

## Is Imagination *A Priori*?

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CURRENT PLAN: WORK INTO LONGER PIECE

**Abstract.** Sometimes, we come to new knowledge via imaginative processes; plausibly, sometimes, such imagination plays an indispensably warranting role. Is such a role for imagination inconsistent with the apriority of our new knowledge? Stephen Yablo has argued that a certain kind of imaginative engagement, ‘peeking’, is relevantly like reliance on perceptual experience, and thus precludes apriority. I argue that Yablo’s case against the apriority of peeking is not compelling.

### Knowledge via Imagination

Some knowledge is gained via processes involving the imagination. The role of imagination in such events of learning can come in many forms. Here are three:

#### *Daydream*

Harry, daydreaming in his history course, imagines kissing Ginny. He enjoys the experience. Upon noticing his imaginative engagement with this scenario, and his reaction to it, Harry comes to realize, for the first time, that he loves Ginny.

#### *Logic*

While studying for her upcoming logic exam, Hermione imagines what sorts of sentences she might be asked to prove or disprove. She imagines being asked to consider this sentence:  $(A \supset B) \supset (B \supset A)$ . Upon imagining it, she writes it down, then produces a countermodel: let A be false and B be true, and the sentence is false. Thus does she learn, for the first time, that this sentence is not a theorem.

#### *Pentagon*

Neville sees a pentagon, and notices that no two of its sides are parallel. He wonders whether a pentagon can have parallel sides, so he imagines changing the shape of the pentagon he is looking at, calling forth visual imagery as of a pentagon with two parallel sides. He recognizes that the shape imagined is a pentagon with two parallel sides. He concludes that pentagons can have parallel sides, and comes, for the first time, to knowledge of this proposition.

In *Logic*, imagination plays a merely causal role in the warranting of Hermione’s knowledge. There is a rather straightforward way in which we can and should say that the role that imagining being asked about that sentence plays in the epistemology of Hermione’s belief is merely enabling; that imaginative act plays the same role that her perceptual experience as of being

asked about that sentence on an exam would have played, had she then gone on as a result to produce the disproof.

In *Daydream*, Harry's imaginative activity plays a more substantial role. Harry's recognition of his imaginative activities is warranting in his new knowledge; he comes to realize that he is in love in part by realizing that only someone in love would imagine as he did. The warrant for his knowledge depends on warrant for the proposition about imagining.

What about *Pentagon*? In this case, unlike in *Logic*, imagination is playing more than a merely causal role; the imaginative process more directly participates in the warrant for the conclusion. The way that Neville comes to know is a way that involves the exercise of imaginative capacities. Is it therefore relevantly like *Daydream*, in its relying on introspected warrant? Does this kind of imaginative element preclude the apriority of the relevant form of reasoning? The case, one might think, looks antecedently like a paradigmatic instance of *a priori* insight; but does it depend on *a posteriori* faculties? We know that essential evidential reliance on perception is inconsistent with apriority; are the imaginative engagements in play relevantly similar?

Notice that, although imagination plays important roles in *Pentagon*, this is not yet to say that imagination is essential to the relevant knowledge; Neville could have come to his knowledge about pentagons by observing a real pentagon with parallel sides, or perhaps by proving the possibility using purely deductive premises. But it is here stipulated that the imaginative act did play an important role in the genesis of the relevant knowledge. One way in which one might defend the apriority of these cases is to deny that imagination plays an essential role; to insist that one could come to the relevant knowledge in a more 'purely' *a priori* way. I won't be exploring that avenue; let it be granted for the purpose of argument that only via imaginative procedures like the ones indicated can Neville come to his knowledge. He never encounters pentagons with parallel sides, and has no quill and paper with which to draw one, and doesn't know how to prove their possibility without considering an instance. I'm granting, therefore, that Neville must, in Stephen Yablo's terminology, 'peek' in order to come to his knowledge.

## Peeking

According to Yablo, to 'peek' is to bring to bear one's quasi-perceptual faculties with respect to an imagined situation; this, he says, is inconsistent with apriority. Yablo introduces this notion in response to a suggestion from David Chalmers. Chalmers writes:

[A]s an in-principle point, there are various ways to see that someone (a superbeing?) armed only with the microphysical facts and the concepts involved could infer the high-level facts. The simplest way is to note that in principle one could build a big mental simulation of the world and watch it in one's mind's eye, so to speak. (76)

In response, Yablo suggests that watching something in one's mind's eye is a form of watching, and is therefore *a posteriori*:

Asking yourself how something strikes you is using yourself as a measuring device. Information acquired by use of an external measuring device is *a posteriori* on anybody's account. Information acquired by use of an internal one seems no different. What matters is that an experiment is done, the outcome of which decides your response. (457)

If this is right, then Neville is engaging in an *a posteriori* process. According to Yablo, he's simulated for himself a pentagon with parallel sides, and then asked himself how it struck him upon examination in his mind's eye; on finding that it strikes said eye as though it has parallel sides, he concludes that it does have parallel sides. Neville uses his experience as an indication of the fact: the introspected premise, that he, upon examining a particular pentagon with his mind's eye, is struck as if it has parallel sides, is strong evidence that pentagons may have parallel sides. It is straightforwardly contingent that Neville responds so, and his justification for believing that he responds so is straightforwardly introspective.

Some might question whether the introspective nature of Neville's warrant here is inconsistent with apriority. According to a certain type of rationalist tradition, introspection, comprising entirely internal matters, is a source of *a priori* knowledge. This approach is not at present orthodoxy, and I do not mean to revive it. Let's grant, then, that knowledge based essentially on introspection is *a posteriori*. (So the *cogito* is not an *a priori* argument.)

Nevertheless, there is still room to challenge Yablo's suggestion that Neville's reasoning is *a posteriori*, for there is room to challenge whether it does, as Yablo suggests, rely on the introspected warrant Yablo claims for it. We can agree, that is, that Harry's reasoning in *Daydream* is *a posteriori*, while still maintaining that *Pentagon* is importantly different. Does Neville's warrant for believing that pentagons with parallel sides are possible depend epistemically on propositions about what Neville was imagining, and how he reacted to it? It is clear that Yablo thinks that, once we've admitted that his visual imagination played the central, peeking role that I've stipulated it did, we must admit that Neville is self-experimenting. He writes:

These claims might be accepted but shrugged off as irrelevant. ... [A]ny suggestion of self-experimentation was inadvertent. 'I looked at *w* and saw it to contain so-and-so's' is only a colourful description of something far more innocent: intellectually contemplating a world *description* and *thinking* my way to a conclusion about whether there are so-and-so's in *w*.

That is fair enough, on one condition. Self-experimentation had better not be *needed* to work out whether *S* holds in *w*. It had better be that one can reason from a microphysical description of *w* to a conclusion about whether or not *S*. *No peeking*. (459)

But is this right? Does Neville's warrant depend epistemically on propositions of the form, *<I am reacting thus to such-and-such imagined situation>*? Of course his warrant depends at least *causally* on such propositions; had he not imagined a figure with the relevant shape, or failed to react to it by judging it to be a pentagon with parallel sides, he would not have come to the relevant knowledge. But this is not yet to establish that such propositions play evidential roles, as the case of *Logic* shows. There, Hermione's imaginative activities played a causal role in their coming to knowledge, but did not serve as evidence for it. And indeed, it's not enough to observe the disanalogy that in this case, Neville's only route to the knowledge is via this imaginative process; that *X* is a necessary condition for *S*'s coming to know that *p* doesn't entail that *X* is evidence for *p*, or that knowledge of *X* is essential to the knowledge that *p*. The fact that Neville exists, for example, is a necessary condition for his coming to know that pentagons can have parallel sides, but this fact is no part of Neville's evidence, and his warrant for the pentagon conclusion does not in any way depend on warrant for his own existence.

(So Yablo's contention that "self-experimentation had better not be needed" is, strictly speaking, too strong. But I think it can be met anyway.)

Why does Yablo think it clear that Neville's activity is essentially introspective? Here again is the language he uses: "What matters is that an experiment is done, the outcome of which decides your response." But it's not true that in general that, when we recognize something to be the case, we are relying on our introspected reaction, and inferring a conclusion from our response; when I look at the sky and see that it is cloudy, I'm not typically noting a reaction in myself (that I'm inclined to judge it cloudy) and using this fact as an indication of its cloudiness. I *could* reason in such a way, but I don't typically do so; and I certainly don't always do so. My warrant is visual, not introspective. Similarly, suppose I consider whether twenty-one is a prime number, then notice that it is the product of three and seven; therefore, I conclude twenty-one is no prime. No part of my warrant here is introspective; I am not noting in myself, and evidentially relying upon, a tendency to think that twenty-one is divisible by three. My warrant here is *a priori*, not introspective. Can the same be said about Neville's imaginative activity?

Before considering Yablo's particular arguments against the apriority of Neville's process, it is worth considering another, familiar use of imagination to come to knowledge:

### ***Knowledge***

Ron wonders whether necessarily, Snape knows all and only that which he truly and justifiably believes. Then he imagines the possibility that Snape truly believes some proposition on the basis of a justifiably believed falsehood, and realizes that in the case being considered, Snape would justifiably and truly believe something he didn't know. So does Ron come, for the first time, to know that it's possible for Snape to have justified true belief that falls short of knowledge.

As before, let's stipulate that making a judgment about his imagined scenario is Ron's only access to this modal fact about Snape; Ron never observes Snape in Gettier situations, and doesn't know how deductively to prove that it is possible; he, like, Neville, must 'peek' at Snape's imagined situation in order to judge that it is an instance in which Snape has JTB without K. Prima facie, there seems to be little obvious difference between Ron's knowledge and Neville's, with respect to apriority. If Yablo's arguments against the apriority of Neville's reasoning applies equally well to Ron's, then much traditionally *a priori* philosophical inquiry is *a posteriori*. It's not clear that this is a result that Yablo welcomes; he certainly doesn't advertise himself as refuting apriority *tout court*. Nevertheless, many of his arguments, I'll suggest, would, if sound, generalize. Ron peeks just as much as Neville does.

In my view, this creates pressure against thinking of the arguments as sound, but a thoroughgoing engagement with skepticism about apriority *tout court* is beyond my present scope.

Yablo offers three arguments against the apriority of peeking. None, I think, are compelling.

### **Peeking at Headaches**

First, Yablo suggests that the sort of geometrical knowledge Neville obtains is too much like the knowledge that one has a headache to be a plausible candidate for apriority. He writes:

It might be argued that mental experimentation *is* different [from *a posteriori* knowledge]. Knowledge gained from it is acquired within the privacy of one's own mind. You determine that S

without appealing at any point to information about the outside world. Shouldn't that be enough to make the knowledge *a priori*?

No, for you determine that you have a headache the same way. Knowledge of headaches is certainly not *a priori*. (457-8)

As indicated above, I agree that knowledge of headaches is not *a priori*. However, I do not see that Yablo makes a convincing case that knowledge of a headache is relevantly like peeking. One immediate way to see this is to observe what a direct correlate for peeking would be. Harry knows that his head aches when Voldemort becomes angry; suppose he considers the question of what sort of phenomenal experience he would have, were Voldemort to become angry. He imagines, therefore, the state of affairs in which he has a headache, and then he projects himself into that state of affairs, 'trying it on', and finds, of the imagined situation, that it is painful. His knowledge of the phenomenal character of the hypothetical headache derives from peeking. This process, it should be clear, is importantly different from the one in which Harry introspects and discovers an actual headache, and that it hurts. This latter involves no peeking into an imagined scenario; it involves only the ordinary experiencing of headaches. Of course, it is not very plausible that in either of these cases, Harry's belief is *a priori*; in the one case, it is introspective, and in the other, it is based on his *a posteriori* knowledge about the connection between the Dark Lord and himself. The point is that the cases are importantly different from one another; contrary to Yablo's assertion, the introspecting of a headache is *not* much like a prototypical instance of peeking. The *a posteriori* nature of Harry's knowledge about his actual headache is secured directly by the fact that it relies on introspective warrant; whether this is so in the case of Neville's knowledge about pentagons is just what is under dispute. Yablo has, plausibly, refuted the suggestion that just *any* knowledge 'acquired within the privacy of one's own mind' is thereby *a priori*; but this is far from the most plausible attempt to explain the *apriority* of Neville's reasoning.

Instead, we might say the following. When Neville brings to mind an image of a pentagon with a certain shape, he makes available that shape to his reasoning. The imaginative act helps to bring a particular shape to mind, to consider it, and to recognize truths about it. Just which shape is brought to mind plays a role in one's reasoning process, but that role is exhausted in its picking out a particular content; there is no evidential, warranting role played by the proposition that one is thinking of some particular shape rather than another. The role of the imaginative experience, on this model, would be analogous to the widely-accepted possible role of sensory experience in helping to bring certain conceptual contents to mind for the purpose of *a priori* reasoning, whether by helping the subject to acquire the relevant concepts, or by merely helping to bring a certain content to mind. Neville's imagination-based knowledge, then, would be thought to be critically different from Harry's knowledge in *Daydream*. Neville's thought experiment isn't an experiment being run on his own thoughts, any more than Ron's is.

### **Digression: Thought Experiments**

This point is significantly parallel to an important discussion on broader questions about thought experiments more generally. Ichikawa and Jarvis (2009) argued that the proper formulation of intuitions about thought experiment scenarios invokes judgments about scenarios that are considerably richer than the interpreted texts of the stories that are used to generate the intuitions. For example, in engaging with a Gettier story, we imagine a scenario that has features that go well beyond what is strictly required by the text; we imagine, for example, that the protagonist

didn't know in advance about the unusual circumstances present, even when (as in the usual case) such is never specified. Such enrichment is common to our engagement with fiction generally; we thought we could bring it to good use with respect to thought experiments. We argued this approach to enjoy important advantages over Timothy Williamson's (2007) treatment, which involved counterfactual reasoning with only the literal content of the text used to generate the story. In particular, our account, we claimed, unlike Williamson's, was not unduly hostage to contingent, hidden, features of actuality. Such close ties to contingent matters, we suggested, were problematic for at least two reasons: first, it was implausible that when actuality was relevantly different from our expectations, the Gettier intuition was thereby false; and second, that it was implausible that we could very often know the content of the Gettier intuition, understood in the way Williamson proposed, because to do so, we'd have to know that actuality wasn't in the relevant ways deviant.

In response, Williamson (2009) suggests that our account does face the same epistemic risks as does his own; if the principles for enriching texts into stories encode sensitivity to actuality, then it may be that what is true in the relevant fictions is different from what we think it is, and that our premise, based on facts about truth in fiction, is similarly epistemically and metaphysically precarious. The response to this charge, I think, is just parallel to the discussion of Neville's imagining about the pentagon. The engagement with truth in fiction does not play a warranting role in the deliverance of the Gettier reasoning. If, as is plausible, truth in fiction is not an *a priori* matter, this is no obstacle to the apriority of the Gettier reasoning, construed the way we intend it. Our engagement with truth in fiction plays a role in bringing the relevant scenario to mind; that role could be played by any number of other processes instead. As we wrote:

Here, our invocation of fictional truth explains how we come to entertain the proposition *p*, but the concept FICTION does not enter into the Gettier reasoning itself. Competence with truth in fiction is an important step in engaging with the thought experiment, but its role is exhausted before the actual invocation in reasoning of (2p), the Gettier intuition. Put another way, one's ability to grasp a story told through a text serves only as a means to grasp a certain proposition, which will figure into the intuition; the content of the intuition itself makes no use of the notion of truth in fiction. (230)

And, by the same lights, skeptical worries about whether the proposition we end up considering is *really* true in the fiction do not cut against the warrant for the Gettier conclusion. Put another way: the warrant for the proposition *<I am considering the scenario that is the content of the Gettier fiction just told>* is *a posteriori*; that is entirely consistent with someone engaging in *a priori* reasoning on the content considered. To deny this would be to insist that *all* reasoning-based warrant is essentially introspective. But this is a mistake. Although all proper reasoning does require one, in some sense, to keep track of what is being considered, this does not imply that all reasoning is introspective, and hence *a posteriori*. This goes for the case of a Gettier thought experiment, and for the case of Neville's visual imagining. His recognition that the pentagon he has in mind strikes him in a certain way is no essential part of his warrant. That he correctly judges, of some possible shape, that it is both a pentagon and a shape with two parallel sides, is sufficient for his knowledge. (Higher-order knowledge, knowledge that he knows such things to be possible, of course, is plausibly essentially introspective and *a posteriori*.)

## Peeking Uses Perceptual Faculties

So the introspection model of ‘peeking’ imagination-based knowledge is, I think, ill-motivated. But this is not Yablo’s only argument against the apriority of peeking. He also argues that the modality by which we apprehend that the imagined object or situation has the properties in question, being of a sensory kind, is not one by which we can achieve *a priori* knowledge. Yablo writes:

[W]hen you conjure up an image of *w*, you are *simulating* the activity of really looking at it. Simulated looking is not a distinct process, but the usual process run ‘off-line’. Knowledge gained by internal looking is not *a priori* because it is acquired through the exercise of a perceptual faculty rather than a cognitive one. (458)

(Briefly: I’m inclined to quibble with the use of ‘cognitive’ here. The relevant faculty—which I agree to be relevantly perceptual—is nevertheless cognitive in the straightforward sense that it is a rational exercise of thought. Undoubtedly, Yablo is here intending to use the term here in a more restricted way, though I confess it’s not obvious to me what that restricted sense is. At any rate, I’ll use ‘cognitive’ in its usual, more general sense.)

The suggestion that visual imagery involves the exercise of standard perceptual faculties run ‘off-line’ is a standard one; phenomenological, functional, and neurophysiological considerations do support the idea that visual imagination involves many of the same perceptual faculties as does prototypically *a posteriori* visual experience. But why think that this cuts against their issuance into *a priori* verdicts? Is it the case that in general, when a judgment is the product of a cognitive process that enjoys important similarities, and shared mechanisms, with prototypically *a posteriori* processes, that process must be *a posteriori*?

I see no particular reason to think so. Whether a particular judgment is *a priori* or *a posteriori* depends not on what sort of process produces it, but on whether it depends upon experiential warrant. Note that running Yablo’s inference in the reverse direction is an obvious mistake: take some bit of knowledge that is admitted to be *a priori*, say, the knowledge that if Frank were a bachelor, then he would be unmarried, produced in this way: we imagine Frank as a bachelor, infer that he must be unmarried, and discharge the assumption, leading to belief in the conditional, if Frank were a bachelor, he would be unmarried. Now, we reason that the process just undertaken does not involve a cognitive mechanism wholly independent of our general recognition procedures for identifying bachelors and unmarried people in the world; instead, it’s the usual process, run off-line. (Timothy Williamson nicely makes the point that there is no special faculty of counterfactual reasoning; instead, counterfactual reasoning recruits all the same cognitive processes as do ordinary belief-forming mechanisms. His quick proof of this conclusion involves the evaluation of counterfactuals with trivially true antecedents; evaluating these are equivalent to evaluating their consequents. (xxx))

So when I now judge that Derek is a bachelor, I’m using the same cognitive process as the one I used off-line a moment ago; since that one issued into apriority, so too does this one; so I know *a priori* that Derek is a bachelor. The absurdity of this conclusion shows the mistake of characterizing apriority by processes; it should be characterized instead by the nature of the warrant—what is the *input* into the relevant process? If it is experiential, then the output is *a posteriori*; if it isn’t, then the output is *a priori*. The fact that supposing Frank to be a bachelor involves the simulation of an *a posteriori* state is irrelevant for the question of whether the

ultimate knowledge is *a priori*; so likewise is it irrelevant that, in imagining his pentagon, Neville is simulating an *a posteriori* state.

Perhaps one will worry that I proceed illegitimately by taking it for granted that we can know *a priori*, in the way suggested, that if Frank were a bachelor, he would be unmarried. Whether this is legitimate depends on my dialectical target. Against a skeptic about apriority *tout court*, I here beg important questions. But I am not here engaging with an apriority skeptic *tout court*; I'm engaging with Stephen Yablo, who argues that peeking is inconsistent with apriority, but that other, non-peeking, processes are *a priori*. He admits explicitly that “[i]f you think up a counter-example to argument form F in your head, then you know *a priori* that F is invalid.” (458) He argues that there is something special about peeking that distinguishes the sorts of imaginative processes discussed here from the *a priori* ones. I'm arguing that his arguments generate no such distinction; that arguments like Neville's can be *a priori*, given that the paradigmatic ones can too.

One might, of course, argue in the opposite direction, agreeing with me that the ‘peeking’ cases and standard alleged examples of apriority ought to be treated alike, and that the peeking cases cannot be apriori, and therefore that the others aren't either. This would be to motivate skepticism about apriority *tout court*; there is, of course, a respectable contemporary tradition in this vein—one version of it derives from Quine, and another has recently been articulated by Williamson. It represents a serious challenge, and one worthy of careful engagement. That's a project for another day. The project for today is to argue that Yablo's intermediary position, charging only the ‘peeking’ cases as *a posteriori*, is unmotivated.

### ***A Posteriori* Track Records**

A third reason Yablo rejects the apriority of peeking is that, in his words,

[S]ome imagined reactions are a better guide to real reactions than others. Imagined shape reactions are a good guide, you say, and you are probably right. But it is hard to see how the knowledge that they are a good guide could be *a priori*. If the mind's eye sees one sort of property roughly as real eyes do, while its take on another sort of property tends to be off the mark, that is an empirical fact known on the basis of empirical evidence. I know not to trust my imagined reactions to arrangements of furniture, because they have often been wrong; now that I see the wardrobe in the room, I realize it is far too big. It is only because they have generally been right that I am entitled to trust my imagined judgments of shape. (458)

This passage, I think, conflates knowledge with higher-order epistemic attitudes. It is one thing for a process to issue into knowledge for a subject; it is another for the subject to know that the process issues into knowledge, or to know that it is a reliable process. Yablo's arguments seem targeted only at the latter. Arguing that, for all we know, a process works badly, directly targets only a claim to knowledge of knowledge, not the first-order knowledge claim itself.

Of course, it may be that Yablo is thinking there are important connections between first-order knowledge and knowledge of reliability, or knowledge of knowledge. Whether such connections obtain is a controversial matter, but perhaps he's happy here to commit to them. And indeed, I'm inclined to think that there are such connections; here is a recent formulation by Stuart Cohen that strikes me as plausibly pretty close to true:

**KR**            A potential knowledge source K can yield knowledge for S, only if

S knows that K is reliable.

If such a connection between higher-order attitudes and first-order knowledge obtains, does Yablo's argument serve against the apriority of peeking-involved imaginative processes? No; he has no argument against the conclusion of the relevant conditionals: he does not object to the claim that we do know that our reactions to shapes tend to be reliable. Indeed, he agrees that this is probably true. What he's keen to emphasize is only that this cannot be known *a priori*. But even if that KR is true, it doesn't entail APKR:

**APKR**      A potential knowledge source K can yield *a priori* knowledge for S, only if S knows *a priori* that K is reliable.

However plausible knowledge requirements on knowledge in general are, it is not at all plausible to convert them into *a priori* knowledge requirements on *a priori* knowledge, any more than it is to convert them into testimonial knowledge requirements on testimonial knowledge (i.e., in order to know via testimony, you must know *by testimony* that your testimonial source is reliable).

Notice that even if a strong version of the KK principle is true, it will not convert *a priori* knowledge into *a priori* knowledge of *a priori* knowledge; it will convert it only to *knowledge of knowledge*, silent on the question of whether the knowledge of knowledge is *a priori* (it patently isn't), or indeed on whether it is known that one's knowledge is *a priori* (this might be so, but is strictly stronger than KK). Or: even if we allow very blatant bootstrapping to come to knowledge of a reliable *a priori* faculty to recognize K propositions, our new knowledge will not be *a priori*. It involves an induction on pairs: *p* (something I know *a priori*) and my faculty returned the judgment that *p* (something I know via introspection).

So, that we don't know *a priori* whether we're any good at recognizing shapes with parallel lines in imagination does not cut against the apriority of our verdicts about parallel lines.

Another problem with this argument from Yablo is that it, like his other arguments, overgeneralizes. It is an *a posteriori* matter how good we are at recognizing matters of logical consequence; some people are better at it than others, and improvement can come with training, and it takes some experience with one's self and one's track record in order to come to a warranted belief about how good we are at recognizing logical implications. How good I am at logic is an *a posteriori* matter, for me or for anyone else. This doesn't make logic an *a posteriori* matter, although it does mean that we should be willing to revise our *a priori* beliefs in the face of sufficient evidence undermining our reliability.

## **Experimental Philosophy and Knowledge of Philosophical Abilities**

It is perhaps worth noting that the point made here has broader implications for recent debates about the methodology of philosophy. Some of the recent findings in the experimental philosophy literature have concerned the empirical discovery of factors which influence the reliability of our judgments about traditionally *a priori* matters. For example, Swain et. al. (2008) present evidence that epistemic intuitions vary according to the order in which cases are presented; similarly, Schnall et. al. (2008) cite experiments indicating that evaluative judgments vary according to whether they are made at a messy desk, or whether the subjects have recently washed their hands. According to a tempting, but mistaken, interpretation of these results, philosophical investigation can now proceed only in an *a posteriori* manner. We ought not to

continue to use an evidential source—armchair judgments about various situations—without some kind of assurance whether we're in circumstances that are likely to lead towards errors. This assurance, of course, can only come *a posteriori*; and indeed, it is plausible that in many circumstances, it can only come via focused science.

What this indubitably shows is that many, perhaps all, putatively *a priori* judgments are susceptible to *a posteriori* defeaters. I can always acquire empirical reason to believe that my *a priori* faculties are functioning poorly and ought not to be trusted. Metaphilosophy—the philosophical study of philosophy, including that of philosophical methodology, is in general an *a posteriori* discipline. But this is consistent with the apriority of much first-order philosophical investigation.

A simple model illustrating this compatibility is one in which the interference of a systematic human error is a defeater for *a priori* knowledge and of full understanding; in the absence of such errors, we are able to achieve *a priori* knowledge. In ordinary cases, when we are not making such errors, we have warrant sufficient for knowledge—we are not here forced to reject the attractive ideas that this warrant does not derive from sensory input, or that it does derive from understanding of the relevant propositions. On this approach, an empirical understanding of our susceptibility to such errors can help put us in a position to achieve more *a priori* knowledge. It follows, of course, that whether one has *a priori* knowledge is not *a priori*; but this is antecedently obvious, and no cause for concern.

On a similar theme, compare Williamson (2007):

[P]sychological experiments might in principle reveal levels of human unreliability in proof-checking that would undermine current mathematical practice. To conclude on that basis alone that mathematics should become an experimental discipline would be hopelessly naïve. (7)

I should add that the dialectic is here complicated by the fact that Williamson himself does not consider philosophy to be *a priori*, as he rejects the dichotomy between apriority and aposteriority on more general grounds; these require their own investigation. My present concern is limited to Yablo's argument that the distinctively imaginative character of arguments like Neville's undermines apriority. I conclude that it does not.

## Conclusion

According to Yablo, whenever we 'peek' at imagined scenarios, our quasi-perceptual experience of what those scenarios are like is *a posteriori* warrant. But that I am imagining such-and-such a figure or situation comprises no essential component to my warrant; I may reason according to the contents of my thoughts, without reasoning according to the proposition that I am entertaining such thoughts. To insist that the latter always comprise essential warrant is a way of, in Williamson's terms, psychologising philosophical evidence. Psychological facts are *a posteriori*, so, if an argument relies on psychological evidence, then its conclusion can be known at best *a posteriori*. But there is no more reason to psychologize Neville's evidence than Ron's, when he considers a case of justified true belief without knowledge. And to psychologize the latter is unduly to restrict one's evidential base.

Perceptual beliefs do not ordinarily rely on introspected premises about sensory experience. Neither do judgments about imagined scenarios in general depend on introspected premises about imagined reactions. There is therefore no in-principle obstacle to their apriority.

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