Basic Knowledge and the Principles of Common Sense:
a Reidian Solution to the Problem of the Criterion
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In his paper "Basic Knowledge and the Problem of Easy Knowledge" (2002), Cohen states a requirement which expresses a deeply entrenched intuition about knowledge. He labels it the "principle of the criterion". According to it:

> *(KR)* A potential knowledge source[1] *K* can yield knowledge for a subject *S* only if *S* knows *K* is reliable.

Trying to apply this principle gives rise to a very unhappy alternative: briefly, the alternative between the impossibility of knowledge (if one does not manage to fulfill this requirement, while still considering it as an important one) and the explosion of poor valued knowledge (if one considers that knowledge is not limited to the extension delineated by the principle). In other words, we are doomed to choose between skepticism and externalism[2].

The aim of the paper is to show that the remarks of the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid offer the ingredients to escape such a dead-end. Reid not only invites us to get rid of this dichotomy, but he also and more interestingly paves the way to an adjusted version of the principle of the criterion, which draws heavily on a kind of holism.

I – How Shall We Begin to Know Anything?

In order to solve the problem of the criterion, let us start tracing its genealogy. As we will see (I.1), we find the premisses of the principle of the criterion in the attempt to satisfactorily answer this question: "how to *start* knowing?". Its legitimacy is then strengthened when it is considered as essential not only to *acquire* knowledge, but also to acquire *valuable* knowledge. As it will be shown (I.2), the problem is that, if we strive to

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[1] By "knowledge source", I refer to a *faculty* that produces knowledge, *i.e.* to what Reid calls the "powers of the mind which are original and natural, and which make a part of the constitution of the mind" (EIP, I,1, p. 21).

comply with it, no knowledge should exist in this world. However, it seems that we have much knowledge. It seems that when someone says she knows "the boss is in the office", she is not lax in her use of the term "knowledge". Rather, she is really referring to a distinct state of the mind which is called "knowledge".

So, between the absence of knowledge and the presence of knowledge which flouts such a principle, what shall we choose? To shed light on the nature of the dilemma, I will expound two versions of the problem. The first one is formulated by Chisholm in *The Foundations of Knowing* (1982, chapter 5) and gives rise to the alternative between "methodism" and "particularism" (I.1); the second one, framed by Cohen, confronts us with the alternative between skepticism and externalism (I.2). Though different, I will show how these discussions are related and why Reid encourages us to go beyond these alternatives.

I.1. The Alternative between Methodism and Particularism

I.1.a – A Problem of Methodology

In his text "The Problem of the Criterion", Chisholm encounters a problem of method, which is a classic in epistemology:

> To know whether things really are as they seem to be, we must have a *procedure* for distinguishing appearances that are true from appearances that are false. But to know whether our procedure is a good procedure, we have to know whether it really *succeeds* in distinguishing appearances that are true from appearances that are false. And we cannot know whether it does really succeed unless we already know which appearances are *true* and which ones are *false*. And so we are caught in a circle. (p. 62)

The point of departure of this "circle" lies in methodological concerns: in order to be sure that what we consider as true appearances are really "correct reflections" of the world, we must have a criterion of truth at our disposal, a criterion establishing for instance that "*appearing to be x* is a good truth-tracker". However, to know that this criterion is an infallible sign of truth, we must have already noticed that it has regularly successfully done its job. It is only once we have noticed that the true appearances possess this "*x* quality", that we

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[2] Of course, the proponents of externalism do not characterize the outputs of a reliable epistemic source as "poor

have grounds to affirm that "what appears to be *x* is a good truth-tracker". But where did this previous knowledge concerning true appearances come from? How could we consider it as genuine knowledge, insofar as it had not been stamped by the seal of the "*x* criterion" yet?

If we do not want to sink into the muddy waters of skepticism, we must *reach a decision*. In this respect, Chisholm draws heavily on the concept of "decision" (pp. 62-65): "how are we to decide these things?", "How do we decide, in any particular case, whether we have a genuine item of knowledge?", "What is the proper method for deciding which are the good beliefs and which are the bad ones?", "How are we to decide which are the good methods and which are the bad ones?". When we are in the grip of an epistemic circle, it is necessary to reach a decision. This is the only way to start knowing.

This decision has significant methodological implications. Only two possibilities seem to be available: either we decide to begin by taking into account particular cases of knowledge, or we decide to begin by applying one or several general criteria of knowledge. Chisholm gives the name of "particularism" to the first procedure, and that of "methodism" to the second.

If you choose to follow the methodist line, it implies that you think you already possess a general criterion of truth, be it an empiricist one (like the "impressions" erected by Hume as a touchstone of knowledge) or a rationalist one (like Descartes's criterion of "clear and distinct ideas"). The question of whether we have true or false appearances must be decided according to this general criterion. Our judgments must "fill the bill" and comply with it to be worthy of the status of knowledge. Accordingly, to know anything, we must begin by bringing an answer to this question:

Question B: "What are the *criteria* of knowledge?" (p. 65)

The problem with this procedure is that it can work if and only if we have good reasons to think we possess a kind of "basic theoretical knowledge", that is to say 1) a knowledge we possess without the need of an antecedent knowledge to support it, and 2) a knowledge that is not an "object-level" knowledge (*i.e.* a knowledge which is not about ordinary internal and external matters of facts, like "my being tired" or "my cat being on the carpet"). This basic theoretical knowledge would be a higher-level knowledge (*i.e.* a knowledge about our sources of knowledge, about the necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of epistemic

valued" knowledge. This description is made from an internalist perspective.

concepts). However, the combination of these two characteristics seems quite paradoxical, if not impossible. How could *basic* knowledge be so *complex* and *sophisticated*? More decisively, how do we know that the selected criterion is the right one? If something should meet with universal approval, basic knowledge seems tailor-made for this role. But a basic *theoretical* knowledge does not fulfill this expectation.

That is why Chisholm recommends the particularist method. In order to distinguish the true appearances from the false ones, we have to begin with an answer to this question:

Question A: "*What* do we know?" (p. 65)

This question calls for an answer that takes an enumerative form. This is a question about the extension of the concept "knowledge", which aims at circumscribing our object-level knowledge. Our answers progressively delineate the field of our immediate knowledge, the peculiarity of this knowledge being its equation with an undefined sum of particular statements ("I know the cat is on the carpet", "I know I was in Portugal this summer", etc.). From then, we can extract one or several general principles of knowledge that condense the distinctive proprieties of the beforehand mentioned judgments.

Even if Chisholm favors this particularist procedure, he is well aware of the difficulties that assail it. He fully recognizes that someone could ask him how he knows the particular items he enumerates are paradigmatic cases of knowledge. He concedes the point and concludes with this surprising statement:

> What few philosophers have had the courage to recognize is this: we can deal with the problem only by begging the question (…) And in favor of our approach there is the fact that we *do* know many things after all. (p. 75)

We find an appeal to the necessity for philosophers to be courageous and to admit that they must proceed by a begging of the question, even if it goes against their sense of logic. Such a renunciation requires a continuous exercise of the will, in order to end up resisting the temptations of the methodist recommendation to reverse the order of knowledge[3]. For

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[3] To accept this point implies to stop considering knowledge as being an epistemic feat, and to view it as something quite common and easily obtainable. In such a perspective, the problem of the criterion would be a mere psychological problem, whose solution would go through a cure for the philosophers enslaved by prejudices about knowledge. To use Wittgenstein's words (1933, §86, p. 300), it would not be a conceptual problem, but a

Chisholm, the obvious fact of knowledge ("the fact that we *do* know many things after all") crushes any requirement whose application should imply that we renounce these many known things[4].

Chisholm views Reid as a good example of the particularist procedure:

> he thought that he had an answer to question A, and in terms of the answer to question A, he then worked out kind of an answer to question B. (p. 68)

In the following, I shall not proceed to lay out the different arguments that confirm this way of describing Reid's processes[5]. I will rather question the way the distinction between particularism and methodism has been used to make the "principles of common sense" pointed out by Reid either the results of an inductive process, or general criteria of truth that are immediately known.

Briefly, the principles of common sense expounded by Reid in the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man,* are "first principles of knowledge", that is to say principles that are the ground of knowledge, without being in need of a proof. In the following, I will more particularly consider the "first principles of contingent truths" (*Essay* VI, chapter 5), which deal with empirical knowledge. Reid introduces the first one thus:

> *First*, then, I hold, as a first principle, the existence of every thing of which I am conscious. (EIP, VI, 5, p. 470)

How did Reid come to such a formulation?

I.1.b – The Peculiarity of Reid's Way

Van Cleve (1999, 2003*b*, 2008) also considers that Reid follows the particularist line. But let us be careful with this characterization. The way Van Cleve uses the vocabulary framed by Chisholm is noticeably different from what was intended by Chisholm himself: where Chisholm gives methodological input to the notions of "particularism" and

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problem linked to the *will* of philosophers, at least the will of those who do not want to recognize the obvious truth: the "commonness" of knowledge.

[4] In this respect, he adopts the same method as Moore in (1941). This is the argument of the "differential certainty": if one argument is as valid as another, let us say a skeptical argument compared to an anti-skeptical one, or a methodist argument compared to a particularist one, we must choose the one whose premises are more certain than the premises of the other. As Moore is more certain of his reasons to believe that "this is a pen" than of his reasons to doubt "he is awake", he sticks to the anti-skeptical argument. Chisholm does the same with the particularist argument. This is a meta-epistemological point, concerning the way to do epistemology.

"methodism", Van Cleve deprives them of this kind of content. For him, adopting the particularist point of view straightforwardly implies that "some particular propositions are self-evident", but not that "some propositions *ascribing evidence* to particular propositions are self-evident"[6]. The explanation for this divergence is to be located in their different conceptions of knowledge. If Chisholm's particularism goes hand in hand with the adoption of an internalist conception of knowledge (according to which "a subject S knows that *p* if and only if S knows that he knows that *p*"), Van Cleve strips particularism of this requirement. According to him, particularism flourishes as well in the externalist garden of knowledge.

If Chisholm considers particularism as an appropriate starting point to answer question B ("What are the criteria of knowledge?"), it is because the immediately known particular judgments he gives as an answer to question A ("What do we know?") are "luminous judgments", that is to say judgments that take "self-presenting states" as their objects. Such states "cannot occur unless it is evident that they occur". In revealing an evident belief, evidence reveals itself as well[7]. For instance, the judgment that "It seems to me that I see a sheep in the field" is a judgment about the "seeming state" I experience, a psychological state such as if I am in this state, it cannot be but evident to me that I am in this state of mind. Consequently, this kind of judgment constitutes a good "sign-board" of evidence[8].

Van Cleve characterizes Reid's "first principles of contingent truths" as "principles of evidence", each one containing a battery of self-evident particular judgments. His main argument is that if the Reidian first principles were general principles of truth, stating for example that "it is a first principle that everything of which I am conscious exist", they could contribute to our knowledge if and only if they were known and *recognized* as such. In other words, this alternative reading of the "first principles of contingent truths" would imply the

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[5] On this point, see Marcil-Lacoste (1975).

[6] 1999, footnote n°26, p. 28.

[7] (1982, p. 72). In this respect, it functions like light (see Reid's analogy: "Perhaps evidence, as in many other respects it resembles light, so in this also, that as light, which is the discoverer of all visible objects, discovers itself at the same time; so evidence, which is the voucher for all truth, vouches for itself at the same time."EIP, VI, 5, p. 481).

[8] Contrary to what Chisholm claims, it is not adequate to describe Reid's processes as beginning with an answer to question A, this answer subsequently giving him the means to answer question B. For Reid, questions A and B are so different that the bringing of an answer to the former does not necessarily open the path to an answer to the latter. The question B is a meta-epistemological question, a question which is not located at the same level of discourse as question A, which concerns object-level knowledge. If Reid pays due consideration to question B, it is because he is anxious to refute the skeptical arguments. It is solely in the context of a discussion with the skeptic that there is a sense of striving to give an explicit formulation to principles we otherwise irresistibly give our assent to. Therefore, Reid's answer to question B (which he tackles in EIP, VI, 4) is certainly *not* the natural extension of his answer to question A. An answer to question B has an *unnatural methodological* tonality for Reid, which develops better in an *internalist* field, whereas an answer to question A does not necessarily take on these characteristics.

adoption of an internalist conception of knowledge. But as Van Cleve rightly points out, the first principles play their parts "simply by being true" (1999, p. 10), that is to say without our knowing that they are true. According to an externalist reading, we know a battery of particular judgments (those embraced by the first principles), but it does not imply that we thereby know that we know them, or that we know that the proposition ascribing evidence to them (*i.e.* the general principle) is true. The presentation of the first principles as general-sounding is just a convenient way to designate at once a myriad of particular judgments.

But if the externalist flavor which hangs heavy in Reid's remarks obtains due recognition through this reading, the problem is that it bypasses some characteristics of the principles of common sense. Reid clearly views them as general, furthermore as immediately known general principles. Does it imply that the principles of common sense cannot be known unless we know that we know them? Not at all. After all, we can have knowledge of general principles that is not luminous. That is why, at this basic level of the structure of knowledge, we are led to accept an "externalist evidentialism", according to which "what is knowledge-conferring" (*i.e.* the evidence we have) is knowledge, even though we do not know that we have it[9]. In this respect, general epistemic principles are known, although they are not easily recognized as such (particular cases are indeed more convincing than general principles[10]). It does not prevent them from belonging to the epistemic background that must be necessarily presupposed in order to acquire knowledge.

In a way that will be clarified in II.3, I know that *q* ("my consciousness is reliable") as immediately as I know that *p* ("I am conscious that the cat is on the carpet"). Of course, this is not a psychological immediacy that is meant here, but an epistemic immediacy, insofar as the general epistemic principle *q* is known without being grounded on previous knowledge. It is "self-evident". According to Reid, this general knowledge must enter the picture of our immediate knowledge. The risk is otherwise to present too artificial a picture of our epistemic system, a picture that separates particular judgments from general principles, bypassing his constant carefulness to link them all "in a chain that cannot be broken" (EIP, VI, 4, p. 464). We understand now why the dichotomy between particularism and methodism does not finely

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[9] Williamson (2000) advances an evidentialist theory along this line. If we take inspiration from it, nothing prevents us from considering as evident "any truths that are *both* contingent and general". Van Cleve's worry according to which contingent general principles cannot easily be regarded as evident (2008, p. 298, p. 301) can only be understood if we adopt an internalist evidentialism. But the way Reid defines evidence is sufficiently general to be compatible with an externalist evidentialism: "we gave the name of evidence to whatever is a ground of belief." (EIP, II, 20, p. 228).

[10] First principles "force assent in particular instances, more powerfully than when they are turned into a general proposition." (EIP, VI, 5, p. 482).

suit the Reidian discourse: it implies to appeal to the distinction between particular judgments and general principles, whereas Reid is more concerned with the distinction between self-evident propositions and propositions that are deduced from the first.

I.1.c – The Appeal to the Faculty of Common Sense

Once we admit that the "first principles of contingent truths which are immediately known" refer to *general* epistemic principles, we give the skeptic food for thought: the latter feels indeed fully entitled to ask what the source of this immediate knowledge is. One may answer that these principles are the products of the faculty of common sense[11]. But the skeptic will argue that to appeal to such a faculty shifts the emphasis of the problem but does not settle the matter. For he is then entitled to ask how we know this faculty is reliable. It is a question of some moment, that can only be answered if we are clear about what "common sense" refers to. But we are far from obtaining unanimity on this subject. Apart from the question of knowing whether common sense is a degree of judgment present in each exercise of our natural intellectual faculties, or a distinctive faculty, a kind of "meta-faculty" that supervises the others[12], there is this most radical question: is the appeal to common sense not a mere "jack in a box", a vain attempt to give a conceptual content to an empty name?[13]

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that we have established the existence of the faculty of common sense. How shall we handle the question to know how we know that it is

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[11] For example, Bergmann (2004) about Reid: "Just as we have noninferential knowledge about our immediate physical environment by means of sense perception and about our past by means of memory and about our minds by means of introspection, so also we have a faculty by means of which we have noninferential knowledge of first principles. (…) And the faculty by which we know these first principles (whether necessary or contingent) he calls 'common sense'."

[12] The challenge of the discussion is to explain how we can make sense of the seventh of the first principles of contingent truths, which claims that "the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious." (EIP, VI, 5, p. 480). If common sense is a "supra-faculty", then it seems not to be included in the "natural faculties" mentioned by the principle. The problem is then to resist the objection of dogmatism, and more particularly for interpreters to determine what extra contribution the seventh principle brings to the previous ones, which have affirmed the reliability of consciousness (principle 1), memory (principle 3) and perception (principle 5). See Lehrer (1989, p. 162) for an attempt to give a specific content to the seventh principle, and De Bary (2002, chapter 5, section 3) for a different explanation, which does not imply raising common sense to the status of a "master-faculty". If on the other hand common sense is included in the seventh principle, then we must face the objection of circularity (insofar as common sense would make us know that common sense is reliable). If Bergmann (2004, 2006b, 2007) and Lehrer (1990) do not think this epistemic circularity is malignant, the former views common sense as a distinctive faculty, whereas the latter views it as a degree or a branch of reason which is present in every use we make of our faculties (in accordance with Reid's own words, EIP, VI, 2 p. 433).

[13] We find such a critic in Reed (2006, p. 196). He has very harsh words against theories that are grounded on the appeal to the faculty of common sense. According to him, nothing enables us to differentiate common sense from other purported faculties like telepathy. The tone of his criticism reminds us of Kant's warning against the appeal to common sense in his preface to *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*: "It is indeed a great gift of God, to possess right, or (as they now call it) plain common sense. But this common sense must be shown practically, by well-considered and reasonable thoughts and words, not by appealing to it as an oracle, when no rational justification can be advanced.".

reliable? It has to be one thing or the other: either we affirm we immediately know that this faculty is reliable, or we take a more winding road, saying we know it via the taking into account of some particular beliefs of common sense, which nearly always happen to be true. In both cases, the skeptic will not be satisfied with such answers, launching either the accusation of dogmatism (how are we entitled to consider the reliability of common sense as self-evident?), or the accusation of epistemic circularity. It is precisely at the second horn of this dilemma that the problem of the criterion, in its most contemporary form, has its starting point.

I.2. The Alternative between Skepticism and Externalism

The contemporary problem of the criterion originates in this formulation of the "principle of the criterion" (Cohen, 2002).

> *(KR)* A potential knowledge source *K* can yield knowledge for a subject *S* only if *S* knows *K* is reliable.

If we apply this principle to the faculty of common sense, we should say that "common sense can yield knowledge for a subject (the knowledge of the reliability of our natural intellectual faculties, common sense being included in the set), only if the subject knows common sense is reliable".

Interestingly, no temporal indication is given in Cohen's formulation. But it is the presupposition that "*K* can yield knowledge for *S* only if *S antecedently* knows *K* is reliable" that puts us in an awkward position[14]. Let us call this version of the principle of the criterion the strong version (*s* for "strong"):

> *(KR)^s* A potential knowledge source *K* can yield knowledge for a subject *S* only if *S* first knows *K* is reliable.

It is the idea that there is a logical order of knowledge that should be respected, an order on which the effective order of knowledge is unfortunately not modeled, that triggers the

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[14] See Huemer (2001, p. 13) for a formulation of the principle of the criterion that explicitly endorses this temporal requirement: "I am justified in accepting a belief formed by method M only if I *first* know that M is reliable.".

worries of the skeptic. If we subscribe to *(KR)^s*, we must conclude to the impossibility of knowing anything. Indeed, there seems to be only one way to acquire the knowledge of the reliability of one's faculties: by carrying out a "track-record argument", *i.e.* an argument that takes the outputs of the faculty as its premisses, and which thereby concludes to the reliability of the very same faculty, after observing the success of the vast majority of them. Whatever the winding roads it takes[15], such an argument has this form (applied here to sense perception):

1. At t_1, I form the perceptual belief that p_1, and p_1 is true;
2. At t_2, I form the perceptual belief that p_2, and p_2 is true; (...)
3. Therefore my sense perception is a reliable source of beliefs.

We cannot but be struck by the bootstrapping aspect of the argument. In order to accept the premisses, we must indeed assume the truth of the conclusion. Apart from the objection that such a procedure is logically and epistemically illegitimate, this argument faces the question of knowing which kind of propositional attitude is involved when the "conclusion" is implied by the premisses. Is it a mere acceptance for lack of anything better, with no particular epistemic credentials? In this case, what would entitle us to set the premisses? Or is it something stronger, a kind of pre-theoretical knowledge of the reliability of a faculty? That would make the acquisition of this knowledge something quite mysterious. Whatever the option we choose, we are launched into a new dilemma: if one recognizes the necessity of such a presupposition, no basic knowledge is granted (because the premisses cannot be known prior to the reliability of their source), and if we grant the possibility of a basic knowledge, while dismissing the necessity of an antecedent epistemic presupposition about the reliability of its source, we must concede that this knowledge is produced as though by miracle. From there, the rot has set in and a fairly widespread skepticism lies at the end of the path. If the premisses are not justified, the prospect of justifying the conclusion is doomed to failure: skepticism spreads by a "house of cards effect"[16].

To escape this disastrous effect, an option consists in saying that, all things considered, nothing recommends us to accept the principle of the criterion.

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[15] The appeal to a new faculty "to sit in judgment upon the old" (Reid, EIP, VI, 5, p. 481) or the attempts to make epistemic circularity appear less flagrant (Alston, 2005, chapter 9) are equally vain.
[16] The expression is from Bergmann (2005, p. 431).

> *(R)* A potential knowledge source *K* can yield knowledge for a subject *S* only if *K* is reliable. *S* can have knowledge from *K* even if she does not know that *K* is reliable.

As explained by Van Cleve (1979, pp. 70-71), for *S*'s particular judgments to be knowledge, it is enough that they "fall under" the epistemic principle laying down the reliability of their source *K*, without *S* necessarily "appealing to" this principle. In other words, *S* has knowledge "in virtue of" the fact that the epistemic principle "applies", but she does not need to know it applies.

This strategy faces two accusations: the accusation of incoherence and the accusation of easiness. The former is based on the adoption of the epistemic closure principle.

> *(ECP)* If *S* knows *p*, and *S* knows *p* entails *q*, then *S* knows (or at least is in a position to know) *q*.

If we subscribe to *(R)*, it entails that at the very moment we know *p* ("the napkin is green"), we do not know *q* ("my visual sense perception is reliable"), even though we know *p* in virtue of the truth of *q* (and even though we are in a position to know that "*p* entails *q*"). *(R)* would not be compatible with *(ECP)*. Thus, the premisses constitute basic knowledge, without us being required to have a justification for the presupposition of the reliability of their source[17]. However, it appears quite counterintuitive, even totally absurd, to deny *(ECP)* at this stage in the argument. The accusation of incoherence is all the more justified that *(ECP)* is largely called upon in the transition from the premisses to the conclusion of the track-record argument.

The second objection deals with an argument favored by some externalists, according to which there are some contexts in which acquiring the knowledge of the reliability of a potential source, through the taking into account of the outputs of this source, is an entirely legitimate intellectual process[18]. If we accept that bootstrapping enters the arena of epistemic legitimacy, we will then have to face the accusation that the "reliability knowledge" can come much too easily. This is Cohen's point:

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[17] This is the view labeled "liberalism" and endorsed by Pryor, Bergmann, Alston and Van Cleve. See Pryor (2004).

[18] Bergmann (2006*a*) distinguishes unquestioned-source contexts, in which epistemic circularity is benign, from questioned-source contexts, in which epistemic circularity is malignant.

> The problem is that once we allow for basic knowledge, we can acquire reliability knowledge very easily – in fact, all too easily, from an intuitive perspective. (2002, p. 311)

Far from applying this observation solely to the "reliability knowledge", Cohen extends it to the vast background knowledge of "how we are situated in the world". This includes the knowledge of the non-realization of some global skeptical alternatives (such as "my being a brain-in-a-vat deceived into thinking the table is red"), as well as the knowledge of the non-realization of very peculiar skeptical alternatives (such as "my being deceived into thinking that the table is red, when it is actually white and illuminated by red lights"). It seems quite strange that, simply from particular perceptual judgments (such as "the table looks red"), we can acquire knowledge of such a variety of things about the world. It is actually too easy a process to be considered as the source of valuable knowledge[19].

To conclude on this point, the problem of the criterion confronts us with this challenge: to find a proper balance between these two extremes which are on the one hand the "no knowledge at all"-consequence of the adoption of *(KR)ˢ*, and on the other hand the "too much unworthy knowledge"-consequence tied to the adoption of *(R)*.

II – Which Third Way? A Reidian Solution

Reid offers the conceptual means to escape the epistemological plight to which we are condemned if we keep thinking that the alternatives exposed beforehand are exhaustive. The framing of a third way may appear as a mere rhetorical trick. But far from being artificial, this approach is the opportunity to take a closer look at our intuitions about knowledge and to wonder whether these *a priori* expectations are well-founded. To do so, I will consider some previous attempts which have taken the direction of a non-gloomy perspective on knowledge, either taking inspiration in Wittgenstein's latest remarks in *On Certainty*, or adopting a solution built on a two-level structure, as it is promoted by Sosa. Many who pursue one or the other of these two strategies think they are also indebted to Reid (Alston for instance, adopting

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[19] About the problem of the value of knowledge, see *infra* II.2.b).

a Wittgensteinian stance[20]; Sosa himself). But then I will explain why these strategies appear to be mere "abortive solutions", and how we can find in Reid the elements of a viable solution.

First of all, it must be kept in mind that if *(KR)* is generally considered as impossible to fulfill, it is because of the twofold principle according to which, if there is to be knowledge of the reliability of a faculty, 1) it can be acquired only by bootstrapping, and 2) bootstrapping is an illegitimate thought process, blatantly infected by epistemic circularity. There are different ways to escape this difficulty :

(i)   One consists in fully rejecting the appropriateness of *(KR)*. As we will see in II.1), this Wittgensteinian strategy is built on an analysis of the usage rules of the verb "to know", and on a distinction between what can be submitted to the insistent questions of the skeptic, and what totally resists the devastating effect of these questions.

(ii)   Another strategy consists in fully recognizing the epistemic circularity involved into any inductive reasoning, and in unhesitatingly endorsing it. Far from sinking into a resigned mood, this way out of the dilemma emphasizes the virtuous aspects of such an intellectual process. It does not accept 2). This is Sosa's strategy which I shall discuss in II.2).

(iii)   Finally, there is a third way to avoid the problem of the criterion: while still accepting *(KR),* it rejects both 1) and 2). It consists in framing a moderate version of *(KR)*, which neither presupposes a way of conceiving knowledge that would be *internalist* from beginning to end, nor implies that knowledge of the reliability of a faculty should be *anterior* to the exercise of this faculty. This strategy has the peculiarity of identifying different degrees of our "reliability knowledge". As I will show in II.3), it implies to construe knowledge no longer as a species of a generic *doxastic* propositional attitude (which calls for a *justification* and thus gives rise to the skeptical worry), but as a species of a robuster propositional attitude: that of trust.

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[20] The family likeness between Wittgenstein and Reid has been underlined by Wolterstorff (2001, chapter 9).

II.1. Basic Knowledge as Animal Certainties

One way to get rid of the problem of the criterion is to notice that *(KR)* is so intrinsically incoherent that we should reject it with no regrets. The ways this observation has been justified may considerably differ. The one I will consider is not the one put forward by the proponents of an externalist conception of knowledge (like Bergmann (2006*a*) and Van Cleve (2003*a*)), but it is the one one can extract from Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty*.

II.1.a – A Lesson Drawn from *On Certainty*

If Wittgenstein had been asked to handle the problem of the criterion, we can presume he would not have attempted to solve it, he would simply have dismissed it. Is it so simple? In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein is concerned with Moorean assertions, such as "I *know* that that's a tree" (§481) or "I know that I am now sitting in a chair" (§553)[21]. What he tries to make us understand is something that should have appeared obvious to us right from the start. But as we are in the grip of Moore's linguistic disease, his cure should be beneficial for us too. Wittgenstein strives to make us recognize the weird character of the use of the verb "to know" in putting forward many questions: "Do I know that I am now sitting in a chair? - Don't I know it?!" (§552), "But doesn't 'I know that that's a tree' say something different from 'that is a tree'?" (§585), etc. His aim is to weaken the power of the linguistic spell which bewitches us and gives us the illusory impression that we are completely entitled to say "I know" each time we feel confident with the known fact. We can find the reason for this illusion in the negation of a rule that governs the use of the verb "to know":

> One says "I know" when one is ready to give compelling grounds. "I know" relates to a possibility of demonstrating the truth. (…) But if what he believes is of such a kind that the grounds that he can give are no surer than his assertion, then he cannot say that he knows what he believes. (§243)

Here is where Moore's negligence lies: he does not carefully distinguish between two things. On the one hand, there are things he knows and in support of which he can give "compelling reasons", *i.e.* reasons that could dismiss any doubt in the mind of his interlocutor,

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[21] This is the kind of assertions Moore made in his articles "A Defence of Common Sense" (1925) and "Proof of an External World" (1939). For a study of the different ways to relate Wittgenstein's and Moore's stances in *On Certainty*, see Moyal-Sharrock and Brenner (2007).

reasons that have a more important epistemic strength than what he is concerned to justify. On the other hand, there are things about which he is certain, but to which he can bring *no* reasons *at all* that could enhance their epistemic value. This conceptual difference corresponds, so to speak, to a difference in location: whereas the first type of beliefs lies inside the epistemic space, the latter lies beyond the space inside which the rules of the epistemic language-game apply. One of these rules could be thus formulated: "one can say 'I know *p*' if and only if the reasons I am able to give in support of *p* are surer than *p*". The problem is that, for many of our beliefs, we cannot provide such reasons: the reasons which are available are either reasons that are less sure or at best as sure as what we are concerned to justify. As a consequence, they slide along the surface of our beliefs, but they can give no support to them. There are some beliefs that are so certain that they are beyond any doubt, and more generally beyond any epistemic consideration. The question of their justification cannot be asked without prompting a feeling of absurdity and discrepancy. Any effort to provide a "belief-holding" reason produces no epistemic benefit. On the contrary, it contributes to arouse a feeling of incongruity, as reported in the following scene:

> My difficulty can also be shown like this: I am sitting talking to a friend. Suddenly I say: "I knew all along that you were so-and-so." Is that really just a superfluous, though true, remark? I feel as if these words were like "Good morning" said to someone in the middle of a conversation. (§464)

In *On Certainty,* Wittgenstein is not concerned with propositions about the reliability of our faculties. He is rather interested in propositions that directly stem from the contemplation of skeptical scenarios, like "I have never been on the moon", "the earth has already existed for such and such a length of time" or "there are physical objects". But let us apply his lessons drawn from his analysis of the latter propositions to the former. They actually belong to the same logical space: the space inside which there is absolutely no sense in applying any epistemic attributes. They constitute the framework inside which such attributions can be made, but the framework is not of the same nature as its content. It belongs to a different category: the category of certainty.

> "Knowledge" and "certainty" belong to different *categories*. (…) I am inclined to believe that not everything that has the form of an empirical proposition *is* one. (§308)

We must not be fooled by the fact that the proposition "my natural intellectual faculties are reliable" seems to be about an empirical contingent fact. We must be aware that empirical propositions do not constitute a "homogeneous mass" (§213). Among them, there are some that have the same status as arithmetical propositions. These specific empirical propositions are like "rigidified" rules, deprived of their contingent content that would make them liable to change. Like arithmetical propositions, they cannot be submitted to a verification process. Such a process could not make us discover anything about them, because they are precisely what defines the space inside which a verification can take place. Any verification attempt would, as it were, wear these propositions on its face. It would therefore betray our lack of concern for the logical differences that exist between "seeming-alike" propositions.

As a consequence, the requirement to know that "*K* is reliable" in order for *K*'s outputs to have the status of knowledge, is inadmissible. Such a proposition does not refer to a belief which aspires to be justified, it refers to an irreversible way of acting that does not wait for an epistemic consecration to do its job of structuring thoughts, actions and linguistic exchanges:

> If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: "This is simply what I do." (1953, §217)

> I want to conceive it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal. (§359)

What I collide with, when I realize that my quest for a justification cannot be satisfied, is a kind of "animal certainty". The privileged manifestation of such a certainty is not linguistic (via the statement "*K* is reliable"), it rather manifests itself through an instinctive and behavioral form, which does not call for any entitlement.

II.1.b – Some Difficulties for a Non-Epistemic Way Out

If this way of linking fundamental beliefs and epistemic assertions has significant merits, the problem is that it maintains a difference in nature between something which resists the application of any epistemic predicate (such as "true", "false", "justified", "known", "doubtful"), and something which is made to be qualified by it. In this respect, it may arouse two types of reactions:

1) If we stick to the existence of a sharp distinction between these two types of propositions, we will have to explain why the skeptical worry is still so present even after we put the rules of the epistemic language-game under close scrutiny. It is no satisfying answer to reply that we are still under the influence of the linguistic spell that makes us feel authorized to flout these rules. It does not give an ear to this meta-skeptical question that seems to be legitimate after all: how do we know that our fundamental certainties are "the right ones", that they are well "harnessed" to the world? This discrepancy may be the sign that what Wittgenstein is concerned with is not what the skeptic is concerned with.

After all, Wittgenstein's imaginary interlocutor in *On Certainty* is not so much the skeptic, as the "dogmatist"[22], *i.e.* someone who considers herself as *possessing* the knowledge the skeptic denies her. If both Wittgenstein and Moore agree on the extravagant character of the question of the skeptic, they are far from being in tune. Wittgenstein is interested in the appropriate conditions of knowledge *assertions*, whereas the skeptic and the dogmatist are both interested in those of knowledge *possession*. Until we have arguments that incontestably establish a strong entailment from the first to the second, we cannot avail ourselves of Wittgenstein's judgment on Moore's misuse of the verb "to know" to declare that, as a consequence, we do not know that "*K* is reliable". If we rely on the supposition that the rules of knowledge possession are not the mere extension of the rules of knowledge assertions, nothing prevents us from attributing to ourselves the knowledge of "framework-propositions", as long as it remains a tacit knowledge and a knowledge that does not call for a foundation. The internalist and evidentialist conditions that apply to knowledge assertions may be given up when what is at stake is the possession of knowledge of things that "go without saying".

2) If on the contrary we choose to deny the sharpness of the distinction between empirical propositions that have a logical content and empirical propositions that have a factual content, we will have to face the objection of conceptual relativism. As Wittgenstein admits, "a language-game does change with time" (§256). It does not only mean that it shifts, but more radically that the frontier between "framework-propositions" and ordinary empirical propositions is very labile and porous:

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[22] By "dogmatist", I refer to what Pryor means in (2000). The dogmatist considers he has basic perceptive knowledge: his perceptual beliefs are immediately justified by his perceptual experiences, without any need for a background proposition such as "my perception is reliable" to be justified. The possession of these *prima facie* justified beliefs enables him to acquire a justification for propositions such as "my perception is reliable" or "I am not a brain-in-a-vat".

> It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid. (§96)

If the logical frontier between propositions is a moving one, if it fluctuates according to the environment we live in, or even according to a mere change of context, do we not incur the risk of being submerged by the flood and ebb tides? Of course, we could reply that what we have in *On Certainty* is a form of contextualism, that does not reek of relativism[23]. But far from soothing our worries, this would make us feel more forcefully our skeptically-framed questions. Pointing to such a difference seems indeed to be possible if and only if, beyond the changes of contexts, there always remains some permanent features of the world, that would be the objects of a "non-contextual, tacit and ungrounded knowledge". It is this kind of knowledge that is aimed at by the questions of the skeptic. Consequently, saying that the framework-propositions may lose their status of "methodological necessities", provided that they are not *all* questioned *at the same time*, betrays a deeply entrenched attachment to the idea that there must be some stability in this world. The reliability of our natural intellectual faculties is one element among others that contributes to making this world a stable one, a world in which we can develop and make predictions. In these conditions, *(KR)* does no longer appear as a principle invented by philosophers who misuse the rule requiring an epistemic ground for every knowledge assertion. Even if we cannot bring such a ground for "*K* is reliable", we still continue to view it as knowledge. It does not shake our trust in it.

II.2. Basic Knowledge as Animal Knowledge

The necessity of *(KR)* having been established, it remains to understand what prevents us from satisfactorily meeting it. One of the presuppositions that makes its fulfillment difficult is the idea that 1) it is only from the outputs of a source *K* that we can establish that "*K* is reliable", and that 2) this bootstrapping process is illegitimate, because viciously circular. I have already briefly referred to a strategy that denies 2) by arguing that there is no circularity at all, insofar as the premisses of the track-record argument are *prima facie* justified, without

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[23] See Williams (2007).

the subject being necessarily required to be justified to presuppose that "*K* is reliable"[24]. The strategy I will contemplate in the following readily allows such a circularity, but denies its devastating effects. It is based on a distinction between two kinds of knowledge: animal knowledge and reflective knowledge.

II.2.a – Sosa's Distinction between Animal and Reflective Knowledge

(KR) is built on a crucial ambiguity: it is said that "a potential source knowledge *K* can yield knowledge for a subject *S* only if *S* knows *K* is reliable". But how should we understand the terms "knowledge" and "knows"? It is often taken for granted that they should be read with the same conceptual glasses. Likewise, in a track-record argument, it is presupposed that if the subject *knows* at the end that K is reliable, then she also *knows* at the beginning that *K* is reliable, so that no increase of knowledge is produced. The fact that she has the impression of better knowing that "*K* is reliable" should not mislead us: this is just an impression.

If that were actually the way things were going, epistemic circularity would be of no help to yield "reliability knowledge", and even less to prove it. Mere redundancy has never proved anything! But taking inspiration from Sosa's distinction between animal and reflective knowledge (1991), we can show that the "reliability knowledge" which is present in the premisses is not the same as that which is obtained through the argument. If the first corresponds to what Sosa calls "animal knowledge", the second is worthy of being called "reflective knowledge". The difference lies in the fact that while animal knowledge refers to a belief that is *apt*, *i.e. accurate* because *adroit* (the belief is true because it is the direct product of our reliable faculties), reflective knowledge refers to a belief that is not only apt, but is also related in the right way by the subject to herself (as the one who takes the responsibility for this epistemic success) and to the total set of her beliefs (her doxastic system). The belief which fulfills the criteria of reflective knowledge is a belief which is apt and justified *for the subject*. The subject does not merely happen to have a true belief, but she considers herself as having something to do with this epistemic success. She is able to relate this belief to her previous ones and to embrace them all in a general and coherent epistemic perspective.

This distinction has inestimable benefits for our problem. If we consider again the structure of a track-record argument, it appears that, at the stage of the premisses, there is animal knowledge of both the particular judgment (*p*) and the epistemic principle *q* ("*K* is reliable"). By the time we reach the conclusion, we have a reflective knowledge of them. Our

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[24] This is Pryor's, Van Cleve's and Bergmann's strategy, based on the adoption of "dogmatism" (footnote 22),

knowledge of *q* is enhanced through the convergence of each premiss with it, and this increase is reflected back on the epistemic quality of each premiss. As a consequence, epistemic circularity is neither redundant nor vicious: the knowledge possessed by the subject at the beginning of the track-record argument is not the same as the one she possesses at the term of it. The latter is better epistemically-loaded than the former.

Furthermore, this solution has the huge advantage of not sacrificing *(ECP)* at any stage of the argument. This is the main difference with the strategy promoted by Cohen and Van Cleve. For the former, "animal knowledge is not closed under known entailment" (2002, p. 327), but the epistemic closure principle is saved for reflective knowledge, and for the latter there is "a particularism of basic knowledge (…) compatible with methodism on inferred knowledge"[25]. This solution was prompted by the wish to escape the "problem of easy knowledge" on the one hand, and the problem of circularity on the other hand. We have seen how epistemic circularity can be positively welcomed. As far as the problem of easy knowledge is concerned, we can reply that if animal knowledge is extended[26], it does not conflict for all that with our intuitions about knowledge. Reflective knowledge of the reliability of our faculties remains what we are the more anxious to possess. Moreover, its acquisition is not as simple as the brief presentation of the track-record argument suggests. It relies on an active mobilization of intellectual virtues, which are not possessed by unreflective beings, such as sagacity, the capacity to make correlations between our beliefs, and some kind of "amplitude of mind" to draw the appropriate conclusions and to find the proper means to bring a truth to light.

II.2.b – Some Difficulties for a Solution Based on a "Two-Level Structure"

However relevant, Sosa's distinction between animal and reflective knowledge will not be retained as such, for it raises some difficulties.

The first difficulty concerns the way Sosa appraises animal knowledge. Even if his distinction has the advantage of embracing the different kinds of knowledge of our epistemic life, it is still enslaved to the idea that, if there is to be knowledge, it has to be a special cognitive achievement. That is why Sosa sometimes seems to think that animal knowledge

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which develops hand in hand with a liberalist conception of the presupposition (footnote 17).

[25] This characterization of Van Cleve's conception (as it is presented in 1979) is due to Sosa, in "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge" (1991, p. 166, footnote 1).

[26] The problem of easy knowledge is blocked because, if the subject "knows" that "*K* is reliable" or that "she is in an appropriate epistemic environment", then we cannot accuse her of discovering too easily (by the use of simple inferential arguments) that "*K* is reliable" or that "she is in an appropriate epistemic environment". She does not *start* believing such things *after* carrying out such inferences.

fails to acquire the status of genuine knowledge, that it only deserves the quality of "near-knowledge". Only reflective knowledge is considered as full-fledged knowledge, for this is the sole kind of knowledge that manifests the capacity of the subject to register information, and above all to integrate it into the global epistemic perspective she has on her entire doxastic system[27]. The problem with this way of characterizing knowledge is that it does not sufficiently take into account the continuity between our different epistemic states. To go from animal knowledge to reflective knowledge seems to imply a kind of "transmutation"[28], a change of nature. This way of viewing encourages us to characterize animal knowledge as "a lesser grade of knowledge", and therefore not very interesting.

Indeed, how could we ascribe the quality of an "achievement", of a "success through ability", to this so-called knowledge? I suspect that the attachment to the conception that, if there is to be knowledge, it must be a kind of remarkable epistemic accomplishment, such as only reflective knowledge could really fill the bill, betrays the idea that a good theory of knowledge must be able to explain why knowledge is more valuable than a true belief. One generally accepted way to explain this supplementary value of knowledge is to mention that it refers to a true belief whose truth is due to its being produced by intellectual virtues[29]. Sosa's theory seems then to be torn between the requirement to keep a specific value to knowledge over a mere true belief, and the necessity to make room for animal knowledge in order to put an end to the problem of the criterion.

The second problem for Sosa concerns the possibility of saving basic knowledge of particular facts. His solution to the problem of the criterion admits the presence of many different kinds of beliefs at the level of animal knowledge. Consequently, it incurs the risk of making basic knowledge completely disappear, the direct outputs of our cognitive faculties being stifled by other – sometimes quite complex – beliefs. They come together as in a swarm. At the level of animal knowledge, we find a variety of "beliefs", such as:

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[27] It must be conceded that Sosa makes room for a meager epistemic perspective in animal knowledge: "One has animal knowledge about one's environment, one's past, and one's experience if one's judgments and beliefs about these are direct responses to their impact – e.g., through perception or memory – *with little* or no *benefit of reflection or understanding*." (1991, p. 240, my italics). But we may presume that the possibility of even a feeble intervention of such reflective virtues is the preserve of men, and that it is not *pure* animal knowledge any more, but rather latent reflective knowledge. This is confirmed afterwards: "no human blessed with reason has merely animal knowledge of the sort attainable by beasts." If beasts are not "endowed with their own epistemic perspectives", we must view the attribution of "knowledge" to them "as metaphorical"(1991, p. 275).
[28] Term used by Sosa in (Sosa and Van Cleve, 2001, p. 196).
[29] This is the explanation promoted by proponents of "virtue epistemology". Here, the term "intellectual virtue" shall be understood as referring to any cognitive faculty, including perception, memory and introspection, in

1) particular beliefs that are the outputs of cognitive faculties ("the table is red"),

2) particular beliefs that are the negations of finely individualized skeptical alternatives ("the table is not white but illuminated by red lights"),

3) general beliefs that take the reliability conditions of our cognitive faculties as their object ("sense perception is reliable"),

4) general beliefs that are the negations of global skeptical alternatives ("We are not brains-in-a-vat").

At first sight, the prospect for keeping basic knowledge (1) seems gloomy: particular outputs of our natural cognitive faculties are so backed up and surrounded by other beliefs – what is more by some very sophisticated ones – that one does not see how one could make the presence of the latter compatible with the presence of basic knowledge, *i.e.* with the presence of knowledge possessed without the knowledge of the reliability of its source. Do we not incur the risk of making animal knowledge too complex? If the knowledge of the reliability of a source is required to obtain knowledge from this very same source, must animal knowledge be so doxastically-loaded for all that? When animal knowledge is at stake, should we not adjust and narrow the conditions of application of *(ECP)*[30]?

A closer look shows that this worry supposes that we subscribe to a certain reading of *(KR)*: it arises if we accept *(KR)ˢ*. It is only if the knowledge of the reliability of *K* must be acquired *before* we exert this source, or if we must at least be antecedently entitled to accept that "*K* is reliable", that the possibility of basic knowledge is threatened. This requirement is the expression of a clear attachment to a foundationalist structure of knowledge, according to which the transmission of any "epistemic positive status"[31] is made along a vertical process. If the assignment of this epistemic positive status must be made along these lines, we cannot maintain the existence of basic knowledge. But is the existence of such an order so obvious?

Furthermore, this difficulty makes sense only if we keep requiring that knowledge be

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accordance with the terminology adopted by Greco. For a discussion of the problem of "value of knowledge", see (Pritchard, Millar, Haddock 2010).

[30] In (2008), Black keeps *(ECP)* right away from animal knowledge too, but he specifies its conditions of application: it is only a "single source closure", *i.e.* the principle relates a knowledge acquired by a source (such as "the table is red") to a knowledge acquired by this very same source (such as "the table is not green"), but not to a knowledge which would require the help of another source, like the faculty to make inferences (such as "the table is not white but illuminated by red lights"). So defined, *(ECP)* does block too easy an acquirement of knowledge but, at the level of animal knowledge, the subject does not know the non-realization of skeptical alternatives.

[31] I borrow this expression from Alston (2005).

construed as a belief. Sosa seems to be well aware of this point, but he balks at giving too precise a terminology to describe our attitude towards the presuppositions that accompany our basic beliefs. He remains quite vague in this respect, alternately speaking in terms of "beliefs", "commitments", "claims", "presuppositions", "convictions" or "hinge-propositions"[32]. Whatever the differences between the proposition as it is implied in the premisses of a track-record argument, and the proposition as it appears in the conclusion, there would be only modal differences, described as a shift from "implicit" to "explicit" beliefs, from "subconscious" to "conscious" and "articulated" beliefs. But then, are we not led to make animal knowledge a rag-bag of an epistemic category?

II.3. Knowledge as an Ability

My Reidian solution to the problem of the criterion retains central elements of both Wittgenstein's and Sosa's solutions. I retain from Sosa the distinction between different levels of knowledge, but I grant the status of full-fledged knowledge to the epistemic background presuppositions that constitute part of our animal knowledge. All the same, I grant the status of knowledge to "animal certainties" inside which our epistemic attitudes take place. This twist is made possible because, from Wittgenstein's remarks, I choose to emphasize the "know-how" flavor which characterizes "hinge-propositions". Of course, Wittgenstein resists claiming that we know such propositions. The rigor with which he carefully underlines the logical rules that govern the use of the term "knowledge" precludes such an option. But even though Wittgenstein does not explicitly state that the appropriate conditions of knowledge assertions are different from the appropriate conditions of knowledge possession, I allow myself such a move. As a consequence, hinge-propositions could very well pretend to the status of knowledge, if by "knowledge that *p*" is meant "the ability to adapt one's behavior to the fact that *p*". Some passages of *On Certainty* convey such an idea:

> "I know that this room is on the second floor, that behind the door a short landing leads to the stairs, and so on." One could imagine cases where I should come out with this, but they would be extremely rare. But on the other hand I

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[32] (2009), especially chapters 4 and 10. About the way to describe our attitude towards these epistemic background presuppositions, such as Reidian first principles, Sosa affirms: "No essential disagreement would now divide us (or Reid) from anyone willing to postulate such implicit commitments, and to assess them through epistemic categories and standards identical and analogous to those used in assessing beliefs." As I show in II.3), I think on the contrary that Reid invites us to a change of category to assess knowledge.

> show this knowledge day in, day out by my actions and also in what I say.
> Now what does someone else gather from these actions and words of mine?
> Won't it be just that I am sure of my ground? - From the fact that I have been
> living here for many weeks and have gone up and down the stairs every day he
> will gather that I *know* where my room is situated. - I shall give him the
> assurance "I know" when he does *not* already know things which would have
> compelled the conclusion that I knew. (§431)

> Thus it seems to me that I have known something the whole time, and yet there
> is no meaning in saying so, in uttering this truth. (§466)

In this perspective, even though it would not be correct to say that "I know that this room is on the second floor", it does not mean that I do not know such a thing. It must be admitted however that not just any conception of knowledge cannot be accommodated to such a linguistic ban. To maintain that our pieces of knowledge manifest through behavior (be it talk, thought or action), and that knowledge assertions are certainly not a uniquely privileged way for us to express our knowledge (whatever kinds of assertions are concerned: implicit or explicit), implies that we give up defining knowledge as a kind of belief. It implies a *change of paradigm* to understand what it is to know something: knowledge does not primarily consist in a certain type of belief, but in "being able to do something".

> The grammar of the word "knows" is evidently closely related to that of "can",
> "is able to". But also closely related to that of "understands". ("Mastery" of a
> technique) (1953, §150)

Even if the ability to do something includes the ability to form a belief which is appropriately related to environmental and psychological facts, we can be appropriately related to such facts without forming a belief. Our intellectual attitude towards known facts is more extended than a mere doxastic attitude: it has more to do with the "mastery of a technique". The mastery of a technique implies a certain ability to adapt our behavior to a change of circumstances, a certain latitude in its conditions of success (the occurrences of this mastery can be more or less well achieved, it does not count as a failure for all that). Such a capacity is not possessed by a belief: if knowledge is construed as a kind of belief (a "true justified belief"), then either it falls or it stays, *i.e.* either the belief deserves the status of

knowledge or it fails to reach it[33].

Even if Reid speaks of knowledge as "a kind of belief", we find in his remarks the impetus to make knowledge a more pervasive epistemic state[34] than mere irresistible beliefs. He lays stress on the powers of knowledge, on the act of knowing, instead of putting it on the known proposition. It does not mean that Reid opens up the way to weaken the standards required for knowledge, but he paves the way to construe knowledge as a robuster attitude than a doxastic (theoretical) attitude[35]. Of course, Reid is still attached to the conception of knowledge which takes it as a kind of belief. But the way he speaks of belief suggests that he is more inclined to depict it as an "ability to adapt to the available evidence" than as a "theoretical attitude of acceptance".

> We give the name of evidence to whatever is a ground of belief. (...)
>
> What this evidence is, is more easily felt than described. (…) but every man of understanding can judge of it, and commonly judges right, when the evidence is fairly laid before him, and his mind is free from prejudice.
>
> (…) All men of common understanding agree, that each of these kinds of evidence[36] may afford just ground of belief (…).
>
> (…) they are all fitted by Nature to produce belief in the human mind. (EIP, II, 20, pp. 228-229)

The way Reid describes evidence is as compatible with an externalist conception of evidence as with an internalist one. The irreducible pluralism of evidence sometimes encourages an internalist reading (when the evidence of reasoning is concerned) and at other

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[33] On this point, see Thébert (2012). About the link between such a conception of knowledge and a form of "epistemic gradualism", see Hetherington (2001). About the question to know whether knowledge should be primarily construed as "knowledge-that" or as "knowledge-how", see Hetherington (2006, 2011).

[34] The term "state" shall be understood in a broad sense, so as to include abilities and dispositions (similarly to Williamson's use of the term in (2000)).

[35] In (2005), Zalabardo takes on this way too. He affirms that *(KR)* constitutes a problem only if we consider that, in the requirement to *know* that "*K* is reliable", knowledge must be understood as a kind of belief. This creates a *prima facie* problem for subjects who "lack the conceptual sophistication that would be required for forming reliability beliefs" (p. 49). If that were the case, we would indeed "make knowledge the exclusive preserve of the intellectual elite who have these concepts at their disposal". To avoid such a mistake, Zalabardo suggests that it is sufficient that our "behavior manifests what we might call *subdoxastic acceptance* of this proposition" (footnote 42, p. 60). Of course, it remains to be known what can count as the display of subdoxastic acceptance of a proposition. Some limitations seem to be required on this matter. As Zalabardo admits: "it is hard to see, for example, under what circumstances my son could count, any time soon, as having warrant for the proposition that any even number is the sum of two primes." This vagueness is typical of abilities: even if manifestations of an ability are not determined, not just anything can count as the manifestation of an ability.

[36] Reid designates "the evidence of sense, the evidence of memory, the evidence of consciousness, the evidence of testimony, the evidence of axioms, the evidence of reasoning".

times an externalist one (when the evidence of the senses is at stake). I presume that the "reliability of our cognitive faculties" is a *fact* that functions as *evidence* for our beliefs. Even if we are not constantly aware of it, and do not permanently have in mind a general picture of ourselves with reliable faculties, this fact guides us in our behavior. Hyman (2006, 2010) illuminatingly gathers these different points in one theory of knowledge:

> knowledge is an ability: the ability to be guided by the facts. Since the facts we are guided by are our reasons, this means that knowledge is the ability to do things, or refrain from doing things, for reasons that are facts. (…) a person knows that *p* (…) if and only if the fact that *p* can be among her reasons for performing a certain kind of action or for refraining from performing a certain kind of action (...).
>
> (…) if, as we ordinarily suppose, evidence consists of facts, a person's total evidence is the sum total of the facts that can guide her assessment of hypotheses. And if knowledge is the ability to be guided by the facts, the sum total of the facts which can guide a person's thought and behaviour in general, and which can guide her assessment of hypotheses in particular, is the sum total of the facts she knows. (2006, pp. 893-894)

Given this equation between a person's evidence and her knowledge, the prospect of solving the problem of the criterion is in sight. It calls for a new formulation of *(KR)*, which makes the requirement to know that "*K* is reliable" more precise. It results in the statement of *(KR)^w* (*w* for "weak"):

> *(KS)^w* A potential knowledge source *K* can yield knowledge for a subject *S* only if *S* knows *K* is reliable. *S* knows *K* is reliable by exercising and mastering *K*. *S* does not necessarily know that she knows it.

Our knowledge of the reliability of *K* manifests itself through our ability to exercise *K* in an appropriate way. We have no separate general knowledge of it. It is given through *K*'s particular uses. We have, so to speak, an "incarnate" knowledge of its reliability, which looks like applied knowledge. In this respect, faculties function as rules, or as "the mastery of a technique": we have no mastery of a rule which is prior to and independent from its applications, in the same way we have no "reliability knowledge" of one of our potential

knowledge sources prior to and independently from the manifestations of this source. It does not mean that "reliability knowledge" comes down to the mere sum of the successful exercises of this source. It does not equal them, even if it is only given through them. The requirement to know that *K* is reliable is maintained, but unlike *(KR)^s* the way to construe this knowledge shifts from an internalist to an externalist reading[37], and more importantly from a conception of knowledge as a "specific epistemic achievement" to a conception of knowledge as "the expression of an ability". Ability is not the mere *causal* condition of knowledge, it is its intrinsic nature. It is not a requisite condition that leads us to knowledge, it is more fundamentally the metaphysical category of knowledge.

Before closing, let us see how coherent this is as an interpretation of Reid's text. The next passage has been taken by Van Cleve as a paradoxical one, because not in tune with his externalist reading of the Scottish philosopher. It deals with the seventh of the first principles of contingent truths, according to which "the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious":

> *If* any truth can be said to be prior to all others in *the order of nature*, this seems to have the best claim; because in every instance of assent, whether upon intuitive, demonstrative, or probable evidence, the truth of our faculties is taken for granted, and is, *as it were*, one of the premises on which our assent is grounded. (EIP, VI, 5, p. 481)

After having acknowledged that it constitutes a "stumbling block" for his interpretation, insofar as it manifests Reid's clear endorsement of *(KR)*, Van Cleve comments on this passage in this way:

> I think that he should not have said that. If Reid is really saying here that the reliability of our faculties is a premise needed to support anything else we claim to know, he is contradicting his frequent insistence that perceptual beliefs, memorial beliefs, and many of our other beliefs are first principles. (2008, pp. 301-302)

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[37] We also find such a move in Zalabardo (2005), who substitutes the principle *(WR)* for *(KR)*: "A belief source is a knowledge source only if the proposition that the source is reliable has warrant for the subject." By this weaker principle, he makes the more radical move to substitute warrant for knowledge.

I do not think we are dealing with a piece of "bad Reid" here. First, it is pretty clear that Reid does not take this principle as really being a premiss upon which the rest of the building of knowledge should be grounded. He actually establishes an analogy between the relation that holds between this first principle and the others, and the relation there is between a premiss and the conclusion of an inferential argument. But this analogy must not be taken literally. The fact that, when I believe that *p*, I take for granted that "*K* is reliable", does not mean that the proposition "*K* is reliable" is a premiss on which my belief that *p* is grounded.

Should Reid have chosen a less misleading analogy? Not necessarily. If he keeps using it, it is because he is well aware that it is all the more enlightening for his readers who have "foundationalist-framed" minds. Reid's rhetorical precautions must not be neglected: he explicitly presents this analogy as a hypothesis, and he straight away specifies its conditions of application. It is meant to be worthwhile "in the order of nature". I suppose this "order of nature" refers to a logical order, the order of exposition we adopt when we give someone our reasons to believe that *p*. It does not necessarily correspond to the occurrent followed order, *i.e.* the order that actually led us to believe that *p*[38].

Reid wants to lead his readers on to another field: a field in which different kinds of propositions can be *concomitantly* accepted by a subject, without one of them preceding the others to provide them with their positive epistemic status. In other words, Reid tries to put forward a form of holism.

> There is hardly any proposition, especially of those that may claim the character of first principles, that stands alone and unconnected. It draws many others along with it in a chain that cannot be broken. He that takes it up must bear the burden of all its consequences; and if that is too heavy for him to bear, he must not pretend to take it up. (EIP, VI, 4, p. 464)

This passage enables us to relate the discussion of the two versions of the problem of the criterion: just as we saw that the dichotomy between "particularism" and "methodism" does not fit in with Reid's remarks, it should be clear now that the knowledge of the first principles (particularly those stating reliability conditions) cannot be disentangled from the knowledge of

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[38] This distinction can be related to the distinction between the reasons we *give* to justify our belief that *p*, when we are asked to do so (in this case, we build an order that is not necessarily the one we actually adopted), and the reasons we *have* to believe that *p*, which make us believe that *p* (but of which we are not necessarily aware, and/or which we would not judge worthwhile to be quoted if someone asked us what our reasons to believe that *p* are). For such a distinction, see Mavrodes (1970, pp. 12-14).

their applied particular judgments. They are like two sides of the same coin.

The knowledge of the reliability of *K* does not require the putting aside of a distinct propositional attitude that would have it as its content, and would be supplementary and prior to *K*'s manifestations. It is concomitant to *K*'s manifestations[39]. In the same way, the trust we have in our mastery of a technique accompanies us each time we exercise it, but it does not precede the use we make of it. Taking for granted the reliability of our cognitive faculties means making an assured, confident use of them. The trust we put in the truth-oriented feature of our intellectual faculties is the criterion of our mastery of them, it is not the cause or a side-effect of their use. Taking the reliability of our faculties for granted is not *believing that* "they are reliable" (it would amount to over-intellectualizing our immediate knowledge[40]). It means *using* them *with trust*, which is the typical manifestation of the possession of an ability. Trust is the internal criterion (not the mere external symptom) of the mastery of an ability.

For Reid, knowledge is a "common feature" of men. By this, he does not want to make it appear as poorly valued but, faithful to a kind of epistemic finalism according to which our Creator has framed our minds so that they are in tune with the way things are, he makes us realize that there is no surprise in our being so well epistemically endowed.

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[39] To take the first *principles* of contingent truths to designate intellectual *powers* lends credit to this reading. This identity is more explicit in *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* than in the *Essays in the Intellectual Powers of Man*: there, the principles of the human constitution are treated as faculties or powers of the mind, whereas the *Essays* tend to convey the idea that they are general propositions. The second reading is favored by the fact that Reid, being well aware of what philosophers and above all the skeptics expect from him, is ready to enumerate the principles. But this systematic presentation must not mask the fact that it is an artificial manner to make the different parts of our original constitution explicit. The *Inquiry* is more focused on the description of the causal processes which underlie our empirical judgments than on the philosophical dispute with the skeptic. That is why Reid does not so much speak of "first principles of knowledge" as of "principles of the human constitution" [I, 1, p. 11]. Most often, he does not distinguish principles of knowledge from powers of mind (my italics): "it must be by an anatomy of mind that we can discover its *powers and principles*" [IHM, I, 1, p. 12], "It must therefore require great caution (…) for a man that is grown up (…) to unravel his notions and opinions, till he finds out the simple and original *principles of his constitution* (…). This may be called an analysis of his *faculties*" [IHM, I, 2, p. 15], "Sensation and memory therefore are simple, original, and perfectly distinct *operations of the mind*, and both of them are original *principles of belief*" [IHM, II, 3, p. 29]. In this perspective, a particular judgment (like "a coach passes by") depends on the fifth of the first principles of contingent truths (which says that "those things do really exist which we distinctly perceive by our senses, and are what we perceive them to be", EIP, VI, 5, p. 476) just as an occurrence of an ability depends on the mastery of this know-how: it is not deduced from it, but is "inspired by" it [IHM, II, 7, p. 37].

[40] About the seventh of the first principles of contingent truths, Reid says that "in most men it produces its effect without ever being attended to, or made an object of thought. No man ever thinks of this principle, unless when he considers the grounds of scepticism; yet it invariably governs his opinions. When a man in the common course of life gives credit to the testimony of his senses, his memory, or his reason, he does not put the question to himself, whether these faculties may deceive him; yet the trust he reposes in them supposes an inward conviction, that, in that instance at least, they do not deceive him." (EIP, VI, 5, p. 482). My contention is that this "inward conviction" does not take the form of a specific doxastic attitude, but rather of a capacity to neglect obstacles, *i.e.* to act in a confident way even in contingent matters.

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