

## Must Philosophers Rely on Intuitions?

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For several decades now philosophers in the mainstream of analytic philosophy, in their pursuit of a theory of *x* (knowledge, necessary truth, causation, intentional action...), have centrally relied on what they themselves have been happy to describe as their own and other people's 'intuitions' of whether or not our concept of *x*, or '*x*', applies to this or that particular case, real or imagined.<sup>1</sup> I shall call the question of whether or not our concept of *x*, or '*x*', applies to some real or imaginary case, when it is raised as part of an attempt to come up with, or test, a philosophical theory of *x*, 'the theorist's question'; and I shall call the research program that takes answers to the theorist's question as its primary data 'the prevailing program'.

In recent years, the prevailing program has come under serious pressure. Two general lines of objection have appeared in the literature to the philosophical reliance on intuitions. First, it has been argued that the intuitions on which philosophers rely are merely *their* intuitions and, given that others could, and as a matter of empirical fact sometimes do, have different intuitions, it is not clear what weight, if any, philosophers should give to their own. This line of criticism was originally broached by Stich (1988)<sup>2</sup> and more recently was claimed to have acquired empirical support (Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich (hereafter WNS), 2001).<sup>3</sup> Following Stich, I shall call this line of objection to the prevailing practice 'the cognitive diversity objection'. Second, the question was raised of how, if at all, we can tell whether our intuitions successfully (reliably) track whatever it is—knowledge, say, or our concept of knowledge—that they are supposed to

track. This second objection was originally raised by Cummins (1998) and, following his way of putting it, has come to be called ‘the calibration objection’. The two objections are not unrelated. Both concern the fundamental question of what it is we are after or ought to be after in philosophy, and how it might best be pursued. Both objections have also been invaluable in forcing analytic philosophers to address questions of philosophical method that for many years have largely been ignored. Neither objection, however, goes quite to the heart of what is wrong with the prevailing research program.<sup>4</sup> Or so, focusing on our concept of propositional knowledge—*knowing that* such and such—I shall argue in this paper.

In a series of articles, incorporated into a recently published book entitled *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, Timothy Williamson attempts to defend the prevailing research program against the above lines of criticism.<sup>5</sup> The whole talk about philosophers relying on intuitions, Williamson argues, has been wrongheaded:<sup>6</sup> What philosophers have relied upon is nothing but our everyday capacity to judge (2007: 3)—that is, to apply our terms, or concepts, to ‘empirically encountered cases’ (2005a: 12). The talk of intuitions, Williamson contends, denies, and for no very good reason he thinks, ‘the continuity between philosophical thinking and the rest of our thinking’ (2004: 152; see also 2007: 192ff). After all, no one would say that I’m relying on nothing but intuition whenever I find or say, in the everyday, that someone knows or does not know this or that; so why should we talk about intuition when I do what, presumably, is essentially the same thing upon being invited by the philosopher to say whether the protagonist of his example knows or does not know?

For the purposes of this paper it would be useful to think of Williamson's defense of the prevailing research program as proceeding, essentially, in two steps.<sup>7</sup> The first step, which he develops in great detail, aims to establish that it should not matter, as far as the purposes of the prevailing research program go, that its practitioners have tended to apply, and to invite their audience to apply, the concept of *x*, or '*x*', to imagined, *hypothetical*, cases. After all, Williamson contends, the cases that feature in philosophers' examples have tended, for the most part at least, to be ones that could very well have been actual. In fact, he continues, cases philosophically relevantly the same as the ones that feature in philosophers' examples most likely *have* occurred; or, if they have not, they could easily be brought about. Williamson reports that he himself brought about a Gettier case—thus making sure that at least one Gettier case was not merely hypothetical—by telling the audience of a lecture he gave that he had been to Algiers, which was false but which they had no reason not to believe and so 'justly' believed; he then 'made sure they inferred' from their false but justified belief that he had been to Algiers the proposition that he had been to North Africa, which happened to be true. He thus put his audience in a Gettier type relation to that proposition (2005a: 12; see also 2007: 192). I find nothing to complain about in the first step of Williamson's defense of the prevailing research program,<sup>8</sup> except for its drawing attention away from where the real problem lies.

The real problem lies with Williamson's second step; and I find it both striking and telling that this step is one for which he does not really argue. Having compellingly argued that we could have encountered, or anyway could fairly easily imagine ourselves encountering, cases essentially like the ones that feature in philosophers' examples,

Williamson simply moves to claim that what we are invited to do when we are invited (or invite ourselves) to answer the theorist's question is not essentially different from what we do when, outside philosophy, we judge that, for example, someone knows or does not know this or that (2005a: 12; 2007: 188). Why should answering the theorist's question counterfactually in the face of, say, an imaginary Gettier case, Williamson in effect asks, be different in any philosophically relevant respect from what answering it in the face of a real Gettier case would be? And why should *that* require anything other than 'the same capacity to classify empirically encountered cases with respect to knowledge as we use when, for example, we classify a politician as not knowing the truth of his claims about terrorists' (2004: 112; see also 2005a: 12)? The philosopher's armchair theorizing on the basis of made up examples, Williamson concludes, presupposes, for its philosophical relevance and methodological soundness, nothing but our 'ordinary capacities for making judgments about what we encounter, and a further capacity to evaluate counterfactuals by running those capacities "offline"' (2005a: 15; see also 2007: 188 and 216).

However, it is one thing to have shown that the cases that feature in philosophers' examples, or ones philosophically relevantly like them, are ones that we could have encountered, or anyway could fairly easily imagine ourselves encountering, outside philosophy, and quite another thing to have shown that the question that we are invited by the theorist to answer in the face of his examples is philosophically relevantly no different from questions that we normally and ordinarily answer in the course of everyday experience. I shall argue that at least when it comes to 'know that' and cognates the theorist's question, whatever exactly it might come to,<sup>9</sup> is *fundamentally* different from any question to which we might need to attend as part of our everyday employment

of these expressions; and the difference is such that it renders the prevailing program misguided—and misguided, as we shall see, in a way that is not quite captured by either Stich’s or Cummins’ objection. Williamson’s defense of the prevailing program therefore fails. In failing, it gives us an opportunity to rethink some of the deepest assumptions that underlie this program.

If the argument of this paper is on the right track, then the new trend of ‘experimental philosophy’,<sup>10</sup> which proposes to eliminate various philosophical biases by running experiments in which ordinary subjects—i.e. non-philosophers—are invited to answer different versions of the theorist’s question, is liable to suffer from much the same shortcomings that traditional armchair philosophy has suffered from. The new trend promises to shake the hold of certain philosophical dogmas concerning particular concepts. The fundamental dogma, however, and one that proponents of the new experimental program share with their ‘armchair’ opponents, is a conception of language that leads both parties to assume that answers to the theorist’s question—be they the philosopher’s or the layman’s, those of the few or those of the many—are our indispensable and best guide when we seek to elucidate any of our concepts, or any of the phenomena they pick out.

### **1. Stage Setting: The Prevailing Conception, and the Intuitions Dialectic**

Why doesn’t Williamson feel the need to argue *from* the fact that at least many of the cases that feature in philosophers’ examples are ones that we can fairly easily imagine ourselves encountering *to* the conclusion that the question that we are invited by the philosopher to answer in the face of those examples is not philosophically relevantly

different from questions that we address, and answer, in our ‘non-philosophical’ judgments? Williamson is here taking for granted a deeply ingrained conception of what the everyday employment of our words involves and requires, and how it relates to what encounters us in our everyday experience.

According to that conception, an essential element or dimension of everyday speech and thinking is that of pure judgment—the sheer ‘application’ of terms, or concepts, to cases.<sup>11</sup> Williamson, as we just saw, very tellingly describes this presumed element or dimension as one of ‘classifying empirically encountered cases’ with respect to some term or concept.<sup>12</sup> The philosopher who holds this conception will be quick to grant that there are any number of other things that we do with words *beyond* this act of sheer application, or classification; but he will insist that there is this fundamental element or dimension, which is presupposed by all other elements or dimensions of speech and thought, and he will further insist that our concepts reveal themselves in *it*, whereas the rest of what we do with our words tends to obscure them. The basic picture is that expressions first and foremost, and independently from the use(s) we (may) make of them, ‘refer to items in the... world’ (Williamson 2007: 281). The philosopher’s invitation to apply our words to different cases, the thought would go, is nothing but an attempt to *isolate* that purely ‘semantic’ element of speech and thought, precisely so as to come to see more clearly the concepts ‘expressed’ by our words, and hence the ‘items’ to which they refer, without the obstruction of all of the rest of what normally goes on when we speak or think.

In the case of ‘know that’ and cognates, this representationalist conception of language expresses itself in the view that their basic role is to ‘refer’ to or ‘pick out’ some

particular ‘relation’ that sometimes holds between knowers and propositions—namely, *the* relation of knowing that. It is accordingly assumed that, as competent employers of ‘know that’ and cognates, we should be reliable detectors of that relation, which either holds or does not hold between any subject and any proposition.<sup>13</sup> And it is therefore further assumed that, given enough information, we ought, in principle, to be able just to ‘apply’ ‘know that’ or one of cognates, either positively or negatively, to any given pair of person and fact (or proposition). In fact, it is assumed that this, essentially, is what we *do* do when we utter sentences featuring ‘know that’ and cognates ‘assertively’ in everyday discourse, whatever *else* we do with the words—illocutionarily and more broadly ‘pragmatically’ speaking. The theorist’s invitation to ask ourselves, in the face of various examples, whether one of the protagonists knows or does not know that such and such, is accordingly taken to be methodologically sound precisely because it is taken to ask us to do, albeit in a theoretically controlled manner, what, essentially, we do ordinarily, and presumably (mostly) correctly. This, I take it, is what underlies Williamson’s contention that philosophical thinking, as he thinks of it, is continuous with the rest of our thinking.

Williamson does not explicitly address the calibration objection; but implicit in his argument is something like the following reply to it:

A way of putting the calibration objection is that there is no way for us to *certify* our answers to the theorist’s question of whether or not some protagonist knows or does not know the proposition in question—no reason to think that these answers in fact track our concept of propositional knowledge, or propositional knowledge.<sup>14</sup> But this is confused; for it supposes that our answers to the theorist’s question are meant to track something that is *external* to and independent from whatever it is that guides and informs

our everyday applications of ‘know that’ and cognates. But they’re not. They are meant to track precisely that which guides and informs our everyday applications of these words.<sup>15</sup> *If*, in general, we were unable to answer the theorist’s question, then there would really be nothing for our answers, and our theories, to track. But evidently, we *are* able to answer that question; we do it every time that we apply (for example) ‘know that’ or one of cognates to some pair of person and fact, which we do at least every time that we ‘seriously and literally’ utter an ‘assertoric’ sentence that features ‘know that’ or one of cognates. What certifies our intuitive answers to the theorist’s questions is therefore the simple fact that *they come from competent speakers* who are asked to do something that, in their competent employment of ‘know that’ and cognates, they do all the time, in situations not essentially different from the ones that appear in the philosopher’s examples.<sup>16</sup> The only difference is that, in attending to the theorist’s question, we do what we do all the time, and reflect upon it, in a more *controlled* way, in the face of theoretically significant cases; and this enables us to bring out and see more sharply features and dimensions of our concept that may get obscured in the hustle and bustle of everyday speech.

From the perspective of the prevailing conception, the above rejection of the calibration objection would be likely to seem compelling. But where would this leave us with respect to the cognitive diversity objection and the empirical findings that have been adduced in its support? If in answering the theorist’s question people are doing nothing essentially different from what they do whenever they find, or say, of someone that she knows or does not know that such and such, how is it that such seemingly stark disagreements have emerged among respondents to the question—even among those who belong to the same culture or social group? Williamson’s answer to this question is that some of us just are better than others in applying ‘abstract concepts to complex examples’ (2004: 150); he also thinks that people can get better at this, in much the same way that lawyers may become better at ‘the application of very general concepts to specific cases’ (2005a: 14). This, then, is how Williamson proposes to deal with empirical findings such

as WNS's: If one group of respondents says 'knows' and the other says 'does not know' in the face of some case, then one group judges correctly and the other incorrectly.<sup>17</sup>

And who's to say whose judgment is correct? Philosophers? Though it sometimes seems that this is what Williamson proposes (see 2007: 40 and 191), at other times he acknowledges that philosophers often disagree among themselves about the correct answer to the theorist's question (2004: 11), and says that they sometimes, and precisely because they have an investment in some theory, misjudge (2003: 253-4 and 285).<sup>18</sup> But if lay people tend to disagree in their answers to the theorist's question of whether some case is a case of x, and if the commitments that come with philosophical theorizing are just as likely to distort one's judgment as they are likely to improve it, then who's to say whether some hypothetical or actual case is a case of x? I do not find that Williamson has a satisfying answer to this.<sup>19</sup>

Here, however, is a reply to the cognitive diversity objection that Williamson doesn't offer, but that someone who believes in the prevailing conception and in its attendant research program *could* offer:

The cognitive diversity objection is a red herring, at least as far as what WNS call 'the descriptive project' (2001: 430)—the attempt to become clearer with respect to our concepts—is concerned. Granted, people who are sufficiently different from each other in their basic sensibilities, practices and metaphysical conceptions will also be different from each other, more or less significantly and more or less pervasively, in their concepts. It would not be implausible to think of this as a conceptual truth. However, if philosophy can aid one just in becoming clearer with respect to *her* concepts—the ones she shares only with those sufficiently like her, be they the whole species or only a part of it—would this not be achievement enough for it? After all, the understanding of philosophy as a form of pursuit of self-knowledge has arguably been with it, however inconsistently, since its inception. If the practice of constructing theories of our concept of

propositional knowledge and testing them in the light of examples is capable of making us clearer just with respect to *our* concept of propositional knowledge, which WNS nowhere deny, then it is a practice worth pursuing. And as for Stich's question of why we should care about what this practice reveals about what is merely *our* concept, the answer to it is simple: Because it is ours; and becoming clearer with respect to it is becoming clearer with respect to those features and dimensions of ourselves and of our world to which this concept is responsive and of which it is therefore revelatory.<sup>20</sup>

This, it seems to me, would have been a compelling reply to the cognitive diversity objection to the prevailing research program, but only if we had reason to believe that the prevailing program was indeed enabling us to become clearer with respect to our concepts, and were it not for the fact that, in the experiments reported by WNS and others, 'disagreements' emerged not only among people who belong to different cultural or social groups, but also among people who belong to the 'same' group.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as we all know, substantive disagreements as to the correct answer to the theorist's question have emerged even within the relatively homogeneous group of analytic philosophers.<sup>22</sup>

This suggests that the significance of the experiments reported by WNS and others may lie elsewhere from where it is commonly taken to lie. What ought to have struck us about the findings of those experiments is the fact that people who presumably are able smoothly and effectively to employ 'know that' and cognates in their everyday dealings with each other, and who by any reasonable criterion understand these expressions in the same way, or mean the same thing by them,<sup>23</sup> nonetheless have come up with opposing answers to the theorist's question. On the face of it, this suggests that responding to the theorist's question is not continuous with the everyday employment of

the words in question; the capacities that are sufficient for doing the latter well may not be those required for doing well the former, whatever doing the former well might be.<sup>24</sup>

Williamson himself acknowledges, and even insists, that someone may be 'mistaken' in her 'application' of 'C' to some particular example or set of examples and yet 'have the concept C', provided that 'in conversation, she uses "C" appropriately, and responds appropriately when others use it' (2003: 253; 2007: 89ff.). Williamson accordingly maintains that philosophers who say of the subject in a Gettier case that he knows the proposition in question

...exhibit theoretical deviance, perhaps bad epistemological judgment, but not linguistic incompetence. Some are native speakers of English; other native speakers of English do not classify them as incompetent in English. By any reasonable criterion, they understand the word 'know' and possess the concept *know* (2005a: 11-2; see also 2007: 216).

It appears that there is tension between the different views to which Williamson seems to be committed. If to (be able to) employ 'x' (and cognates) competently, and to respond competently to other people's employment of it, is to understand 'x' and possess the concept of x (2003: 250), and if people who, by this criterion, possess the concept of x, and possess it in common, nonetheless disagree in their application of 'x' to the cases with which the theorist is presenting them, is this not reason to suspect that what they are invited by the theorist to do in the face of his examples is *not* continuous with their everyday employment of 'x'? Williamson's answer to this seems to be that the examples with which the theorist presents us are 'complex', so that in applying our concept to *them* we step beyond the common basis that we share with other competent employers of the

term, and differences in ‘skills at applying abstract concepts to complex examples’ emerge (2004: 150), that do not normally emerge in the course of everyday speech. The idea seems to be that philosophical thinking, while still somehow continuous with the rest of our thinking, takes us to regions of our concepts in which we rarely travel and that not just anyone can travel in without losing his way.

But how plausible such a reply would be? Perhaps Gettier cases are, in *some* sense, more complex than the sorts of cases in the face of which we normally and ordinarily employ ‘know that’ and cognates. I shall argue in the next section that for normal, everyday, intents and purposes there is nothing complex about Gettier cases; they only come to seem complex when we attempt to apply our concept of propositional knowledge to them from a metaphysically external position, and therefore apart from any of our normal intents and purposes. Leaving Gettier cases aside for a moment, consider, for example, Cohen’s (1999) ‘Airport’ case. This case is surely as simple as any that one could hope to encounter in the everyday: Some passenger’s itinerary says that some flight has a layover in Chicago. And yet, while Williamson, along with other ‘invariantists’, is inclined to say (judges, intuitively, or what have you) that the passenger in Cohen’s example just knows—context *insensitively*—that the flight has a layover in Chicago (Williamson 2005c: 232), Cohen, along with many other ‘contextualists’, is inclined to say that in some contexts it would be false to say that he ‘knows’ this.<sup>25</sup> And yet, for all that, I suspect that Williamson and Cohen, if they found themselves facing together a situation of the sort that Cohen describes in his example, would be able to get along just fine with each other, *as far as understanding what they each said and meant with (or by) their words was concerned*.

Understanding what the other says and means with her words does not mean agreeing with her every assertion or empirical judgment, of course. This is why it would be wrongheaded to object here to the worry I've been pressing by appealing to the fact that we also do not always agree in our applications of 'know that' and cognates *outside* of philosophy, in spite of the fact that we all presumably are competent employers of these words and possessors of the concepts they 'express'. Both Williamson (2004: 150; 2007: 192) and Sosa (2007a and 2007b) have appealed to the fact that we also do not always agree in our empirical judgments, in an attempt to discount the threat to the prevailing program from the fact of disagreements on the correct answer to the theorist's question. But the two kinds of disagreement are altogether unlike each other. The former is part of normal discourse; the latter reveals the anomaly of the theorist's question.

Normally, if you say of someone (a politician, say) that he knows something and I say he does not, what we disagree about are *the facts*, or their significance, not the meaning of 'know(s) that'. We disagree about the case, but we still are in agreement *in* our use of 'know that' and cognates, and hence in our understanding of these words. In fact, it is precisely our agreement in what our words mean that makes it possible for us both to disagree on particular cases and to know how to go about trying to settle our disagreements. This is precisely what does *not* happen when, in the context of theorizing about knowledge, you say in the face of some example 'knows' and I say 'does not know' (or, if I am a contextualist, 'It would be false for so and so to say "knows"'). If the example is to do its theoretical work, there should be no disagreement about the facts among the respondents—we all are supposed to know all that any normal person would know about the case, once she has read its author's description of it. If there is genuine

disagreement between us here, it seems that it would have to be about the meaning of our words.

In pronouncing on the theorist's question we therefore, in an important sense, *do no work* with our words—we are not *using* them.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps this is part of what Williamson means to register when he says that skepticism with respect to answers to the theorist's question is 'skepticism about *judgment*' (2007: 220ff.); but I do not think he aptly appreciates the difference between the philosophical 'judgment' and non-philosophical judgments. In the next two sections I shall argue that the capacity to understand and competently answer everyday questions is essentially the capacity to see and properly respond to their *point*; and I shall also argue that the theorist's question *has no point*, in the relevant sense. The point of an everyday question guides us in answering it and in assessing our own and other people's answers; and this guidance is lacking when the theorist invites us to answer his question. The prevailing conception would have us suppose this lack to be a (theoretical) virtue. My aim in what follows is to show that, at least in the case of 'know that' and cognates, that supposition is mistaken.

## **2. What is it Like to Encounter a Gettier Case?**

Williamson, I said, may be granted, at least for the sake of argument, that we may encounter, or anyway could fairly easily imagine ourselves encountering, cases of the sorts that philosophers have imagined for us in their examples.<sup>27</sup> Where he goes wrong is in presupposing that in encountering such cases outside of philosophy we may have to answer, and in fact do regularly answer, questions not essentially different from the question that the theorist is inviting us (and himself) to answer in the face of his

examples. Let me make my contention clear before I turn to argue for it: The *words* that express the theorist's question might be the same, or more or less the same, as the words that express questions to which we do attend, and which we do need to answer, in the course of everyday life. But what the theorist's question *comes to* is fundamentally different from what the everyday questions come to, or may come to.<sup>28</sup> In particular, what answering the theorist's question involves and requires is fundamentally different from what answering the everyday questions involves and requires. And this raises a serious worry about the nature, and value, of whatever it is that gets revealed in our answers to the theorist's question.

Consider the Gettier type case that WNS have used in their experiment (2001: 443). It is formally very similar to the case that Williamson says he brought about; and it seems to me to come as close as possible, and certainly closer than Gettier's (1963) original two cases, to being a case of the sort that we might actually encounter in the course of everyday life:

Bob has a friend, Jill, who has driven a Buick for many years. Bob therefore thinks that Jill drives an American car.<sup>29</sup> He is not aware, however, that her Buick has recently been stolen, and he is also not aware that Jill has replaced it with a Pontiac, which is a different kind of American car. Does Bob really know that Jill drives an American car, or does he only believe it?

The philosopher who holds the prevailing conception and is committed to its attendant research program assumes that the question that we are here invited to answer is a question that, as competent employers of 'know that' and cognates, we ought in principle to be able to answer, and answer correctly, and for the simple reason that the

'capacity' for answering this question correctly is also required for the everyday competent employment of these expressions. I shall now argue that neither our everyday employment of 'know that' and cognates nor anything else, with the exception of theorizing within the prevailing philosophical paradigm, ever requires that we answer the kind of question that we are here invited to answer. This does *not* mean that our answers to it are revelatory of nothing, or of nothing potentially interesting. But it does suggest that what they do reveal is not what proponents of the prevailing program have taken them to reveal.

Suppose we 'encountered' the above case in the course of our everyday experience. Why should we need or care to know, or tell, whether Bob (really) *knows* that Jill is driving an American car (or only believes it)? On what occasion, other than philosophical theorizing, might we actually (need to) attend to the above question as the theorist thinks of it? I consider different lines of answer, and I reply to them in turn:

1. *Someone who knows that such and such is in a position to assure others that such and such, and whether or not someone is in that position may sometimes matter a great deal.*<sup>30</sup>

That may well be true; but then the question is why we, or anyone, should need, or care, to know whether or not Bob is in such a position with respect to Jill's driving an American car. After all, *we*, the readers of the example and anyone who knows about this case as much as we do, already know, on the basis of an assurance that in earthly matters only God could provide, that Jill drives a

Pontiac, and hence an American car.<sup>31</sup> We, and anyone who knows about this case as much as we do, do not need an assurance from Bob on this matter.

2. *What about someone, call her Agent, who does not already know, but needs for some reason to know, whether Jill drives an American car? Agent might be told by Bob that she does, and might then wonder whether she should count on that assurance.*

To begin with, whatever question with respect to Bob we imagine Agent to be needing or wanting to answer here, it cannot plausibly be thought of as the question of whether someone *in a Gettier situation* knows; for, by hypothesis, Agent does not know herself to be facing one. The situation in which *she* finds herself is rather the common situation in which one wishes to find out whether such and such, and receives an assurance from someone else that such and such. It would nonetheless be instructive to consider this case, and precisely because Agent's situation, as we are here imagining it, is so common.

There are, basically, only two possibilities: Either Agent knows on what Bob is basing his assurance and is capable of assessing this basis, or not. If she doesn't know Bob's basis and for some reason does not ask for it, or if she knows it but for some reason is unable to assess it, and yet she still asks herself whether Bob knows that, or whether, Jill drives an American car, then the question she is asking herself is clearly *not* the question that the theorist is inviting us to answer. She is asking, perhaps, whether Bob is, or seems, a trustworthy fellow, not whether Bob's evidence would be 'good enough for knowing' that Jill drove an American car, if it were true that she did.<sup>32</sup> By hypothesis, Agent either doesn't

know what evidence, if any, Bob has, or is not in a position to assess how good it is.

If, on the other hand, Agent does know Bob's basis, and assuming that she does not doubt *its* truth—she takes it that Jill has indeed been driving a Buick until quite recently; and if she also is capable, or anyway takes herself to be capable, of telling how good a reason this gives her for taking it that she currently drives an American car; then *that* becomes her question. In other words, the question she needs to (be able to) answer is whether the (presumed) *fact* that Jill was driving a Buick until at least quite recently gives her sufficient assurance that she is currently driving an American car. The theorist's question of whether *Bob* knows that Jill drives an American car, or whether he *knows* that she does—whatever exactly this question might come to here—is beside the point, as far as Agent is concerned. She has no reason to attend to it.<sup>33</sup>

As for the question Agent does have reason to attend to, it is altogether implausible to suppose that there is just *one* correct answer to it. People in situations such as Agent's need not always agree with each other about whether what they know or reasonably take for granted gives them sufficient assurance that some further state of affairs obtains. People with different temperaments, basic attitudes, past experiences, etc., would be likely to disagree with each other about such matters, and I see no reason to suppose that if they did, then, necessarily, at most only one of them would be saying something true, or correct. What fact, or set of facts, *sufficiently* ensures the obtaining of some other fact is not only a context sensitive matter but, *within reason*, also a matter of opinion.

The theorist, I conclude, should either concede that the question that people in situations such as Agent's would need to ask themselves is just not his question, or else concede that his question, at least in cases of this type, is just that of whether some set of facts sufficiently ensures the obtaining of some other fact. If he opted for the latter (and I don't think he would),<sup>34</sup> he would need to give up the assumption that his question has just one correct answer. He would also need to reconsider the significance of the answers to it that he is eliciting.

3. *All right, go back to the situation of someone, let's call him Judge now, who knows all that the reader of the example knows, and in particular knows that Jill drives a Pontiac and knows that, and why, Bob thinks she drives a Buick, and hence an American Car. And now imagine that Judge learns that Bob has assured Agent that Jill drives an American car. Judge may now wonder whether Bob was in a position to give Agent the assurance he gave. And to wonder about that just is to wonder whether Bob knew that Jill drove an American car. To make the case more plausible, imagine that a great deal is at stake for Agent in whether or not Jill drives an American car; imagine that Judge knows this; imagine that Bob knows this as well; and imagine that Judge knows that Bob knows this.*

Judge's interest in this matter must not be imagined to be merely theoretical, or academic; for if it were, we would be begging our question. Presumably, he has reason to be concerned that, given what is at stake for Agent in finding out whether Jill drives an American car, Bob might have been too casual (uncaring, thoughtless, rash...) in assuring Agent that she does. I leave aside the question of what reason exactly Judge might have for being concerned with this.<sup>35</sup>

Whatever his reason for concerning himself with this matter, Judge must put himself in *Bob's* position, if he is to judge him competently. The things that Judge knows about the case, but that Bob doesn't, or didn't, know, are therefore irrelevant to the question Judge is wishing to answer. This, however, means that the case we are imagining is not unlike the previous case we considered. And this in turn means, first of all, that the question Judge wishes or needs to answer is *not* whether someone *in a Gettier situation* knows, and therefore is not the question that the theorist meant to be raising. It also means that the question is not one for which there is only one correct answer: competent speakers might fully competently disagree in their answers to it, and it needn't at all be the case that, if they did, at least one of them would have to be wrong.

Even more pertinently, Judge's question is really whether, under the circumstances, Bob was *right* (reasonable, not thoughtless, or rash, or negligent, or silly...) to assure Agent that Jill drove an American car.<sup>36</sup> And *that* question is a question about when, and how, and under what circumstances an assurance ought to, or may reasonably, be given. It is not the purely semantic question of when, or under what conditions, 'knows that' 'applies' to some pair of person and fact (or proposition).

The theorist is likely to insist here that the latter question—i.e. his question—may be raised with respect to this case regardless of whether or not it would make sense for Judge to raise it under the circumstances that we are here imagining; and he will insist that to suppose otherwise is to have fallen prey to what Searle (1999: 141-6) has called 'the assertion fallacy'—to have come to

confuse, that is, what it would make sense actually to *say* or even just *think* under some set of circumstances with what would be *true* (to say, or think). I'll come back to this. For now, remember that our question at this point is only whether we would ever have occasion, outside of philosophical theorizing, to attend to the theorist's question. And what we've just seen is that people in situations such as Judge's wouldn't.

4. *So far, we've focused on situations in which knowledge that such and such matters to us because it puts its possessor in a position to assure others that such and such. Let's try a different tack. It sometimes matters to us whether someone knows that such and such, not in the philosopher's sense of having proper assurances for her true belief that such and such, but simply in the sense of having learned that such and such. Perhaps we think that, for one reason or another, she would be interested to learn that such and such, if she hadn't already. Or perhaps, if she already has learned that such and such, there are certain things that we could, or should, reasonably expect (of her); whereas if she has not yet learned this, it would be unreasonable for us to expect those things, and reasonable to expect others.*<sup>37</sup>

True. The question of whether someone knows that such and such may sometimes just be the question of whether she is in possession of some pertinent, or potentially pertinent, piece of information—a piece of information that those who attend to the question already possess. In fact, it almost always is.<sup>38</sup> But how could this help motivate, or make seem natural and in place, the theorist's question of whether Bob really knows that Jill drives an American car, or only

believes it? By hypothesis, Bob thinks that she is still driving a Buick, and hence an American car. He would therefore not be interested to learn that Jill drove an American car; nor is it clear how, conceptually speaking, he could learn *this*. What he might be interested to learn, and what it is clearly possible for him to learn, is that Jill is no longer driving her old Buick and instead drives a Pontiac. This is something that, given his story as told above, he clearly does not know; but it must be noted that ‘knows’ here contrasts, not with ‘only believes’ or ‘believes on grounds insufficient or inappropriate for knowing’, as it does in the theorist’s intended question, but with ‘has not yet learned, or become aware’.

As for the question of what to expect of Bob, well, we know what he knows, what he does not yet know, and what he thinks—vis-à-vis the type of car Jill drives. His epistemic relation to the fact that Jill drives an American car is as clear as it can be:<sup>39</sup> We know about it all that will ever be known about it that would be pertinent to answering the question of what we ought to, or may reasonably, expect of Bob. Nothing therefore hangs, as far as answering *that* question goes, on what the (‘correct’) answer might be to the theorist’s question of whether Bob (really) *knows* that Jill is driving an American car (or only believes it); and there would therefore be no reason for anything like this latter question to arise in the sort of situations that we are here imagining. If the theorist tried to press his question in a situation of this sort, where what matters to us and what we need to decide is what we ought to or may reasonably expect of Bob, a proper reply to him would be: ‘Say what you will, as long as you don’t confuse yourself. The *situation*, after all, is as clear as it could be; and your “application”

of “knows that” to Bob and the proposition that Jill drives an American car, be it positive or negative, would not make it one bit clearer. Nor would it help you, or us, decide what to expect of Bob. It would therefore be utterly idle, of sheerly theoretical interest—or, as it is sometimes put, “merely semantic”.

### 3. Why ‘Intuitions’?

It would be unreasonable for me to expect that considerations of the sort raised in the previous section would by themselves lead those committed to the prevailing research program to give it up. It is far more likely that such considerations would be dismissed as irrelevant on the grounds that they belong to the realm of ‘pragmatics’ and therefore have no bearing on the viability of the prevailing research program. ‘What it would and would not make sense to say or ask under various circumstances,’ proponents of the prevailing program would most likely argue, ‘is affected by factors other than, and therefore has no obvious bearing on, what questions may philosophically legitimately be asked, and how they ought to be answered. Why can’t the theorist just ask whether (it would be true to say that) Bob knows or does not know that Jill drives an American car, and look for an answer to his question?’

But of course I do not say that the theorist can’t ask his question. He can and he does. My aim is to make clearer both the nature of the question itself and the philosophical significance of the answers that he and others might give to it. We must keep in mind where exactly we are in the dialectic. In response to the objection that theories produced within the prevailing program rest on nothing but philosophers’ intuitions, and that it is unclear what if anything those intuitions reveal, nor why we

should care about whatever it is that they might reveal, Williamson has claimed that philosophers have relied not on anything aptly describable as ‘intuitions’ but rather on a capacity for ‘applying concepts in judgment’ to ‘empirically encountered cases’—a capacity that according to Williamson we all exercise in our ‘non-philosophical thinking’. In claiming this, Williamson has given voice to a widely held conception of what the everyday employment of our words involves and requires. I have interpreted Williamson’s claim to mean that the question that we are invited by the philosopher to answer in the face of his examples is not essentially different from questions that we need to (be able to) answer in the course of everyday life, as part of our normal and ordinary employment of our words.<sup>40</sup> In section 1 I said that *if* the prevailing conception of language that is presupposed in Williamson’s argument were correct, *then* there would indeed be good reason for taking our answers to the theorist’s question of whether or not ‘x’ applies to this or that case to be a good guide to what our ‘x’ means, or to our concept of x, and therefore good reason for pursuing the prevailing research program.<sup>41</sup>

In the previous section, however, we imagined someone “encountering”—each time from a different perspective and with an interest or concern of a different sort—a subject, Bob, whose relation to some proposition is of the Gettier type. I do not claim to have covered all of the different sorts of possible contexts of encounter, of course; but I do believe that I have presented a representative enough sample. In considering each of the different encounters, we saw that the question that the person encountering Bob would naturally ask herself—whether or not it may even aptly be put in terms of ‘knowing’<sup>42</sup>—is importantly different from the question that the theorist has wanted, and taken himself, to be asking. In particular, what going about answering the everyday

question would normally involve and require, in each of the different cases, is nothing like what going about answering the theorist's question involves and requires.

And this is no accident. In particular, the fact that the case I considered was of the Gettier type played no essential role in my argument. There is good reason to suspect that no question that may naturally arise in the everyday would come to anything like the theorist's question.<sup>43</sup> This has nothing to do, really, with the nature of the cases we encounter, inside and outside of philosophy. Williamson is perfectly right about this. It has everything to do, however, with the nature of the encounter. Whenever a question arises in the everyday that might seem to be the same or essentially the same as the theorist's purportedly purely semantic question, what competently answering it involves and requires—and hence, in an important sense, what the question itself comes to—is inseparable from the *point* of the question. The point of the question guides us in answering it; and everyday questions that are competently raised have a point: they are expressive in some suitable way of some particular interest in the case.

Someone has given you an assurance and you wonder whether it is good enough; someone gave someone else an assurance and you wonder whether it was right for him to do so; you think someone would be interested to learn that such and such, and you wonder whether she already has; someone could have been expected to do something if he had been aware of the fact that such and such, and you wonder whether you are justified in getting angry with him for not having done it... In each of these situations a question arises that might *seem* no different from the theorist's question. But let anything that might seem like the theorist's question arise in a context where it has a point, and answering it, while it may sometimes be a difficult or delicate task, will normally not

seem to be, or be, the seemingly profound and befuddling task that answering the theorist's question is. Nor will answering it seem to be, or be, merely a matter of following our intuition.

But such a point as everyday questions normally have is precisely what the theorist's question lacks—and lacks not accidentally, but self-consciously and methodologically: this is what the separation of 'semantics' from 'pragmatics' has come to within the prevailing program. And this, I propose, is what is registered by our sense that other than theory, which we know we are not supposed to heed, we have nothing but intuition to go on in trying to understand the theorist's question and to answer it. This is also what explains the fact that even fully competent speakers, who by any reasonable everyday criterion mean the same thing by 'knowing that' and share the concept of *knowing that*, nonetheless could come up with contrasting answers to the theorist's question. All that normally and ordinarily guides us in understanding and answering everyday questions that concern empirically encountered cases has been methodologically removed—all but the case itself, and some familiar words to which we are invited to respond in its face. And this is not at all what everyday 'non-philosophical' speech and thinking is like.

The prevailing conception would have us suppose that this should not matter, that the case and the familiar words should suffice, that a clear enough question has nonetheless been raised and that as competent employers of 'know that' and cognates we ought to be able to answer it. But while the prevailing conception is widely assumed and often insisted on, we have seen reason to suspect that it may be importantly misguided, at least in the case of words such as 'know that' and cognates. Why *must* our capacity

competently to employ each and every one of our words presuppose a capacity just to apply this word to cases, apart from any particular interest and without doing anything else with the word beyond sheer application? Why *must* there be a purely semantic component to the understanding of every general term—a component which is extractable from all of the rest of what this understanding involves and requires, and which is fully cashable in terms of ‘truth conditions’?<sup>44</sup>

It is important to see that I am not questioning here just *any* distinction that one might draw between what may be called ‘semantics’ and what may be called ‘pragmatics’. I am questioning a very particular way of drawing that distinction, or trying to. If the distinction between semantics and pragmatics is the distinction between, for example, *what one would say*, or could reasonably be taken to have said, in uttering some sentence in some particular context, and whether it would be ‘appropriate’ (pertinent, wise, not misleading, not bad manners, etc.) to say it under the circumstances, then I have no problem with it. If it is a distinction between *what one would say* if one were to utter some sentence in some context, and what one could reasonably be taken to *imply* or otherwise ‘implicate’ or ‘convey’ in (or by) saying it, then again I have no problem with it. Such distinctions may sometimes be worth drawing. My argument in the previous section, however, concerned precisely *what* question one would raise, or could reasonably be taken to have raised, in a given situation, in asking ‘Does so and so know that such and such?’. What I *am* questioning is the widespread assumption, which is presupposed throughout by Williamson,<sup>45</sup> that the meaning of ‘know’, together with the meanings of the other words that make up that sentence, is enough for determining *that*.<sup>46</sup>

As against Williamson's defense of the prevailing program, I argued that what the question of whether someone in Bob's situation knows the Gettier proposition comes to in 'non-philosophical thinking' is inseparable from the point of the question—from the particular interest in the case of which the question is expressive; and I accordingly argued that, at least in the case of 'know that' and cognates, no question that might naturally arise in the everyday would be the theorist's question. There is nothing that we do in the everyday that could aptly be described as simply 'classifying empirically encountered cases with respect to knowing', or as merely 'applying' 'know that' and cognates to cases—not if this classification or application is supposed to require nothing beyond familiarity with the cases and with the meaning of 'know'. If we had, or if philosophy were somehow to construct for us, a concept that enabled us to do *that*, that concept would not be our concept of propositional knowledge. Nor is it clear of what use such a concept would be.<sup>47</sup>

Williamson is right, I believe, in proposing that philosophers' description of themselves as intuiting their answer to the theorist's question bespeaks uneasiness on their part with respect to their method of inquiry (2004: 119). But if my argument has been on the right track, this uneasiness is in place and ought not to be shrugged away by attributing it to misguided skepticism, as Williamson does (2004: 113-9; and 2007: 220-46); for it registers the discontinuity between our everyday employment of the words under investigation and whatever it is that we are invited by the theorist to do with them in the face of his examples—a discontinuity that undermines the prevailing research program. If any skepticism is relevant here, it is skepticism concerning, not our everyday capacity for judgment—for that capacity, as we saw, is really out of play, or at least

severely handicapped, when we attempt to answer the theorist's question—but the soundness of the prevailing research program and its suitability for elucidating our concepts.

I am *not* saying that our answers to the theorist's question are merely arbitrary and bear no relation to the concept under investigation. In all probability, our answers are affected, to some extent and in more or less traceable ways, by what we know in knowing how to competently employ and respond to other people's employment of (for example) 'know that' and cognates in different kinds of contexts, hence by our knowledge of what these words mean, and hence by our concept of knowing that. It is overwhelmingly plausible, for example, that the Gettier intuition is affected by considerations that at least sometimes guide us in our competent employment of 'know that' and cognates, and therefore is revelatory of an aspect of our concept of propositional knowledge. This could explain the *relatively* wide endorsement this intuition has enjoyed among both philosophers and non-philosophers.

However, in 'applying' words to cases apart from any of the contexts in which we normally and ordinarily employ them, there is no telling in advance how far we might also *distort* what we know in knowing how to employ these words in such contexts. One underlying distortion, I have argued, is the very assumption that it *must always* be possible to separate the 'semantic' powers of words from their other powers. This assumption is *built into* the prevailing program and into the rather special context in which we attend to the theorist's question. It encourages us to expect our words, or their meaning, to sponsor questions that, given the work that we ordinarily and normally do with them, and the conditions under which it is done, there is no good reason to expect

them to sponsor. I believe that much philosophical puzzlement results from such expectation.<sup>48</sup>

### **Concluding Remark: *Must* Philosophers Rely on Intuitions?**

A proponent of the prevailing program could still insist, on various grounds and despite all that we've seen, that there *must* be a purely semantic component, of the sort envisioned within that program, to our concept of *knowing that*, even if it is not related to our everyday understanding and employment of 'know that' and cognates in anything like the straightforward way that Williamson presupposes in his defense of the program. This purely semantic component, this person might argue, is what is supposed to get revealed in our intuitive answers to the theorist's question, and what philosophical theories of knowledge (for example) are in the business of tracking.

However, even if we ever arrived at some sort of reflective equilibrium that accounted for at least most of *our* intuitive answers to the theorist's questions and satisfied at least us, there would still be Stich's question of why we, or anyone else, should care about whatever it is that *our* intuitive answers to the theorist's question track, and Cummins' question of what justifies the assumption that these intuitive answers track whatever it is that they are supposed to track—knowledge, for example, or our concept of knowledge. While the invocation by philosophers of some sort of special faculty of philosophical intuition *invites* such questions, Williamson's line of defense of the prevailing program has promised to *answer* them. Once this line of defense is given up, as I have argued it should, it is not clear how these challenges to the prevailing program could be answered. If there is no connection of the sort presupposed by Williamson

between what guides and informs our ordinary and normal employment of our words and whatever it is that inclines us to give this or that answer to the theorist's question, then there is a real worry, which should not simply be dismissed, that our answers to that question may in the end only be revelatory of how we—with or without philosophical training—are inclined to answer that question. And it is not clear what the significance of *that* might be.

What, then, do I propose? How *should* we proceed, when we wish to become clearer with respect to our concepts? *Is there* a way to avoid the reliance on intuitions in philosophy?<sup>49</sup> My answer to this is that there is such a way: We should forgo the reliance on intuitive applications of the words outside of practice, and instead appeal directly to (our shared knowledge of) what competently going on with these words, in different types of situations, normally involves and requires. In other words, I am calling for a return to a form of philosophizing long-rumored within the mainstream of analytic philosophy to have been refuted, or otherwise shown seriously misguided: ordinary language philosophy, as exemplified, however differently, in the writings of Austin and Wittgenstein. Fully to make the case for such a return, however, is a task for a different occasion. Here I have only attempted a first step.<sup>50</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Of course, appeals to ‘intuitions’ in philosophy have taken other forms. In this paper I focus on this particular form, partly because I focus on Williamson who focuses on it, and partly because it is central and, to my mind, representative of the other forms.

<sup>2</sup> See also Weinberg and Stich (2001).

<sup>3</sup> See also Machery et al. (2004).

<sup>4</sup> More recently, Melnyk (2008) has argued for another line of skepticism about the prevailing program. Melnyk’s conclusion is that philosophers would do well to forego ‘conceptual analysis’ altogether and focus instead on the discovery of a posteriori necessary identity truths such as that water=H<sub>2</sub>O. I’ll make just one brief comment about Melnyk’s proposal. Neither water, nor our concept of water, has befuddled philosophers for millennia, or is likely to have ever driven one to philosophy. Philosophers became concerned with ‘water=H<sub>2</sub>O’ only when they became concerned with *the nature of the claim/truth* it (supposedly) expresses, and in particular with the (conceptual) possibility of what they have called, after Kripke, ‘a posteriori necessary truths’. Does Melnyk propose that we attempt to resolve the issues raised by Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity* by searching after an a posteriori necessary truth of the form ‘a posteriori necessary truth=...’? And how, taking another example, could philosophers even begin to look for an a posteriori identity truth of the form ‘knowledge=...’ (Melnyk 2008: 284), if they can’t even agree among themselves whether passenger Smith, in Cohen’s (1999) ‘Airport’ example, knows or does not know that the flight has a layover in Chicago, or whether *that* question is or is not ‘context-sensitive’? I find it striking, and a little ironic, that Kripke’s ‘intuitions’ about our concepts of *necessary truth* and *contingent truth* and their relation to our concepts of *a priori truth* and *a posteriori truth* have encouraged philosophers to think that philosophy could do altogether without reflection on our concepts. For better or for worse, philosophers are stuck, it seems to me, with the attempt to become clearer with respect to our concepts. The present paper concerns the question of how *that* may best be done.

<sup>5</sup> I should say that in the book Williamson seems more concerned to bring about an improved shared understanding of the prevailing program among those already committed to it than to defend it against those skeptical of it. My interest in this paper, however, is in Williamson’s account as containing a line of response to the cognitive diversity objection and to the calibration objection.

<sup>6</sup> This is in contrast with Sosa (1998, 2007a, and 2007b) and Bealer (1998), who concede that philosophers have indeed been centrally relying on intuitions, and go on to defend what they call intuitions as a special source of philosophical knowledge. Since, just like Williamson (2007: 136), I do not find compelling the attempts to defend philosophical intuitions as products of some special faculty or capacity, I take Williamson’s attempt to defend the prevailing program to be its best shot. I’ll come back to this at the end of the paper.

<sup>7</sup> There is actually a further step that’s meant to give us reason to think that everyday judgments ‘tend to be true’ (2004: 139-152; and 2007: 247-77). But since my aim is to show that Williamson’s second step is unsound—to show, more specifically, that what holds for everyday judgments does not hold for responses to the theorist’s question—I do not in this paper consider the step that follows it.

<sup>8</sup> I am simplifying matters here, for the sake of clarity of exposition. Much would actually depend here on how one understands ‘encountering a case’, and on how one takes the identity of the cases encountered to be determined.

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<sup>9</sup> The qualification is meant to register the fact that the theorist's question has so far been identified merely by means of some particular form of words ('Is this or is this not a case of x?', or, more particularly, 'Does so and so know that such and such, or doesn't he?'). That it is none too clear what the question comes to, or how it is to be understood, is part of what I try to show in this paper.

<sup>10</sup> Experimental Philosophy is now a thriving, if also contestable, industry. In addition to WNS (2001), see also Knobe (2003, 2006). Knobe's attitude towards the prevailing program is corrective and constructive, as opposed to the mostly critical attitude of WNS. For more papers representative of either of these two attitudes, see Knobe and Nichols (2008). For a helpful survey and further references, see Alexander and Weinberg (2007). Williamson's argues against the new trend in 2007: 7 and 191.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that the notion of 'applying a word (or a concept)', which features centrally in contemporary analytic philosophy, has no straightforward connection with anything that we might naturally describe, outside of philosophy, as 'applying a word (or a concept)'. It is a philosophical term of art that's meant to capture that element of pure judgment—the sheer attaching of word to object, or case—that is presupposed to underlie human discourse. Outside of philosophy, to apply a word, or anything else for that matter, is to put it to this or that use.

<sup>12</sup> See also Jackson (1998: 36-7), who speaks of conceptual analysis as 'concerned to elucidate what governs our classificatory practice'.

<sup>13</sup> I am setting aside here the possibility of vagueness. An appeal to the vagueness of *knowing that* might be the best response available to the proponent of the prevailing conception to my argument in the next section. Such an appeal would *save the prevailing conception by undermining the prevailing program*, since the latter presupposes that there is one clear cut and correct answer to the theorist's question, at least when it comes to 'know that' and cognates and to the sorts of cases to which theorists have invited us to apply these expressions. I should also add that the appeal to vagueness seems to me merely ad hoc when it comes to 'know that' and cognates, and to these sorts of cases. Take any of the paradigmatic vague concepts—the concept of *being red*, for example. Here, that there just are 'borderline' cases shows *in practice*: there just are cases where we (properly) hesitate upon being called upon to say the color of some object, and say things like 'It's reddish' or 'It's sort of red' or 'I guess you could call it red', etc. But we don't normally hesitate or hedge in anything like this way when, in the everyday, we are called upon to say, or otherwise judge, whether someone knows or knew something; at least not with respect to the sorts of cases that have featured centrally in the literature.

<sup>14</sup> I confess not to know what tracking propositional knowledge, philosophically, could be, if it is not at the same time a tracking of our concept of propositional knowledge. I suspect, however, that Williamson would have reservations about my assuming here, as I'm assuming throughout, that what we're looking for in philosophy is a clarification of our concepts. Philosophers have wanted to think of themselves as investigating things, not just our concepts of them, he would say (2005a: 2; and 2007: 10-22; see also Sosa 2007b). Williamson would be likely to say that my proposed response to Cummins betokens a 'psychologizing [of] the subject matter of philosophy' (2007: 211). I cannot enter a discussion of this issue in this paper, so I will only say that, at least when it comes to phenomena such as knowledge, I doubt that it makes sense to distinguish the attempt to become clearer with respect to our concepts from the attempt to become clearer with respect to the phenomena they pick out. That philosophers have often taken themselves to be investigating things (as they are in themselves...), *as opposed to* our concepts of things, seems to me no evidence at all against the

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'conceptual' conception of philosophy. So far as I can tell, however, *this* disagreement between Williamson and I may philosophically safely be set aside in this paper.

<sup>15</sup> That what theorists seek to track in raising their question ('Is this a case of "x" or "not x"?') in the face of various examples is not external to or independent from our capacity to answer precisely such questions is argued by Goldman and Pust (1998: 183-191). A similar idea is expressed by Jackson (1998: 31-2).

<sup>16</sup> I am not entirely clear on whether this is the sort of thing that Sosa has in mind when he sets out the requirement that philosophical intuition stem from 'virtue' or 'competence'. I suspect it is not; but, if so, I'm not sure how the virtue or competence he has in mind is to be established. An advantage of Williamson's account is that it contains a ready answer to this kind of question.

<sup>17</sup> Two possibilities that Williamson does not consider are emphasized by Sosa (2007a: 102-3): first, the possibility that different people imagine differently the case in the face of which the theorist's question is asked, and, second, the possibility that different people understand in different ways the theorist's question itself. If neither possibility obtains, Sosa is happy to say, with Williamson, that one party is just right and the other just wrong (Ibid: 102). As it stands, I find Sosa's appeal to the two possibilities unconvincing. Sosa, it seems to me, owes us some story of how a Gettier case, for example, may philosophically relevantly be imagined in different ways by different people, and how the question of whether the subject knows that such and such may philosophically relevantly be understood in different ways. What I do think is true, but this is something that neither Sosa nor Williamson considers, is that it is none too clear what understanding the theorist's question requires and how we can tell whether we really understand it or only *think* we understand it. Surely, that the words in which it is couched are familiar to us, and that we *feel* we understand it and even know how to answer it, is quite compatible with the latter. This is something that Kant teaches us in his 'dialectic of pure reason': that it can happen in philosophy that competing answers are given to a question, and it then turns out, upon reflection, that the question itself 'rests on groundless presupposition' and that the competing answers to it are therefore 'lacking in sense' (1998: A484/B513).

<sup>18</sup> This is what Goldman and Pust (1998) have called 'theory contamination'. Compare Weatherston (2003) who argues that when our intuitions clash with an otherwise compelling theory it is not clear that we should always give up or amend the theory, as opposed to simply taking the intuitions, however robust, to be wrong.

<sup>19</sup> Williamson might be relying on something like reflective equilibrium to help us decide which intuitions we should rely on and which ones we should explain away (see Williamson 2000: 33). But I agree with Stich (1988) that reflective equilibrium, however wide, will not help us here. If the history of philosophy has taught us anything, it is that however wide the reflective equilibrium is with which one philosopher has satisfied himself, it is always possible for another philosopher to find it deeply misguided.

<sup>20</sup> Compare Grice: '...even if my assumption that what goes for me goes for others is mistaken, it does not matter; my philosophical puzzles have arisen in connection with my use of E [some philosophically troubling expression], and my conceptual analysis will be of value to me (and to any others who may find that their use of E coincides with mine)' (1989: 175).

<sup>21</sup> Nichols and Ulatowski (2007: 347) anticipate an answer along the above lines to the cognitive diversity objection, and then stress in response to it the significance of what they call 'intra-cultural differences' (Ibid: 353-4).

<sup>22</sup> Williamson wishes to downplay the 'levels of disagreement' among 'trained philosophers' (2007: 191); but I don't think that the facts would support him in this in all cases. 'Contextualists' and '(Anti-Skeptical) Anti-Contextualists' are split, for example, on the

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question of whether (it would be true for John and Mary to say that) passenger Smith, in Cohen's (1999) 'Airport' example, knows that the flight has a layover in Chicago. And neither position lacks supporters.

<sup>23</sup> They normally do not become puzzled by each other's employment of these expressions; they normally respond to the other's employment of these expressions in ways that the other does not find puzzling; they never, or hardly ever, have occasion to ask the other 'What do you mean by "know"?', or to say to her 'This is not what "knowing" means'; etc.

<sup>24</sup> In responding to Weinberg's and Stich's objection that his armchair procedures ignore the possibility, and significance, of cognitive diversity, Jackson (2001: 661) cites the fact that we can smoothly and effectively communicate—sometimes via letters, emails, or phone—with people 'we have never met' and whose background is 'very different from our own'. Jackson's response is helpful in bringing out a question that Weinberg and Stich fail to address; but it begs precisely the question that I am pursuing in this paper. When a stranger emails Jackson and asks, say, 'Do you know at what time the departmental colloquium is today?', she is asking a question that may be, and normally will be, presumed to have a point. Responding to her will be easy and straightforward enough, and not at all a case of following one's intuition; but precisely because she is *not* simply inviting Jackson to 'classify himself and the timing of the colloquium with respect to knowledge', and for no particular reason. Let Jackson understand the question as inviting him to do the latter, and all of a sudden all of the difficulties that have befuddled western epistemologists—skepticism, for example—will begin to emerge, and answering the question will naturally seem to be an exercising of intuition.

<sup>25</sup> Or consider another example. Hawthorne (2004) structures a whole book around what he calls 'the lottery epistemological puzzle'. The most compelling version of the puzzle requires that we be inclined to think, or say, that we know things about our future such as where we will spend the summer. Hawthorne even chides Williamson for seeming to deny that we know such things (Ibid: 3, fn. 7). But any number of philosophers have been happy to concede, and have even insisted, that we do not know such things as what will happen to us or what we will do in the future. See for example Feldman's (forthcoming) critical study of Hawthorne's book. A clash of intuitions. If one of the two positions here is just wrong, then it is just wrong about a very significant region of our concept of propositional knowledge. And yet its proponents would most likely be no less competent in their employment of 'know that' and cognates than the proponents of the opposite position; and members of the two opposing parties can presumably nonetheless smoothly and effectively speak to and understand each other.

<sup>26</sup> Nor are we *imagining* ourselves (or others) to be putting the words to some use or another, which is what we do when we follow Austin in reminding ourselves of 'what we *should* say when, and so why and what we should mean by it' (1979: 181). Pursuing the difference between Austin's recommended practice and the prevailing program would take us beyond the scope of this paper. I do this elsewhere (forthcoming, reference omitted). I'll come back to this difference briefly at the end of this paper. What matters for our present purposes is just this: that the problem with the prevailing program is *not* its use of *hypothetical* cases, but rather *the nature of the question* it invites us to answer in the face of them. Whereas Austin's question invites us to recollect the ordinary and normal practice(s) of actually using the words, the theorist's question invites us to apply the words to cases altogether outside of practice, or, as I said, without really using them.

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<sup>27</sup> Though over-generalization here would be over-charitable. ‘Twin-earth’ type arguments, for example, or arguments of the sort found in Williamson (2000: 69-70), invite us to answer the theorist’s question in the face of cases that, outside of philosophy, none of us has ever had to face, let alone apply her concepts to.

<sup>28</sup> Throughout his defense of the prevailing program Williamson takes it for granted that we could understand a question just on the basis of our familiarity with (the meaning of) the words that make it up and our knowledge of syntax. For example, he takes it for granted that ‘Was Mars always either dry or not dry?’ is a question about *Mars*, which someone who would ‘like to know the history of Mars’ might, or should, wish to answer (2007: 24ff.). Of course, that Williamson takes this for granted is due to his adherence to the prevailing ‘compositional-and-truth-conditional semantics’ conception of language. But I doubt that anyone truly interested in the history of Mars would ever need to attend to Williamson’s question, *as Williamson and other theorists think of it*. And should a question arise in the course of an investigation of the history of *Mars* that might be expressed with the same words, the attempt to answer it would take an altogether different form from that of philosophical theorizing about vagueness. Simply to insist that it would nonetheless be the same question, or that it would anyway have the same ‘content’ (Williamson 2007: 44)—on the basis of nothing else than the sameness of the sentence expressing it—would be to presuppose the conception of language that is part of the target of the argument of this paper.

<sup>29</sup> From the way WNS phrase the example, it is not entirely clear whether Bob comes to think that Jill drives an American car by inference from the false (but ‘justified’) belief that she still drives her Buick (which is how WNS intend the example to be understood), or by inference from the true belief that she’s driven an American car for many years (so that if she for some reason no longer owns the Buick, she must have replaced it with another American car). Jackson (2001: 662) complains about this feature of WNS’s example.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Craig (1999), and Schaffer (2006). As we shall see, and as I argue at more length in (forthcoming, reference omitted), though philosophers have tended to focus on it almost exclusively, this is only *one* sort of significance that knowledge has.

<sup>31</sup> This, by the way, is one important difference that Williamson fails to note between hypothetical cases and actual cases. Williamson tells us that he has been to North Africa. But what if his telling us this is itself part of some philosophical exercise? What if he mis-spoke or wrote? If we really care about whether he has been to North Africa, should we rely just on what he says? By contrast, someone who is assured by the author of the case that such and such, has an assurance that is qualitatively, metaphysically, different from any assurance that we might have with respect to actual cases. In general, the significance of the difference this makes for our relation to the case has not been appreciated by philosophers who assure us that p, in order to get us to reflect upon what knowledge requires *beyond* the truth of a belief.

<sup>32</sup> Fantl and McGrath (2002: 67). For similar formulations of the theorist’s question, see Stanley (2005: 88), and Bach (2005: 62-3).

<sup>33</sup> I argue this in far more detail in (forthcoming, reference omitted).

<sup>34</sup> Not least because this would mean that his question, in this case at least, does not essentially concern someone’s *mental* state.

<sup>35</sup> Is he concerned, for example, about Bob’s moral well-being, and worries in particular that he tends to be too casual when it comes to things that matter to other people? Or is it rather that he cares about Agent, and therefore is outraged by Bob’s (alleged) casualness?

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<sup>36</sup> I note that here, as in the previous scenario, it is going to matter a great deal whether Bob told Agent his basis, as people in his situation normally would have, either on their own accord or upon being asked ‘How do you know?’.

<sup>37</sup> In (forthcoming, reference omitted), I discuss these sorts of situations in much more detail.

<sup>38</sup> If you go back to the previous ‘proposals’ and to my replies to them, you’ll see that while I did use ‘know’ and cognates liberally in them, I used them in the way, or sense, that we are now considering, not in the way or sense on which philosophers have tended to focus. Bach (2005: 62-3) notes, as I do, the difference between what normally concerns us when we ask whether someone knows that such and such and what the epistemologist seeks to track in his question of whether some person’s belief ‘rises to the level of knowledge’. For Bach, however, it’s the latter that ought to concern epistemologists; and for him this means that much of our ordinary use of ‘know that’ and cognates has no (obvious) bearing on how we ought to answer the theorist’s question. The present paper, by contrast, argues, *following Williamson*, that if the theorist’s question is not one to which we need to attend in the course of our everyday employment of ‘know that’ and cognates, then it is not clear what justifies the prevailing program, in epistemology and other area of philosophical inquiry.

<sup>39</sup> Since Bob is a fictional character, whose existence, presumably, is confined to WNS’s example, there *is*, metaphysically speaking, nothing that *could* be learned about him beyond what is given to us in the example.

<sup>40</sup> It might be argued that the *capacity* might be the same, even though what it is expected to accomplish in philosophy is fundamentally different from what it accomplishes in ‘non-philosophical’ thinking. Though I confess not to know how capacities might plausibly be identified other than by what they are capacities *for*, I’d be happy, given my aims in this paper, to drop the talk of capacities altogether. The point that matters for my purposes is that if there is not the sort of continuity that Williamson assumes, between what we do with our words outside of philosophy and what we are invited to do with them when we are invited to answer the theorist’s question, then there is serious reason to worry about the soundness of the prevailing program, whatever one chooses to say about the capacities involved in each case. In other words, my interpretation of Williamson captures not only what he quite clearly means in his talk of ‘same capacity’, but also what he *must* mean by this expression, if he is to offer a compelling response to Cummins’ calibration objection.

<sup>41</sup> In either its traditional ‘armchair’ version or its recently advocated ‘experimental’ version.

<sup>42</sup> An anonymous referee has suggested to me that perhaps my point is that knowledge, or our concept of knowledge, is simply not something we are interested in in everyday life. But this is not what I propose. While I do think, and argue elsewhere (forthcoming, reference omitted), that philosophers all too often “make” the protagonists of their example utter sentences featuring ‘know’ and cognates in contexts in which these utterances are wholly unnatural, because lacking any point, I also think that there clearly are contexts in which these words do different kinds of important work for us. And since I also believe that knowledge is best thought of—not as some particular item in the world that is there anyway, but—as whatever we refer to (speak of, claim, invoke, deny having, confess having had...) when we competently employ ‘know’ and cognates, I find it undeniable that knowledge does sometimes matter to us, in different ways under different circumstances.

<sup>43</sup> Perhaps some vocabulary tests could take something like the form of the theorist’s question; but I doubt very much that the sorts of cases philosophers have used in their arguments could effectively serve for testing a student’s understanding of words such as ‘know’,

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which have given philosophers trouble for millennia. If the argument of section 2 is on the right track, there is every reason to think they could not.

<sup>44</sup> Though addressing these questions on a *general* level would take us far beyond the scope of this paper, let me just say, for whatever it is worth, that the widespread insistence on there being in our understanding and employment of each of our generally ‘referring’ expressions a semantic component that can be isolated and identified in terms of reference and truth-conditions, may in general be supported either by conceptual considerations (having to do with what ‘understanding a word’ or ‘knowing the meaning of a word’ means, for example), or by empirical ones (having to do with what we need to presuppose in order to empirically explain our ability to learn and employ words as we do). I do not see that our relevant concepts lend any support to the insistence. As Williamson himself says, the normal criterion for ‘understanding a word’ or ‘knowing what a word means’ is the ability to employ it competently in (a large enough portion of) everyday discourse. Now, does *that* ability presupposes an ability just to apply the word to cases, apart from any context of significant use? If my argument in the previous section has been on the right track, then there is good reason to suspect that at least some of our words are actually *unfit* for such application: Competently applying them to cases, outside of philosophy, is too tightly tied to the point of the application. And *this* seems to me to suggest that, *empirically* speaking, the above insistence, far from being necessary for explaining our ability to learn and employ our words as we do, rather leads to a distorted view of the very ability that needs to be explained.

<sup>45</sup> For a clear expression of the assumption see Williamson (2007: 281).

<sup>46</sup> It might be thought that in denying that the meaning of ‘know’, together with the meanings of the other words that make up the sentence, is enough for determining what question would, or might, be asked by means of ‘Does so and so know that such and such?’, I am advocating a ‘contextualist’ view of knowledge of the sort offered by philosophers like Travis (1989, 1991, 1997, 2005), DeRose (1992, 1995), Lewis (1996), and Cohen (1998, 1999). I cannot here do justice to the complex issue of how my view—which of course may also aptly be called ‘contextualist’—relates to what in contemporary analytic philosophy goes by the name of ‘contextualism’. I do this elsewhere (one published and two forthcoming papers, references omitted). Here I will only say that in presupposing that with respect to just any competent utterance of a declarative sentence featuring ‘know that’ or one of its cognates we could always philosophically safely and fruitfully ask, ‘Is it true or false?’, contemporary contextualism with respect to knowledge still partakes of the prevailing program’s ‘representationalism’. In other words, the contextualist still supposes that ‘know that’ and cognates *first* refer to some item in the world—albeit an item whose presence in any particular case may not be determined apart from some particular ‘context’—and only *thereby* become fit for whatever work we wish to do with them (in this or that particular ‘context’). My view, by contrast, is closer to that of Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Austin (in some of his moments), and, more recently, Brandom (2008): that is, I believe that, at least when it comes to ‘know that’ and cognates, reference should be thought of as secondary or even epiphenomenal, and use—in the full blown sense of the *work* that is being done with the words, the difference we *make* (as opposed to merely note or describe) by means of them—should be taken as primary.

<sup>47</sup> I argue for this in much greater detail, and illustrate the point by means of a close examination of DeRose’s ‘Bank’ example (1992) and Cohen’s ‘Airport’ example (1999), in (forthcoming, reference omitted).

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<sup>48</sup> In (forthcoming, reference omitted), I propose this as the gist of Kant's diagnosis in his *Critique of Pure Reason* of the dialectical illusion that leads to the 'antinomies'.

<sup>49</sup> A recurrent move among defenders of the prevailing program is to argue that those who object to it themselves rely on intuitions in their objections, or anyway on nothing more solid than that on which those pursuing the prevailing program have relied. See Pust (2001: 251), Williamson (2004: fn. 11), and Sosa (2007a).

<sup>50</sup> I make the case for a return to some version of ordinary language philosophy—to what I call 'ordinary language philosophy at its best'—in (forthcoming, reference omitted).

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