you are right about that, then Boghossian in any case loses this round of the debate. For once the connection between grasp of the concept and compliance with its requirements is relaxed as you suggest it properly should be, the argument for the *blamelessness* of compliance is undercut'. But not so. That is true only on the interpretation of the argument offered by Williamson in the most recent quote above. Otherwise a connection with blamelessness may still be safeguarded as follows. It is, quite generally, a *default* requirement that we use our language in ways that accord with the character of the concepts expressed. Absent reason to drop out of the practice that the expression for a given concept mandates, it is a constraint on normal social cooperation that one participate properly to the best of one's knowledge. That is why it needs logical objection, as developed by McGee, or moral objection (as for the case of the pejorative 'Boche'), for instance, to justify dropping out.

To summarize the gist of this section:

Williamson's objection to Boghossian's proposal to enlist the notion of epistemic analyticity to assist with the epistemology of basic logic can be summarized as (i) that it requires what have come to be known as understanding-assent links: links connecting grasp of a concept with assent to proper applications of it and (ii) that, as he argues, there are no such links.

Boghossian's response, further developed in the ensuing chapters, is essentially to build qualifications into the links. What is required is not actual assent but a *disposition* to assent and, moreover, a disposition that is in a certain sense *basic* – underived or 'primitive' – but which can be overridden by theoretical or moral or ... considerations.

I think the substance of Boghossian's qualifications is generally apt, but that, for two reasons, there was never any need for the protracted exchanges in which they are developed. First, grasping a concept that is constitutively defined by certain practices – knowing what its, as it were, internally correct practice involves – does not require *even a disposition* to participate in that practice. But second, participation in the relevant practice will still be, as a default, and failing any excuse for non-participation, *de rigueur*, so that the downwards connection, sought by Boghossian, from meaning-constitutive rules to the default non-irresponsibility of compliance with them, and hence to that extent the justification of such compliance, can be saved in any case.

Two final points. The above line of argument is potentially pre-emptive of both Williamson's objection and the need for Boghossian's form of response to it. I offer it as good for concepts in general but, as Boghossian has suggested to me in conversation, there may be special reasons why the root inferentialist idea, that basic logical rules of inference are constitutive of the principal logical

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concepts that they configure, requires a tighter connection between grasp of those concepts and practice in accordance with them than is good for concepts in general. If that is so, the basis for this part of the exchange with Williamson will be restored. But I have found no discussion of the question in the volume.

Second, to stress, it also remains that a fully satisfying epistemology of basic logical inference that exploits its putative constitutive epistemic analyticity will still need to provide more than an argument for the non-irresponsibility of so inferring.

2. *The theoretical (in)significance of the a priori: Williamson's Central Argument*

One of the most thought-provoking chapters in the book is Williamson's chapter 8, in which he argues that the a priori – a posteriori distinction, though genuine, is insignificant for theoretical epistemology – that it fails to cut epistemic reality 'at the joints', as he likes to say. He is quite content to grant that there *is* a distinction, which people are capable of picking up from examples and applying non-collusively to new cases in ways which produce broad agreement with each other – in short, that there is, as he puts it, a 'bottom-up' route into capacities of productive, non-collusive broadly consensual judgements about what is a priori and what is a posteriori. But the profile of the distinction that we thus draw does not coincide with any theoretically important or explanatory epistemological distinction.

How is this to be argued? Williamson considers the following two propositions:

(*Crimson*) All crimson things are red.
(*Who's Who*) All recent volumes of *Who's Who* are red.

(*Crimson*) he takes to be a paradigmatic example of the a priori as traditionally conceived; (*Who's Who*), correspondingly, a paradigm of the a posteriori.

Williamson next imagines a character – Norman – who has been trained ostensively in the use of the words, 'red' and 'crimson', independently of each other, encountering both positive and negative samples of each. We are to suppose that his training went well and that he is expert in the simple classificatory use of both expressions. Now for the first time he is invited to take a view about (*Crimson*). In Williamson's opinion, he can competently do so purely by an exercise of the kind of capacities of visual imagination which, plausibly, his training will have fitted him with: he has only visually to conjure up a sample of crimson and then 'within the imaginative supposition' recognize that it is indeed red. No recollection of any specific previous encounters with red or crimson things is needed. And since, Williamson claims, Norman's performance may be supposed to have been 'sufficiently skilful', and the background conditions for it to have been perfectly normal, his consequent judgement that (*Crimson*) is true should count as knowledgeable.

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So says Williamson. Readers may feel, as I do, that it is actually pretty dubious whether this account passes muster as an outline of how (*Crimson*) and similar propositions may be recognized to be true a priori in something like the 'bottom-up' understanding of the notion.[6] But let that pass for now. Then the sting comes when, according to Williamson, we realize that exactly the same kind of reflective, imaginative routine is, in relevantly similar circumstances, at the service of knowledge of a 'bottom-up' *a posteriori* proposition such as (*Who's Who*). We have only to suppose that Norman has successfully undergone a similar ostensive teaching in the correct classificatory use of the expressions 'red' and 'recent volume of *Who's Who*' – similar in that he has encountered both positive and negative examples of the application of each, that they have been explained independently of each other, and that the teaching involved no explicit consideration of (*Who's Who*). In order to come to a judgement of that proposition, Williamson avers, all Norman has to do is, similarly, to conjure up in his visual imagination a sample of a recent volume of *Who's Who* and correctly judge the colour that it is therein represented as having. Once again, provided the performance is sufficiently skilful, and assuming that the background conditions are normal, there is no reason, in his view, to deny that Norman's judgement is knowledgeable (121–2).

One point Williamson intends the example to make is that the distinction, traditionally allowed by defenders of the a priori, between the evidential and the enabling – concept-bestowing – role of experience in cognition, misses an important *third way* in which experience can be involved in justification. This third way is tied to the knowledge-productive use of the imagination in the kind of 'offline' application of skills acquired through perception that Norman is meant to illustrate. The suggestion is interesting, but one who wishes to resist Williamson's argument has no need to contest it. What they must contest is that exercises of the imagination, by all means 'honed' by experience, can make for the acquisition of knowledge both of (*Crimson*) and of (*Who's Who*) in, in all essential epistemological respects, just the same way.

So, what are we to make of Williamson's analogy? I think the correct response to it is broadly coincident with the forceful critical reaction that Boghossian develops in chapter 9 and, after Williamson's further fusillade in chapter 10, in chapter 11. However, I think an additional 'tweak' is needed to round out this response.[7]

6 Below, I will further question whether it really does pass muster.

7 I draw in what follows on the paper 'Oxonian Scepticism about the A Priori', jointly authored by Giacomo Melis and myself when we were colleagues at the Northern Institute of Philosophy in Aberdeen. Our paper was composed in the months leading up to the final conference in 2012 of the *Basic Knowledge* project that was funded at the NIP by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. The commonalities between Melis' and my paper and Boghossian's discussion are the result of a convergence of the wise, rather than mutual influence.

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It is important, obviously, that the parallel between Norman's cognitive processing in the two cases be developed in sufficient detail to make it plausible that in both he has done something *by which he is properly rationally convinced*. It is here that, on closer inspection, the shoe begins to pinch. To begin with, as hinted earlier, Williamson's description of the case of (*Crimson*) leaves it completely unclear what role the imagination plays in justifying the step from an appreciation of the impression of the visualized patch of crimson to the *generality* of the judgement concerning *all* crimson things. Surely he needs some kind of assurance that the patch of crimson visualized is somehow *prototypical* – that it somehow typifies all shades of crimson in relevant respects. And this information does not seem to be something that merely imagining a particular shade can deliver: rather, Norman will need some independent grip on how far crimson extends in the colour band, before he can be assured that the shade he visualizes is in some way central or relevantly typical of crimson shades in the relevant respect.

Williamson acknowledges a worry in this vicinity. His response to it[8] makes play with the idea of the *reliability* of Norman's skills, suggesting that he may not have been mindful that his argument is advertised as neutral on the opposition between broadly externalist and internalist conceptions of knowledge and justification.[9] But there are anyway other sources of discomfort with the analogy. To get the fundamental issues in focus, we do best to switch to a more plausible example for his purpose.

Consider the following:

(*Square*) All squares are diamonds.

In this case there is a much more plausible role that the visual imagination can play in inducing apparently justified conviction. Suppose that Norman has acquired the concepts *square* and *diamond* in the relevant kind of ostensive way and now considers for the first time whether *(Square)* is true. He visually imagines a typical square-looking figure and then *reorientates it in the imagination* by rotating it through 45 degrees in such a way that it then impresses as resting on an apex and diamond-shaped. Satisfied with this, he assents to *(Square)*.

8 'Naturally, that broad-brush description neglects many issues. For instance, what prevents Norman from imagining a peripheral shade of crimson? If one shade of crimson is red, it does not follow that all are. The relevant cognitive skills must be taken to include sensitivity to such matters. If normal speakers associate colour terms with central prototypes, as many psychologists believe, their use in the imaginative exercise may enhance its reliability' (121: cf. n. 11 above).

9 In his Closing Reflections (241) he writes, 'Although I do have a positive account of knowledge, it does not constrict the resources available to epistemological theorizing in any way analogous to Boghossian's internalism. A case in point is our dispute over the a priori. My account of the examples at issue – for instance, about colour relations – assigned a key role to imagination. That is not a distinctively externalist resource; I described conscious processes, which internalists too could invoke'. That much is true. The 'creeping externalism' comes in with the account of how these processes are meant to underwrite knowledge.

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The crucial issue that the example highlights is, exactly as Boghossian emphasizes, that of *generalization* – how or why does Norman get to be justifiably certain that *all* squares are diamonds, rather than merely that this particular imaginary square, re-orientated in his imagination, is a diamond? What justifies the transition from the properties of the particular phenomenal object to a generalization about all squares, phenomenal and physical?

This, it seems to me, is actually an instance of one of the hardest questions about the basic (non-inferential) a priori.[10] Putting the spotlight on it brings out the fundamental disanalogy that indeed fractures the Central Argument. Compare the following triads:

(Who's Who)	i	Norman's visual imagination of a volume of *Who's Who*
	ii	Norman's judgment: all recent volumes of *Who's Who* are red
	iii	The publishers of *Who's Who* use the same colour for all the volumes
(Square)	i	Norman's realignment of a visually imagined square through 45 degrees
	ii	Norman's judgment all squares are diamonds
	iii	The visualized square is prototypical and any square may 'in principle' be re-orientated in that way

In each case proposition iii is crucial in underwriting the generality involved in Norman's judgment ii in at least the following way. If Norman *doubted* (*Who's Who*) iii, he could not rationally move to, or justify, the proposition (*Who's Who*) on the basis of the imaginative episode i that Williamson described. And if Norman doubted (*Square*) iii, he could not rationally move to, or justify, the proposition (*Square*) on the basis of the imaginative episode (*Square*) i. But there is an evident difference: removing a doubt about (*Who's Who*) iii would require routine empirical investigation – a call to the publishers, a trip to the public library, other people's testimony or whatever. By contrast, the assurance – if needed – that the visualized square is prototypical and the relevant process of reorientation always possible, at least 'in principle', *requires no such investigation*. On the contrary, by bottom-up standards, and although, as remarked above, its grounds may seem mysterious, it is an assurance that can be accomplished in stride and, intuitively, paradigmatically *a priori* – we find the point *obvious on reflection*.

So far, so broadly coincident with Boghossian's discussion.[11] The needed 'tweak' I referred to above emerges when we ask: so, what actually *is* the

10 It is pursued in Wright forthcoming).

11 Boghossian raises the worry about the generality of Norman's conclusions at pages 150 and following.

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epistemic role of the two iii-propositions in the justificational architecture of Norman's two judgements, (*Who's Who*) and (*Square*)? Williamson (163–4), reacting to that part of Boghossian's reply to him in chapter 9 which is touching on the same issue, assumes that it is being suggested that Norman's justification in both cases is *inferential* and needs the iii-proposition as a premise. He then presses Boghossian for an account of how, for the A Priorist (and if we transpose his question to the case of *Square*), the iii proposition might be known (for the purpose of justifying such an inference). As I have said, that is indeed a fundamental question. But it is doubtful whether the iii-propositions need to be so regarded for the purposes of the objection. The certain point is only that, in order for the transition from i to ii in both cases to be rational, the iii proposition must at least not be doubted.

Can we say more? I think the right perspective is that the iii-propositions should be viewed as what I have elsewhere called *authenticity-conditions* and Pryor calls *anti-underminers* – as necessary conditions for the evidence detailed in the respective i-propositions to lend support to the respective claims ii (see Wright 2007: 29–30, 2014: 214ff and Pryor 2012: 298). Now, there will of course be a legion of such conditions for any kind of (defeasible) evidence for any proposition. The crucial question is therefore: in what epistemic relation does an agent need to stand to an authenticity condition when weighing the probative force of a body of evidence for a given proposition?

There are two cases to consider: *lemmas* and *props*. Lemmas for a body of evidence E that is potentially supportive of a proposition P are conditions that a thinker needs some kind of independent assurance about before they can rationally regard E as supportive of P. If the iii-propositions in Norman's cases are regarded as *lemmas*, they are propositions whose truth Norman needs some assurance about before he can justifiably take the imaginative processing described in the two i-components as grounding the generalizations mentioned in the two ii-clauses. In that case Williamson's argument clearly implodes. Part of the process of Norman's rationally persuading himself, by the relevant phenomenological exercises, that the two generalizations hold will be the attainment, before or during, of independent assurances that the two iii-propositions hold, and at that point the claimed analogy will break down. Supplementary information is needed before Norman can achieve knowledge of (*Square*) and of (*Who's Who*) in the kind of way described, and this supplementary information is 'bottom up' empirical in the one case, but 'bottom up' a priori in the other.

It is true, of course, that this way of breaking Williamson's analogy *relies on* the notion of apriority – on the claim that the putatively needed lemma is a priori in the one case but in need of empirical confirmation in the other. But Williamson, remember, is, officially, not a sceptic about the reality of the (bottom-up) distinction. So he can have no objection to a critic's appealing to it in order to explain a crucial difference between cases that he is mistakenly arguing are essentially similar.

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OK. But is it quite that simple? *Are* the respective iii-propositions correctly regarded as lemmas? Not all conditions a doubt about which would undermine justification of a certain kind for a claim are conditions for which independent reassurance needs to be demanded before one has such justification. Any coherent epistemology has to reckon with conditions of this type – has to be, in contemporary terminology, *liberal* with respect to some such conditions (cf. Pryor 2004: 356). The hard question is which are the authenticity conditions – the negations of potential underminers – which serve merely as background *props,* and about which one can rationally permissibly take a liberal view, and which are those which need, rationally, to be regarded as lemmas and for which the opposing *conservative* view is appropriate: viz. that independent assurance about them must be part of any rational conviction about the truth of the target proposition?

In these terms, the alleged analogy-breaker just outlined rested on a conservative view of the two iii-conditions. What if Williamson were to counter by taking a liberal view – by proposing that the iii-conditions concerned are merely props, conditions which need to obtain in order for the relevant episodes of imagination to have the assigned evidential force, but which Norman does not need to independently attest before he can legitimately credit them with that evidential force?

To be sure, the question 'When in general is it appropriate to be liberal about an authenticity condition, and when in general is it appropriate to be conservative?' is one that I believe that no one at present knows how to answer in general terms. But there is a strong case for thinking that a liberal view would be quite inappropriate in the case of (*Who's Who*). For suppose that, instead of a play within the visual imagination, Norman is presented with an *actual* token of a recent volume of *Who's Who*, and an *actual* drawing of a square on a piece of paper. He holds the paper in his hand, rotates it appropriately, and concludes as before that all squares are diamonds. He looks at the volume of *Who's Who* and concludes as before that all recent volumes of *Who's Who* are red. In the latter case we surely would – rationally, *must* – require that he have some independent ground to believe that the volume he is looking at is *typical* before he can be regarded as justifiably generalizing. And such an independent ground would have to be acquired empirically, in one way or another. By contrast, it seems there is vanishingly small room for rational doubt that the ability of the square to present the two different aspects, depending on its orientation to the observer, is internal to it and may be safely attributed to squares in general.

Conservatism is clearly required about the iii-condition in the *perceived* volume of *Who's Who* case. And that is enough to set up a dilemma. Even if we take the view that Norman does strictly need independent assurance that the presentation of distinct *gestalten* by the square that he has *physically*

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reoriented can be expected to be sustained by squares in general, still it does not seem as though that reassurance needs to be secured empirically. It *could* be secured empirically by repeated trials with cut-out squares. But someone who felt the need for that would be regarded as idiotic. And if we take the view that Norman can instead perfectly rationally simply generalize from his experience with the single paper square that he manipulates – then that is also a crucial distinction between the two cases.

When the objects concerned are presented to perception, then, Williamson's analogy implodes, one way or the other. (*Who's Who)* iii is, in such a case, an a posteriori lemma, whereas if (*Square)* iii is a lemma at all, it is at any rate an a priori one. If, on the other hand, it is properly regarded as a prop, that breaks the putative analogy in any case.

So much for the concrete case. The question for a supporter of Williamson, then, is how – by what magic – could it make a relevant difference to the justificational architecture reviewed if the relevant tokens are presented not in external experience, but 'offline', in imagination?

3. *Intuition and the synthetic a priori*

I turn, finally and perforce very briefly, to the third phase of the anthology, which is led by Boghossian's proposed reinstatement of the idea of a faculty of *intuition* into the epistemology of the a priori.

The reinstatement is driven by what Boghossian now perceives as the inadequacy of epistemic analyticity, in either its Constitutive or Basis forms (187), to underwrite a satisfying account of our knowledge in a wide class of purportedly non-empirical cases. A priori justification is thus not, or not always, justification sourced purely in the understanding.

If this is right, then as Boghossian notes, the effect is – for the believer in the a priori – to enforce taking seriously the traditional category of *synthetic a priori* justification. But Boghossian's version of this is not the Kantian: synthetic a priority as it emerges in chapter 13 is not a property of propositions that project and generalize structural features of our temporal and spatial experience, but pertains especially to our knowledge of all and any *fundamental normative principles*, including moral principles and principles of rationality.

I have no space here to discuss in any detail the considerations that lead Boghossian to this conclusion. However I will outline the basic moves.

First, and strikingly, Boghossian draws on an upgrade of Moore's Open Question argument to make a case that mastery of (at least fundamental) normative concepts is exhausted by – to draw on an analogy with logical theory – mastery of their *out-rules*. Where F is such a concept, a full understanding of F requires no more than knowledge of what else, if one accepts, in fact or suppositionally, that something is F, one is thereby obligated to do

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or think. It is this point that explains why we can understand, even if deplore, the moral attitudes of radically alien moral cultures. The attitudes of a fully coherent Caligula, as the example is usually developed (see e.g. Street 2010: 371), are not those of someone who simply does not understand the concepts of the morally right and good, but rather of someone who possesses a radically alien, to us rebarbative view of their extensions. The understanding of such concepts is not to be modelled on the grasp of a satisfaction condition whose realization in particular cases is then a matter for independent cognition.[12]

What follows if Boghossian is right about this? Well, assume that we do indeed have basic knowledge of what is moral, encapsulated in principles like his favourite,

(*Torturing*) Torturing the innocent for pleasure is wrong.

Such knowledge might be empirical on certain views – a consequentialist, for instance, might make a case that focussed on the characteristic social and personal consequences of such a practice. But that of course would need to rely on some independent moral assessment of those consequences, and our focus here is on *fundamental* moral principles. These, then, cannot be known empirically. Our knowledge of them must have a different character. But if, in the light of the upgrading of the Moorean argument, we are persuaded that there is no route to this knowledge that draws only on the character of the concepts of moral wrongness and non-moral features of the practice concerned, then we have to conclude that we are dealing with a kind of non-empirical knowledge that is not sourced in the understanding alone. 'Intuition' is then the suggested label for the cognitive faculty that is productive of such knowledge.

Boghossian glosses intuitions – understood as the products of particular episodes of the operation of the faculty – as *intellectual seemings*: as it were, appearances that P which in the basic case need not be associated with any inclination to believe that P. Many philosophers, Williamson included, are inclined to find it implausible at a purely phenomenological level that they are subject to such seemings. But it seems unlikely that a satisfactory debate about the epistemological issues here can be pursued on the basis of introspection. From an internalist point of view, in which of course Boghossian is invested, there have to be states of mind that constitute the evidence for the fundamental normative judgements in question if those judgements are to be justifiable. If Williamson agrees that we know that (*Torturing)* is true, he also owes an account of what it is that enables us to be reliable about, or

12 As an aside, I wonder about the correctness of this claim for fundamental concepts of rational belief management. Suppose someone accepts a proposition from which they agree that it follows logically that another proposition holds which they nevertheless steadfastly refuse to accept. Does the concept of rational belief management have nothing to say about whether this performance falls under it?

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disposed safely to believe, for example, that proposition. The fundamental question is less about whether our justification for basic normative beliefs is based on a characteristic kind of mental state than about how the cognitive apparatus that delivers justification/knowledge about such matters is supposed to work.

Back to Boghossian's proposal about that. The manner in which his argument ushers us into this territory constrains what we can say. Grasp of the concepts concerned is shown to be insufficient. Yet in knowing (*Torturing*), we know that a certain property characterizes acts of torture of the innocent. This is a property – wrongness – that is expressed by the concept *wrong*, but aspects of whose nature – the principles whereby it gets to be instantiated or not by particular action types – are not even implicit in that concept. Is that worrying?

Someone might reply on Boghossian's behalf that such a hiatus – between concept and property – is not of course unprecedented. It is familiar in the case of the divide, argued by Putnam (1975) and Kripke (1971), and now more or less accepted as orthodoxy, between our quotidian concepts of certain natural kinds and their essences – the characteristics that *constitute* something's being an instance of the kind. But this precedent should not make us think that we can take the present proposal in easy stride. In the case of natural kinds, it is only a *presumption* that cases where we take the concept to apply will prove, on further empirical investigation, to manifest an underlying essential similarity – a presumption that might not be redeemed. But if we have kept company with Boghossian's argument up to this point, then it is moral *knowledge* of propositions such as (*Torturing*) that is the datum for explanation – we are not in the market for its turning out that there is no real underlying commonality in the cases of torture of the innocent, scams designed to fleece the elderly, sexual abuse of eight-year old children and 'county lines' drug trafficking.

The natural kinds analogy – which is not, I should emphasize, suggested by Boghossian himself – creaks in another respect. It is a criterion for the correct identification of the essence of a natural kind that it be explanatory of the instantiation at the surface level of the features that ground the application of the quotidian concept. But in the case of fundamental normative concepts, not only is it unclear in what terms a further investigation in search of the underlying essential property might proceed – what's more, there is no question of working through to an explanation of the co-instantiation of features that are taken to mandate the application of the quotidian concept, since, by the first part of Boghossian's argument, *there are no* such features – nothing that corresponds to, for example, *colourless, odourless, potable liquid, falling in rain and filling the seas in salinized form* etc.

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None of this tends to show that Boghossian's new proposal about the synthetic a priori is misguided. But perhaps these considerations have some tendency to substantiate the oft-repeated charge that intuition is 'mysterious'. If it seems just too mysterious, let me close by emphasizing that the mystery arises only via the conjunction of *two* major theses: Boghossian's interestingly supported thesis of the extensional neutrality of fundamental normative concepts is one. Fundamental normative cognitivism is the other.

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