BOOK SYMPOSIUM: NUNO VENTURINHA.
Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology
(Springer, 2018, 120 pages)

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Moral epistemology
Wittgenstein

Abstract: This book symposium comprises a précis of Nuno Venturinha's *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (Springer, 2018) together with four critical commentaries on different aspects of the book by Marcelo Carvalho, João Vergílio Gallerani Cuter, Marcos Silva and Darlei Dall'Agnol, and the author's replies.

Nuno Venturinha - *Epistemic Contextualism, Subject-Sensitive Invariantism and Insensitive Invariantism: Anything Else?*

This paper aims to provide an overall picture of what lies at the heart of my book *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* (2018) although the examination ranges even further afield. Section 1 contrasts epistemic contextualism with what I call context-sensitive objectivism (CSO). Section 2 discusses a major strand of thought in contemporary epistemology that also reacts against traditional contextualism: subject-sensitive invariantism. Finally, section 3 explores insensitive invariantism, including Williamson's anti-sceptical version of the latter. I argue that CSO has considerable advantages over each of them.

1. EPISTEMIC CONTEXTUALISM

Epistemic Contextualism (henceforth EC) is standardly taken to be concerned with knowledge attributions and to have as its main feature the indexicality of "know". Traditional EC theorists seek to explain this predicate in terms of the same semantic factors that account for our use of gradable adjectives which, given their vagueness, can be modified by intensifiers and downtoners. For example, to

talk about a cycle route as being "long" is evidently vague. If you are just an occasional cyclist, 50 miles may look like a *very* long ride, but someone well-trained could say instead that it is a *fairly* long distance. Similarly, the idea is to regard sentences of the form "*S* knows that *p*" as obeying to different epistemic standards that are made salient in the conversational context. These standards can be *higher* or *lower*, that is, more or less epistemically demanding, and will determine in each case what counts as "knowledge"—a totally relative concept from the contextualist point of view. According to Stewart Cohen, the earliest major proponent of EC,[1] "one speaker may attribute knowledge to a subject while another speaker denies knowledge to that same subject, without contradiction" (1987, 3; 1988, 97). Keith DeRose, another leading EC theorist, considers that "[t]his lack of contradiction is the key to the sense in which the knowledge attributor and the knowledge denier mean something different by 'know'" (1992, 920). But to what extent can it be legitimately argued that there is no contradiction? In *Description of Situations* (2018, ch. 1) I claim that the contradiction is unavoidable if a strong conception of knowledge is assumed. EC, of course, is directed exactly against such a conception putting virtually all the emphasis on the rules that govern our practical reasoning. As Patrick Rysiew emphasizes, "in itself, EC is silent about *knowledge*" (2011, 111, fn. 1). However, if EC is also committed, as its proponents forcefully defend, to eradicating radical

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[1] David Lewis' 1979 "Scorekeeping in a Language Game" was undoubtedly a forerunner of EC but it would take him several years to offer a comprehensive account as found in his 1996 "Elusive Knowledge" (see Lewis 1983 and 1999).

scepticism,[2] then critics like Richard Feldman (1999, 2001, 2004) and Crispin Wright (2005) are right in stressing that a relativist account of "know" leaves the sceptical challenge untouched. The argument that radical scepticism will only arise in high-standards contexts but not in low-standards, ordinary ones looks much more like an inadmissible capitulation to the sceptic, who is perfectly happy to make demands that are exceedingly difficult to meet, than like a proper solution to the problem.

Let me illustrate some of these worries with an example. Ralph has been a rock fisherman his whole life and he is used to observing the phases of the moon to predict high and low tides. For someone as experienced as him, tide charts are almost unnecessary. Ralph knows that spring tides occur during the full and new moons, and he always gets his best catches when the tide is rising. But is it licit to say that he really *knows* it? Ralph has only an elementary education and cannot give a full account of the gravitational interactions between the earth, the moon and the sun. His understanding comes from the regularities he has been able to identify from experience. In comparison with an astronomer or a geophysicist, who can explain the various forces involved and provide detailed calculations for their conclusions, Ralph's *knowledge* suddenly becomes *ignorance*. So should we come up to Ralph and say he does not know what he apparently knew? I think Ralph would simply reply: "Bring me those scientists and I'll give them a fishing lesson!" Ralph's simplified picture of the intricate phenomena at stake serves a practical purpose and it completely fulfils this end. It is patently clear, however, that Ralph would be at a loss to explain long-term variations such as draconic spring

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[2] DeRose's 1995 "Solving the Skeptical Problem" makes a clear and unambiguous statement of such intention (see DeRose 2017, ch. 1). See also Cohen 1999 and 2000.

tides, which occur roughly every 9.3 years (see Wilson 2012; Wilson and Sidorenkov 2013). Should we then assert, as Plato did nearly twenty-five centuries ago in the *Theaetetus*, that knowledge must be accompanied by an explanation? I see no other way if "knowledge" is understood in this strong sense, but even the scientific explanation has its limits. There can obviously be much longer-term variations at a macro-temporal level which involve aspects that are still to be grasped or that will never be grasped.

What is the EC theorists' take on this? They maintain that it all depends upon the context in which the attributors find themselves. An attributor whose stake is low and another whose stake is high will respectively say that Ralph knows and does not know what is happening for the simple reason that, in DeRose's words, they "mean something different by 'know'". Indeed, it has never been an issue for Ralph to offer a systematic account of tides. He just wants to *ordinarily know* his way around them and have the best fishing. An unusually large, draconic tide can catch him every decade or so but he is also able to notice its long-term consistency and err on the side of caution. He does not *scientifically know* why it happens; he only *ordinarily knows* that those extreme tides occasionally happen. On the other hand, astronomers and geophysicists understand "know" in a specialized way. For them, it means to integrate lots of technicalities into a coherent theory, which is completely alien to Ralph's mind when he sits on a rock with his fishing rod. But, despite EC's ingeniously crafted argument, do not the attributors presuppose that both Ralph and the scientists are *knowing* something by means of making approximations to its *truth*? This way of speaking is essentially uncongenial to any EC theorist because the basic assumption of contextualism is precisely, as Kevin Hermberg sensitively put it, "that truth and knowledge are relative to a specific social context and thus that there is no such thing as objective truth arrived at by

cognizers" (2011, 163). *Description of Situations* challenges this relativist, subjectivist view and proposes a radically different perspective in epistemology: what I have called elsewhere Context-Sensitive Objectivism, which I abbreviate as CSO (Venturinha forthcoming a). CSO is not driven by the mere context-sensitivity of knowledge attributions but rather by the objectively context-sensitive basis of our "claims *about* knowledge"—what Rysiew (2011, 111, fn. 1) stresses that EC is not interested in. This may seem contradictory but I am not alone in thinking that a compatibility between context-sensitivity and objectivism is possible. For example, in reflecting upon the "contextually sensitive" nature of "chance ascriptions", which are conceived within an "objectivism about chance", Toby Handfield avers apropos of context-sensitivity that "although it might mean that *what proposition is asserted* by a given sentence may depend, in part, on subjective factors, the truth conditions for the proposition asserted need not depend on subjective factors" (2012, 123). Let me briefly sketch the fundamentals of this idea.

CSO assumes that there are *n* epistemic possibilities (*EP*) inherent to a state of affairs *p*. By the epistemic possibilities of *p*, I mean the various ways in which *p* can be objectively known, regardless of whether *p* is eventually known in a context *C* at a time *t* by a subject *S*.[3] It follows from this

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[3] This notion of "epistemic possibilities" is totally different from DeRose's, whose concern lies in "possibilities of the kind that sentences of the form 'It is possible that P' […] typically express" (1991, 581). Recently, Scott Aikin and Thomas Dabay have suggested in a way similar to DeRose that "[s]omething is an epistemic possibility only if *we* don't know it doesn't obtain" and formalized this principle in modal terms as follows: "EP: E$\Diamond$p $\supset$ ~K~p" (2019, 119, my emphasis). In truth, this had already been propounded by Ian Hacking in his initial discussion of the issue when he wrote: "a state of affairs is possible if it is not known not

definition of *EP* that the knowability of *p* rests on mind-independent facts. In order to preserve the objectivity of *p* when it is accessed in a given *C* at some *t* by a certain *S*, I see no need to distinguish, as Husserl did, between a situation and a state of affairs.[4] The recognition of what can be objective in *p* cannot be done at the expense of drawing an intangible line separating *p* and, say, *p**, its decontextualized version. What CSO vindicates is that all aspects about *p* that can be known by *S* in period *t* resulting from *C* are *p*-subordinated. Note that, like Roderick Chisholm, I am using the propositional variable *p* to denote a state of affairs (see Chisholm 1986, 30 *et passim*).[5] Therefore, within the framework of CSO, the EC-type sentence "*S* knows that *p*" depends on there being a corresponding state of affairs *p* that is propositionally expressible. Again, this propositional

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to obtain, and no practicable investigations would establish that it does not obtain." (1967, 149). Handfield (2012, 24, 71) also discusses "epistemic possibility" along these lines.

[4] Husserl's distinction between "situation" (*Sachlage*) and "state of affairs" (*Sachverhalt*) is explained in his rather idiosyncratic style as follows: "What we call a situation […] appears here merely as the *passively preconstituted foundation*, qualitative or relational, of all these states of affairs; but subsequently, if the states of affairs have been constituted and objectified in an original predication, this foundation can be apprehended objectively as the identical situation which underlies them." (1973, 241) Wittgenstein also uses these two terms in the *Tractatus*, but he takes a more monist approach seeing "a situation in logical space" as "the existence and non-existence of states of affairs" (1961, 2.11). I explore this issue further in chapter 2 of *Description of Situations*.

[5] Alluding to "Frege's use of 'thought' or '*Gedanke*'", Chisholm argues that "propositions" can be regarded as "a subspecies of states of affairs" (1986, 29). Frege actually occupies a central place in chapters 4 and 5 of *Description of Situations*.

expressibility of *p* is psychologically independent from *S*. This is what allows the sentence "*S* knows that *p*" to be ultimately true or false. What makes it true or false can neither be the attributor's "own reasoning ability"—namely when the subject and the attributor are the same[6]—nor a consensus within epistemic groups, as suggested by Cohen (1986, 579; 1987, 15) and other contextualists. "*S* knows that *p*" is true iff *S*'s knowledge matches one or more of the *n* epistemic possibilities belonging to *p*. Error, on the contrary, occurs when there is a mismatch in relation to *p*. Context-sensitivity matters only insofar as it captures the fluidity of reality, whose ever-changing nature excludes immutable truths. It is in this sense that, I am convinced, CSO is able to avoid what John Turri, in commenting on Michael Williams' rejection of "epistemological realism", describes as "[t]he realist's major mistake", which "is to suppose that every belief has an utterly unchangeable epistemological character" (2014, 29). Turri goes on to say that "in everyday life, the evidential requirements for beliefs 'shift with context'" concluding that "[t]here are no fixed and immutable relations of epistemic priority" (ibid.). The anti-realist's major mistake, as I see it, is to suppose that context shift cannot have an objective basis. This was what led Williams to reject that we should believe "that a proposition has a definite epistemological status simply in virtue of being 'about the world'" (1988, 425).[7] It is little surprise that Williams (2018,

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[6] This relation is expressed in sentences of the form "I know that *p*" and, as I discuss below, its subjectivity was explored by some theorists as a different kind of contextualism.

[7] What Williams characterizes as the sins of epistemological realism is exactly what I take to be its virtues, namely: "To treat 'our knowledge of the world' as a genuine totality, as even a possible object of wholesale assessment, is to suppose that there are objective epistemological relations underlying the shifting contexts

2019a, 2019b) puts too small a price on Wittgenstein's so-called "hinge propositions" of *On Certainty*, which in *Description of Situations* I take to be the best candidates for those propositions "about the world".[8] But let me resume my argument.

If CSO is right, then Ralph will know a tidal occurrence p if he can estimate at least $n - 1$ epistemic possibilities of p, but he will not be able to offer a comprehensive estimation of p as astronomers and geophysicists will since the latter depends on an articulation in a justified theory of the epistemic possibilities $n - 1$, $n - 2$, $n - 3$, …, ideally reaching $n - n$. I can hear the EC theorist grumbling: "So what's new if they all know? That's the point!" However, Ralph does not know p because he himself or someone else attributes this knowledge to him on the presumption that to "know" means in this context to estimate fortnightly spring tides. He does know p because he knows something about p that originates from p. When compared to a scientist's knowledge, Ralph's knowledge looks extremely narrow. But the most important thing is that they do not "mean something different by 'know'" for on their different planes they are making approximations to the truth of p. If knowledge were a concept determined by the epistemic standards of an individual or a social group, and not by the states of affairs themselves, we would have to accept unreasonable claims to know made by demented persons or conspiracy theorists like

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and standards of everyday justification. It is to assume that context-sensitivity does not go all the way down, there being rather an underlying objective structure of justificational relations that philosophical reflection brings into view and which allows us to determine, in some general, uniform way, whether we are entitled to claim knowledge of the world." (1988, 425)

[8] I respond to Williams 2019b—which is a commentary on *Description of Situations*—in Venturinha 2019.

flat earthers. As the radical sceptic has no qualms about raising doubts about what normal people take for granted, defenders of a flat earth make use of the most perverse arguments to call into question all scientific evidence that the earth is spherical. And, astonishing as it may seem, all that EC can say about flat earthers and radical sceptics is that, given their unusually high epistemic standards, they may well be right. We would be tempted to agree with Timothy Williamson that "contextualists are apt to console themselves with the thought that although most denials of 'knowledge' in [a] context of scepticism are correct, in everyday contexts many assertions of 'knowledge' are also correct" (2005a, 689). However, what Williamson acutely observes is "the gravity of the situation in which the sceptic has put contextualists, on their own analysis" (ibid.). Let me adapt an example Williamson gives to illustrate this point— there being a whiteboard in the room within the context of an epistemology seminar and outdoors—to the case I was discussing and follow the direction of his line of reasoning. If someone affirms, against flat earthers, "Scientists know that the earth is round", the factivity of knowledge implies that the analytically entailed sentence "The earth is round" be true in *both* the flat earthers' world (even if they take this sentence to be false) and the scientists' world.[9] Either the earth is flat or it is round! But a scrupulous contextualist, in the face of flat earthers' criticism, will dodge the choice and contradictorily assert "The earth is round and I don't know that the earth is round". Mylan Engel Jr. summarizes well the conundrum in which EC is trapped when he defines "the metalinguistic turn":

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[9] On the factive character of knowledge, see also Williamson 2000, ch. 1, and, specifically directed against contextualism, 2001, 26 ff.

> First, contextualists maintain that there is no correct context-independent standard of knowledge. Consequently, there is no context-independent fact of the matter as to whether or not *S* knows that *p*. Since there is no fact of the matter as to whether or not *S* knows that *p* outside a context of ascription, they maintain that we epistemologists should drop all talk about whether or not *S* knows that *p*. Our focus, instead, should be on whether sentences of the form '*S* knows that *p*' are true in some specified context of ascription. (2004, 207)

EC thus needs *reasonable standards*, but who can set them except those who make first-person knowledge claims or attribute knowledge to others always within an epistemic group—even if its epistemic merits have never been questioned? A perfect world would certainly be one governed by what DeRose has called "pure reasonableness", but deep disagreements show that we are still far from such a stage of civilizational evolution.[10] DeRose admits that in a certain conversation

> the matter of which of our speakers is speaking the truth depends on facts about what are the reasonable standards for them to use in their situation. And, of course, this opens up a whole host of questions that I won't even begin to address about what makes standards the reasonable ones to use. (2009, 142).

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[10] DeRose's attempt to answer Williamson's concerns discussed above evokes precisely the "reasonableness view" (2017, 129).

He writes a bit further on:

> It's good for speakers to use reasonable standards (or, more generally, reasonable scores), of course. But if they opt for unreasonable standards, I'm inclined to think the truth-conditions of their claims then reflect those unreasonable standards that they are indicating. (Ibid.)

I am convinced that this brief survey suffices to realize that, all in all, EC creates more problems than it solves. This is unfortunate because context matters to a great extent, only not perhaps in the way in which EC theorists would have wished. Criticisms notwithstanding, EC still attracts many devoted followers who, unwilling to pay the price of realism, happily subscribe to a view that, in Paul K. Moser's evasive words, "finds the basis of epistemic justification in a social consensus *of some sort*" (1989, 183, my emphasis). But I do not think that epistemologists should be satisfied with such a muddle about what is to know, especially if they are committed to *solving the sceptical problem* instead of sweeping it under the rug.

2. SUBJECT-SENSITIVE INVARIANTISM

One alternative to EC that is also (at least to a certain extent) contextualist and that I did not explore in *Description of Situations* is so-called Subject-Sensitive Invariantism (SSI). The label comes from DeRose

(2004; 2009, ch. 6), who criticizes the views of authors such as Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath, the first to advocate against contextualism that "a subject's pragmatic situation may affect her justification" (2002, 70), John Hawthorne, with his "(subject-)sensitive moderate invariantism" (2004, ch. 4), and Jason Stanley, who speaks more specifically of "interest-relative invariantism" (2005, chs. 5-7). What is from the outset rejected by SSI, as Hawthorne explains, is "ascriber-dependence", which "forces the thesis of context-dependence" (2004, 157). More specifically, Hawthorne writes,

> it forces the conclusion that two ascribers may be looking at a single subject at the same time and one truly say[s] 'He knows that p', another 'He doesn't know that p'. Contradiction is avoided by claiming that the verb 'know' expresses different relations in the mouths of each ascriber. (Ibid.)

The solution, then, is "to consider the deliberative context of the subject" and this means being sensitive to its "practical environment" wherein rests "the truth of knowledge ascriptions" (ibid., 180). On this view, it would not be possible to have, as in EC, someone ascribing knowledge to Ralph on the basis of low epistemic standards (e.g. his fishing mates) *and* someone else denying it on the basis of high epistemic standards (e.g. a scientist listening to a conversation between Ralph and his fishing mates) without contradiction. What is relevant are only, in Stanley's jargon, "the subject's practical interests" (2005, 122). Thus, if Ralph is merely interested in predicting the occurrence of spring tides every fortnight and he succeeds in doing so, then he

knows it. The same holds true for the astronomers and geophysicists whose interest lies in achieving scientific understanding of tidal phenomena. As in EC, in SSI everyone knows in the last analysis. But whereas EC can trust that the knowledge attributor will appeal to some "reasonable standards", SSI does not enjoy those standards inasmuch as the attributor's context is considered epistemically irrelevant. Elke Brendel offers a useful snapshot of what is at stake when she avows that "at any given time t, a knowledge ascription 'S knows that p' has a fixed truth value due to the fixed practical interests of S at t" and this means that "'know' is a *univocal* knowledge relation in SSI" (2012, 34). Accordingly, there is no variability of "know" between contexts of attribution—and hence the invariantism that is appended to the subject-sensitive nature of our knowledge claims. Taking into account, as Jonathan Schaffer puts it, that SSI theorists "claim to capture the contextualist data without the shifty semantics" (2006, 87), then it could seem that an invariantist view might help my case and that SSI would be closer to CSO than EC is. But to lay all the emphasis on the subject is too dangerous a step for epistemologists to take. If knowledge is construed in terms of our "needs and interests", as insisted on by Fantl and McGrath (2002, 71), one of the most vexing outcomes of SSI will be the relegation of specialized knowledge to just another point of view. Here is how Schaffer lucidly approaches this question:

> In general, the social role of the expert is to serve as a *reservoir* of knowledge. This requires a stability in one's pool of knowledge that is not compatible with SSI. The social status of expertise cannot fluctuate as the stakes rise and fall. For instance, one cannot gain in expertise by suddenly not caring about the topic. So I

conclude that the status of expertise is not sensitive to what is at stake for the subject. (2006, 97)

At the core of SSI lies an idea of *ready-made knowledge* as what fuels all of our practices. There is definitely something epistemically important in the way we know how to do the most varied things. However, that I *know how* to walk does not entail that I *know that* which biomechanically allows me to walk. It is no coincidence that Stanley, together with Williamson, has questioned the Rylean view according to which "there is a fundamental distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that", viewing the former as "simply a species" of the latter (Stanley and Williamson 2001, 411).[11] To investigate the manner in which our propositions hinge on more basic ones that are not, to speak like Duncan Pritchard, "in the market for knowledge" (2016, 77 *et passim*) may be, so *Description of Situations* suggests, a promising path. But the kind of Moorean certainties that *we know without knowing* supplies no "interest-relative" standard whatsoever. Looking at the matter from the perspective of EC, seen as the only contender "able to provide a socially fitting conception of knowledge", Schaffer strongly argues that "knowledge must not be sensitive to what is at stake for the subject, but must rather be sensitive to what is in question for the attributor" (Schaffer 2006, 100).[12] CSO, in turn, is in

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[11] On this topic, see in addition Stanley 2011. Williamson, however, does not present himself as an SSI-er, proposing in place of EC or SSI an "insensitive invariantism", described as "the view on which the epistemic terms at issue undergo no shift in the standard for their correct application" (2005b, 213). See more below.

[12] Other relevant criticisms of SSI can be found in Blaauw 2008, Brown 2008, Blome-Tillmann 2009 and Baumann 2016.

a very particular sense context-sensitive, but it rejects that either epistemic variantism across contexts or subject-sensitivity within a specific context can contribute to an inclusive view of knowledge which must go beyond the social sphere.[13]

3. INSENSITIVE INVARIANTISM

What about Insensitive Invariantism (II for short)? Can it do better than EC and SSI? There are, no doubt, some points in favour of II. Above all, it is not a relativistic view amenable to attributor contexts or subject contexts. Quite the contrary, it is an epistemological view which assumes that this thing we call *truth* is not laid down by ourselves and that *knowledge* involves apprehending something about reality. In this sense, it looks very similar to CSO, at least to its objectivistic component. In fact, compare my characterization of CSO to how Wayne A. Davis justifies his preference for II over both EC and SSI:

> I advocate *classical* or *insensitive invariantism*, on which the truth conditions of 'S knows p' do not vary with truth-independent factors.
> […] There is a wide variety of uncontroversially context-sensitive terms, but all behave differently from 'knows p' in several ways. For example, 'is flat' and 'is heavy' allow comparisons and relativizations, as do 'knows Paris', 'knows how to dance', and 'is justified in believing p'. But 'knows that p' cannot be qualified by *more* or *better*, and we never say

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[13] The subtitle of my book, *An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology*, must thus be taken with a pinch of salt.

things like: *He knows it's true by (or relative to) low standards, but not high standards; He knows it's true compared to Mary, but not Jane*; or *He knows it's true, but not perfectly.* (2017, 219)

From Davis' insensitive invariantist account, what Ralph supposedly knows about spring tides would only be permissible if it were expressed under the form of the examples given at the end of this quotation. Ralph, however, does not evidently say that *He knows it's true that spring tides happen every fortnight by (or relative to) low standards, but not high standards*, that *He knows it's true that spring tides happen every fortnight compared to his fishing mate Stubb, but not scientists* or that *He knows it's true that spring tides happen every fortnight, but not perfectly*. The point made by II-ers is precisely that Ralph sees no further possibilities of knowing that *p* and unjustifiably takes his understanding of the phenomenon to constitute *knowledge*. In other words, he is unaware of his *ignorance*. To speak about low standards for knowing that *p* is already the result of *our* recognition of there being higher standards for doing it. When we are in such an epistemic position, the II-er maintains, only high standards are admissible and there is simply no room for low standards. The problem for II is that what we now regard as the (high) standard for knowledge can in the future turn out to be merely a lower standard or even an error, with the (high) standard being replaced by a new one. Just think about what Ptolemy and his followers, unaware that they were misconceiving the heavenly bodies as revolving around a stationary earth in circular orbits, considered as high standards in comparison with Copernicus, who within his heliocentric model nevertheless kept the idea of circular motion, or Kepler, who showed that planetary orbits are elliptical.

Our position, like Ralph's and anybody else's, is always viewed as *the* standard, even if we recognize that it can be

revisable. In that case, the standard will be to hold a revisionary posture, one that ultimately leads to an awareness of continuous possible ignorance in the midst of which knowledge must be permanently treated as provisional. Does this imply adopting a form of scepticism? Williamson actually highlights that "[s]ome insensitive invariantists are sceptics", given that for them "'know' invariably refers to a maximal epistemic standard that we cannot meet" (2005b, 225). He thus proposes an "anti-sceptical insensitive invariantism" ($_{AS}$II for short), within which "'know' invariably refers to an epistemic standard that we can and do meet quite easily" since "everyday ascriptions of knowledge are often true" (ibid.). Williamson's strategy is to replace the II-er's "attempt to explain the illusion of knowledge" with another task proper to the $_{AS}$II-er, which consists of explaining "the illusion of ignorance" (ibid.). Williamson is absolutely right in arguing that there are limits to what can be doubted and that philosophical scepticism is responsible for introducing a radically unnatural suspicion. His diagnosis that "an illusion of epistemic danger" is the "result from exposure to lurid stories about brains in vats, evil demons, painted mules, or gamblers who bet the farm" (ibid., 226) seems to me perfectly judicious. However, while I fully subscribe to the anti-scepticism of this view, Williamson's appeal to "practical reasoning" (ibid., 227 ff.) makes $_{AS}$II coincident with SSI.[14] What is distinctive of any insensitive invariantist description is indeed the denial that "practical" reasons can affect the knowledge relation. Michael Hannon stresses this point when he writes:

> Insensitive invariantism is the main source of resistance to contextualism. According to this view, what counts as being in a sufficiently

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[14] See note 11 above.

good epistemic position to know does not vary
with practical facts about the context.
Whatever the subject's or the attributor's (or
someone else's) practical interests might be,
there is some good epistemic position in which
an agent must stand with respect to a
proposition in order for that agent to know it.
(2019, 165)

Hannon brings to the fore an inevitable struggle against
contextual factors that is typical of II-ers, for whom the
"good epistemic position" is not relative to standards. So
what should distinguish $_{As}$II-ers? If Williamson has in mind,
for instance, that Ralph cannot doubt that a spring tide
happens every fortnight or (imagining a theoretical scenario
or that Ralph suddenly suffers from some mental disorder)
that the fishing rod in his hand and his own hands are real, I
would completely agree. But I do not see how—within
Williamson's framework—uttering those things can be
conceived without the attributor of EC or the subject of SSI.
And since any form of invariantism *per definitionem* excludes
EC's variantism, $_{As}$II can only fit in SSI. As a matter of fact,
Williamson's KPR principle, which states that "A first-
person present-tense ascription of 'know' with respect to a
proposition is true in a context iff that proposition is an
appropriate premise for practical reasoning in that context"
(2005b, 227; see also 231), is manifestly subject-sensitive
invariantist and as such not anti-sceptical at all. Ralph does
not know what he is convinced he knows about tides only
because what he knows *is an appropriate premise for his practical
reasoning*. Definitely it is, but that he cannot even imagine to
reason differently in his daily practice would neither detain
the sceptic from raising Humean doubts about Ralph's
inductively inferred beliefs nor, more importantly, the
scientist from claiming another level of knowledge that can

be attained. The closure of Williamson's $_{AS}$II—as that of SSI—cannot thus originate more than what Ian Evans and Nicholas Smith called "a (compelling) fallibilist invariantist explanation of our intuitions" (2012, 69).

Yet, unlike Evans and Smith, I do not find fallibilism compelling. Following Wittgenstein (1974) and Lewis (1999), I argue that a fallibilist view, equally defended by contextualists like Cohen (1988), does not provide the best shield against radical scepticism and that only infallibilism can coherently demonstrate the illogical character of the sceptic's manoeuvres.[15] The advantage of an infallibilist perspective is that it is capable of being intransigent about what cannot be subject to doubt without sacrificing revisionism, as the reflex of a natural progress of knowledge. Pritchard's interpretation of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* offers an excellent framework in making room for a distinction between "über hinge commitments"—intimately connected with "anti-skeptical hinge commitments" and formulated in "über hinge propositions" or "anti-skeptical hinge propositions"—and "personal hinge commitments"—with their "personal hinge propositions" (2016, 95-97). While the former "hinge commitments" are stationary, the latter are susceptible to change as long as they mirror our embedment in a world where culture and science evolve. On this view, which is at the bottom of CSO, Ralph can perfectly claim that he knows that spring tides occur

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[15] I elaborate on this in chapters 6, 7 and 11 of *Description of Situations*, while chapters 8, 9 and 10 are devoted to different sceptical attitudes. See also Venturinha 2020a, in which I defend a Lewisian "non-sceptical infallibilism" against the fallibilism articulated by Jessica Brown in her 2018, and Venturinha forthcoming b, in which I respond from a Wittgensteinian standpoint to Anna Boncompagni's fallibilist approach set forth in a commentary on my book (Boncompagni forthcoming).

every fortnight and at the same time the scientists can claim that they know how to explain tidal phenomena according to what is scientifically established so far. As pointed out, this could also be the outcome in EC but, contrary to what EC theorists admit, what is known is presupposed as being known "about the world". Without this presupposition, which is anchored to the über hinges as our most elementary natural ties to the world, EC's response to scepticism is completely defective. It could be argued that what Ralph knows about tides would then be comparable to what, say, a seagull *knows* about them, though I do not see this as constituting an objection.[16] Wittgenstein understands "certainty" to mean exactly "a form of life", envisaging it "as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified, as it were, as something animal" (1974, §§ 358-359). It should be noted in addition that the epistemic multiplicity permitted by CSO—akin to the epistemic variability permitted by EC—is not tolerable by either SSI (including $_{AS}$II) or II. Whereas the former can only admit Ralph's low-standards knowledge claims, the latter can do no more than only admitting the opposite.

Table 1 gives a perspicuous arrangement of the different options available. It is modelled on Michael Blome-Tillmann's scorecards that access the compatibility and incompatibility with EC and SSI of "temporal embeddings", "modal embeddings" and "conjunctive ascriptions" (2009, 316). My table is somewhat less ambitious and aims to access

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[16] In commenting on Ernest Sosa's initial discussion of the matter (1988), I consider in chapter 3 of *Description of Situations* that attributing *knowledge* to animals cannot just be seen as "metaphorical" insofar as they certainly *know* something "about the world". This leads me to reject in that chapter, after Bolzano, Frege and Lewis, a correspondence theory of truth, which is necessarily anthropocentric.

only the compatibility and incompatibility with EC, SSI, II and CSO of Ralph's low-standard knowledge as opposed to a higher standard of knowledge:

Table 1

Ralph's Knowledge

	Low Standards	*High Standards*
EC	✓	✗
SSI	✓	n/a
II	n/a	✗
CSO	✓	✗

Here one clearly sees that in SSI or II, as Brendel put it, "'know' is a *univocal* knowledge relation" and that EC, although it has shortcomings, is nonetheless closer to CSO in treating knowledge as multifarious. Much work is still needed to make a comprehensive epistemological theory out of CSO. In particular, it must be flexible enough to accommodate very different kinds of knowledge attributions or claims. But I hope that my arguments have shown that CSO can provide a more solid theoretical basis than the alternatives proposed in contemporary epistemology. At least one thing seems certain: its rival theories do not involve less problems. Many will say, however, that objectivism is an illusion and that we should conform to the idea that the world is always a result of our projections. Is it not the corollary of quantum mechanics that, as theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli eagerly professes, "we must accept the idea that reality is only interaction", that it is "less about objects than about interactive relationships" (2016, 18, 41)? Here I prefer to side with Einstein's view, old-fashioned as it may look, for whom "quantum mechanics is logically consistent but […] it is an incomplete manifestation of an underlying theory in

which an objectively real description is possible" (Pais 2005, 455) or, more simply, "a self-consistent but incomplete description of the objective processes" (Lehner 2014, 331). The fact that general relativity continues to subsist alongside quantum theory, despite being incompatible with one another, shows that there is still room for epistemological realism. Those who do not feel attracted to such a quest for objectivity can perhaps take comfort in the moral subjectivism articulated in the last chapter of *Description of Situations*, which is in stark contrast to the previous chapters.

Marcelo Carvalho - *On What There Is in Our Words*

1.

"I am working at a table. There is a lot in these words" (Venturinha 2018, 2). There is, according to Nuno Venturinha, a large set of logical and ontological presuppositions: about other persons and me, about negation, about the world and what there is, and even about what there may be, possible worlds, and the nature of possibility. The "descriptive exercise" that tries to unfold the logical and ontological structures that are already there, in our everyday use of language, is the way Venturinha proposes, in *Description of Situations*, to address the difficulties of epistemology from a contextualist point of view. The book is a singular, ambitious and vigorous argument that mobilizes an impressive number of conceptions, philosophers and books, from Aristotle and Aquinas to Bolzano, Husserl and Wittgenstein, in order to justify its choice for contextualism (with a Wittgensteinian flavor) in epistemology. This is a risky enterprise that puts the book in the way of an enormous number of possible objections. However, its strength lies where we expect to find its weakness: it is structured in such a way that it is convincing, with relevant comments on different philosophies, and the arguments are made as it moves from one conception to the other. The result is that questions about details of its remarks on Rawls, Heidegger or Aquinas, for example, are secondary to its broader reasonings and results.

Two themes will be addressed here, in order to get clear about the book's more basic commitments: the relationships between logic, ontology, and epistemology (and their connections with the Platonist and Tractarian traditions); and the particular variety of contextualism that Venturinha

embraces, in opposition to "classical contextualism", and the way in which he uses Wittgenstein's later philosophy.

2.

The classical strategy to support an ontological thesis, which comes from Parmenides and Plato, is to ask how the world must be in order for it to be possible to present true and false statements about it: ontology is built up from logic. That there are different things and that some of them "participate" in others seems to be a condition of the meaning of propositions: we say that "A is B" when A is different from B (like we do in the proposition "the sky is blue"); this "being B" should have an ontological counterpart. That there are *essences* seems to be a condition for the meaning of general terms, for there should be "something" that they *mean*, that they refer to. Or, in an argument that Venturinha borrows from the *Tractatus*, logical analysis and the meaningfulness of our system of propositions presupposes, as a necessary condition, that the world is not a set of *objects*, but "the totality of facts" (Wittgenstein 1961, 1.1); and that we can talk about objects only in the context of a state of affairs.[17] The problem with this strategy is that ontology, established this way, regularly asserts the necessary existence of fabulous beings like "unthought thoughts", things that are neither existent, nor non-existent, or that are eternal and cannot be destroyed (like the "simple objects" of the *Tractatus*) (cf. Wittgenstein 2009, § 55). It is still more problematic in a post-Kantian context that assimilates the distinction between noumena and phenomena.

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[17] "If I know an object I also know all its possible occurrences in states of affairs." (Wittgenstein 1961, 2.0123)

The epistemological problem that Venturinha's contextualism intends to address is an alternative formulation of an argument that we find in Nietzsche: Kant's assertion that the world of our experience is *phenomenal* (appearance), together with the classical Aristotelian conception of truth as correspondence to what is ("to say of what is that it is"), implies that nothing we may say is true. In Venturinha's words:

> the problem with the correspondence thesis, from a multispecies perspective, is that one must admit as many *correspondences*—and consequently *truths*—as the existing cognitive modes. (Venturinha 2018, 21)

In a sequel to Kant's Copernican Revolution, knowledge is conceived as presupposing an "agreement structure", a "conceptual scheme". The result is an unavoidable perspectivism:

> […] a thing can only be known if its knowledge falls within a certain structure that sanctions this knowing. […]
> Taken in this way, the correspondence theory leaves us in a problematic relativism since truth utterly depends on the angle through which things are contemplated. More complicated than that, the sole criterion for assessing truth in general is this very same angle and one cannot go beyond the horizon it opens. This is what the Kantian problem of the *thing in itself* is all about. (Ibid., 22)

The dramatic conclusion that "we cannot know it [the *thing in itself*] for we are condemned to have appearances"

(ibid.) seems quite close to Kleist in his Kantian crisis.[18] From this perspective, philosophy is still contemporary to those that followed Kant and his unexpected support of an ontological relativism: we should readdress the logico-ontological problem in order to avoid subjectivism and relativism in epistemology. The quest that we follow in *Description of Situations* is that for a fundamental ontology that supports our epistemological claims and the rejection of relativism and skepticism. That is why, at the core of Venturinha's book, we find an unanticipated debate with Bolzano, Frege, Husserl, and Heidegger. It intends to unfold a new ontological foundation for the contextualist epistemological claims.

Against this background, Bolzano's idea of *propositions in itself* appears as a defense of objectivity against relativism and subjectivism, and that there may be knowledge of reality. Bolzano opens the way to the alternative Venturinha finally seems to embrace:

> In Bolzano's view, in turn, each proposition that can be enunciated or merely thought is implied by a *proposition in itself* that is already tangible though not in its entirety. The world for Bolzano is not a relation composed of

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[18] H. von Kleist's letter to Wilhelmine, March 22nd, 1801: "We cannot decide if what we call truth is truly truth, or if it only appears to us that way. If that is so, then the truth we gather here is no more after death—and every effort to acquire a property that also follows us into the grave is in vain […]." ["Wir können nicht entscheiden, ob das, was wir Wahrheit nennen, wahrhaft Wahrheit ist, oder ob es uns nur so scheint. Ist das letzte, so *ist* die Wahrheit, die wir hier sammeln, nach dem Tode nicht mehr—und alles Bestreben, ein Eigentum sich zu erwerben, das uns auch in das Grab folgt, ist vergeblich (…)."] (Kleist 1961, ch. 3)

objects and our cognition of them, which brings with it the problem of correspondence. Bolzano's world is already *propositional in itself*. [...] It is indeed a consequence of Bolzano's proposal that, with the rejection of a correspondence theory, there must be a common ground—the reality—despite all differences between the multifarious accesses to it. (Venturinha 2018, 23)

Bolzano's ontology attempts to reintroduce objectivity and reality in this new, Copernican context: his concepts of *truth in itself* and *idea in itself* (*Vorstellung an sich*), similar to Frege's "thinking" and Meinong's "subsistence" (*bestehend*), are the objective references that assure meaning to false or even impossible propositions.[19] But it does that at the price of offending our "sense of reality" (these are the words Russell used to characterize Meinong's ontology).[20] After all, the idea that the meaning of the proposition "my notebook and my pen are side by side" is assured by a *proposition in itself*

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[19] Bolzano's influence can be seen also in Martin, Twardowski and Brentano.

[20] "One of the difficulties of the study of logic is that it is an exceedingly abstract study dealing with the most abstract things imaginable, and yet you cannot pursue it properly unless you have a vivid instinct as to what is real. You must have that instinct rather well developed in logic. I think otherwise you will get into fantastic things. I think Meinong is rather deficient in just that instinct for reality. Meinong maintains that there is such an object as the round square only it does not exist, and it does not even subsist, but nevertheless there is such an object, and when you say 'The round square is a fiction', he takes it that there is an object 'the round square' and there is a predicate 'fiction'. No one with a sense of reality would so analyse that proposition." (Russell 1919, 56-57)

that was always there, independent of anybody thinking, knowing or saying it, is peculiar.[21] Bolzano presents his *ideas in itself* in the following terms:

> By objective idea I mean the certain something which constitutes the immediate matter [*Stoff*] of a subjective idea, and which is not to be found in the realm of the actual. An objective idea does not require a *subject* but subsists [*bestehen*], not indeed as something *existing*, but as a certain *something* even though no thinking being may grasp it; also, it is not multiplied when it is thought by one, two, three, or more beings, unlike the corresponding subjective ideas, which are present many times. Hence the name *objective*. For this reason, any *word*, unless it is ambiguous, designates only one objective idea, but there are innumerable subjective ideas which it causes […].
> By object of an idea I mean that something (sometimes existing and sometimes non-existing) of which we say that the idea [*Vorstellung*] *represents* [*vorstellt*] it, or *of which* it is a representation. (Bolzano 2014, 158-159)

Contrary to the followers of Bolzano, the primary goal of Russell's "On Denoting" (1905) is to explain how semantics can avoid the supposition that there must be a fantastic ontology of objective contents. Russell's answer is evidently simpler and more elegant. However, he does not give up the

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[21] Venturinha points out that this description of "objective ideas" and of a "proposition in itself" have a theological substratum in Bolzano, pointing to something like a "perspective from God".

idea that ontology is the counterpart of logic. And it still results in an ontology that lacks a sense of reality. It becomes clear in Wittgenstein's formulation of the analytical project in the *Tractatus*, which is closely related to "On Denoting": it demands the necessary existence of simple objects that are eternal and indestructible. Without these objects, there can be no guarantee that analysis has an end and, consequently, that words have meaning.[22]

However, Venturinha does not suppose that Bolzano's conception of objectivity is an alternative in its original formulation. Charles Travis's rejection of the idea that there may be "unthought thoughts" makes explicit the reason for that. The problem is the same that applies to Frege's *thoughts*. In the end, it is still the flirtation of ontology with the fantastic:

> That a group of men can hide themselves inside a wooden horse to attack their enemies unexpectedly is not a thought of Homer. Anyone can represent that and no one really knows whether it happened or not. The big question is: who thinks Fregean thoughts? Not who participates in these thoughts, but for whom do they exist? (Venturinha 2018, 39)

According to Venturinha, an alternative solution to this problem can be found in Wittgenstein's later philosophy and its use of the concepts of "hinge propositions" and "system of evidence":

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[22] For a debate about ontology in Wittgenstein's philosophy, see Carvalho 2019.

> Even an uneducated person would be puzzled if she were told that her ancestry goes back only 150 years. The picture of the world that we share, despite all variances in content, cannot be changed so drastically. That is why Wittgenstein calls attention to the systematic character of this evidence, which offers itself, more than *certain*, as *secure*. It is the self-evidence of the system that legitimates what can count as an admissible element within it. (Ibid., 51)

Evidences are solid because they constitute a system. It is the secure ground that is *presupposed* by all our everyday assertions. And at its core, incrusted in it, there are *hinge propositions*. This image plays a central role in the new kind of contextualism conceived by Venturinha:

> Wittgenstein does something quite different than full-blooded contextualists do when they seek for evidence. He sees the evidential bedrock of each situation as materializing in *hinge propositions* which, for him, should constitute a new field of epistemological inquiry. He explains that "the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges [*Angeln*] on which those turn" […]. A hinge cannot be learned in isolation. It is assimilated by us in practice—in the practice of the varied "language games" we play, to use a key notion of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. (Ibid., 51-52)

3.

Before coming to a conclusion about the epistemological question, however, Venturinha deals with the problem of subjectivism. He does that by discussing Descartes's skepticism and his "modal question" about essence and existence; Kant's "constituent schemes", that "organize" the given (resuming the objection that it implies that we lose "contact with truth" [ibid., 70]); and Husserl's phenomenological project. It is with Husserl that we find for the first time a perspective that makes clear the kind of contextualism that Venturinha has in mind and how subjectivity finds its place in it.

> Husserl is not interested in the Cartesian *ego cogito*—or in the Kantian *Ich denke*—but in the torrent of *cogitationes* that are transcendentally produced and that form "my own pure conscious life" […]. Phenomenology has indeed the merit of seeking a description of the given without endorsing any metaphysical theory about it. (Ibid., 75)

A central role is attributed, in the *Cartesian Meditations*, to the concept of "being in the world" and to the *texture* of our suppositions (actualizing the Aristotelian Doctrine of Supposition). Husserl's phenomenological project conceives the subject from the perspective of its relationships to others.

> What intentionality reveals, in Husserl's view, is that our awareness is indisputably an awareness of something other than ourselves. […] intentionality defends a mutual relation (*S ↔ O*). What this amounts to is that the things

> I have before me and the coffee shop at the
> corner of the street require my intentional
> projection of them, as *cogitata*, to be what they
> are. Consequently, without an admission of
> their complete independence of subjective
> conditions, the modal impasse is maintained.
> (Ibid,, 75-76)

Husserl's project is, however, bound to fail in the epistemological debate from the beginning: it implies solipsism, the impossibility of being able to say that "anything or anybody exists" (cf. Hermberg 2006, x, *apud* Venturinha 2018, 78). Again, it is Wittgenstein that presents a proper solution and helps to produce a final formulation of contextualism. It is only in Wittgenstein's later philosophy that we can find, according to Venturinha, an adequate formulation about our fundamental ontology and the social character of subjectivity. Wittgenstein's "background" is the substitute for Husserl's "life world" (cf. Venturinha 2018, 78), without the epistemological problems that follow from Husserl's egology.

One preliminary conclusion about *Description of Situations* is that it faces the contemporary debate about contextualism from a "traditional" perspective, a logico-ontological investigation updated by Kant and his followers. Wittgenstein's later philosophy is accessed from that perspective. However, that Wittgenstein is still part of that Platonic-Kantian debate is not evident. One reason for thinking so is that the ontological claims that can be found in the *Tractatus* do not have any place in the *Philosophical Investigations*. On the contrary, maybe Wittgenstein presents a radical alternative to this classical formulation and opens the way to a different strategy against relativism and skepticism.

4.

According to Venturinha, classical contextualism does not present a satisfactory answer to the question about "the evidence of its evidence", about the epistemic status of that which constitutes the ultimate basis of justification:

> In fact, my believing that I am working at this table, that I have a body and am surrounded by material objects, etc., though contextually justified, is not immune to a question about its evidentness. A classic form of epistemic contextualism would not help here. Can a Wittgensteinian-type of contextualism do better? I am convinced it can. (Ibid., 70-71)

It is, in fact, in the Wittgensteinian conception that there is a *background* that we access as a *system of evidence*, that is presupposed by our practices, in which we can identify *hinge propositions*, that Venturinha finds the elements to reformulate contextualism in epistemology. Wittgenstein's strategy assures a "natural ontology" that is immune to skepticism and solipsism. It is, in Beyer's words, a "background of epistemic justification" (ibid., 78). Supposedly, Wittgenstein, in *On Certainty*, makes clear an ontological foundation that is essentially contextual and that guarantees that we may say we *know*, in a proper sense, that that is a book, or that we are reading now. As he says,

> Can I doubt it? Grounds for *doubt* are lacking! Everything speaks in its favour, nothing against it. (Wittgenstein 1974, § 4)

Duncan Pritchard, like Venturinha, thinks that epistemological disjunctivism and Wittgensteinian

contextualism, taken together, offer an adequate answer to "radical skepticism" (cf. Venturinha 2018, 55). The problem with that solution, says Pritchard, is that although it provides an answer to epistemological skepticism, it does not eliminate the "vertigo" that follows from it:

> Yet, Pritchard admits, an "epistemic vertigo" may subsist after the loss of our "epistemic innocence" […]. He explains that "the phenomenon of epistemic vertigo is more psychological than philosophical, in that it describes the particular phenomenology involved when one has resolved the skeptical puzzle" […]. (Ibid.)

According to Prichard, "the Wittgensteinian element" in this answer to skepticism, the "essential locality of rational evaluation", results in intellectual anxiety: we tend to seek an "overall perspective" on our epistemic position (Pritchard 2016, 185-186). Accepting the epistemological limitations implied by the Wittgensteinian answer does not seem to come naturally. Having that in view, Venturinha's last step is into what he calls the "moral-epistemological debate", where he searches for another answer, adequate to skeptical vertigo.

> I agree with Pritchard. […] scepticism has a corrosive strength that cannot be eliminated once and for all by means of any theoretical argumentation. The only way to override vertigo is, I shall argue in the last chapter, by taking a moral-epistemological attitude. (Venturinha 2018, 87)

5.

There is a lot to say about the role that Wittgenstein plays in this narrative. First of all, Wittgenstein does not talk about ontology—nor is it evident that he talks about epistemology as we usually understand it. The supposition of a background ontology that works as the unreflected support of all our claims in the context of our lives seems more Heideggerian than Wittgensteinian.[23] Venturinha's description of that as an alternative to Husserl makes this claim still more plausible. Beyond that, if Wittgenstein, in his later philosophy, still plays the game of building up a logico-ontological investigation, in a similar way to the one we find in the *Tractatus*, then the *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* are still in the ground inherited from Parmenides and Plato, and play the same game. And, instead of proposing a reticulated foundation, it is, also, a foundationalist investigation.[24]

Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* presents the *context* of our lives as what assures that our language is meaningful. But he does not present that as a transcendental condition, or as an ontology of everyday life (the ontology *that there must be* to make language meaningful). The distinction between *justification* and *meaning*, between epistemology and logic, is central: Wittgenstein is not asking what justifies an assertion, but what assures (or justifies, in a non-epistemological sense)

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[23] It may also be related to P. Strawson's conceptions about ordinary language; for a criticism of the supposition that Strawson and Wittgenstein have similar conceptions about the epistemological status of ordinary language, see Bento Prado Jr. 2017, 25-65.

[24] But, maybe, the idea of "groundless" is the counterpart of the autonomous practices that we find in the end beyond our justifications; cf. Wittgenstein 1974, §§ 128-131.

its use. This does not mean that the *Philosophical Investigations* and *On Certainty* are not dealing with epistemology (or ontology) at all, but that it affects epistemology only "negatively": it implies that some epistemological claims are the result of mistaken conceptions about language. In this sense, Descartes's *dream argument* and *cogito* do not present meaningful problems or alternatives; they are not meaningful propositions.[25]

Venturinha presents pertinent remarks about the difficulties that face classical contextualism. And *Description of Situations* is really inventive in the alternative it proposes: the recourse to a Heideggerian-Wittgensteinian "natural ontology" that is the foundation of any foundation, the evidence for any evidence; and the idea that it exists in the context of our everyday life as a system, and that it implies that we live, believe and judge together with others. It avoids the emptiness of the idea of a *contract*, and the abstract relativism that follows from that. But, in the end, how can we be sure that our ontology is *the* natural ontology? How to avoid the relativistic objection that there may be as many ontologies as there are "forms of life" (whatever that is)? Why can we not ask about the evidence for the last evidence presented by Venturinha's contextualism, and repeat that *ad infinitum*?

Behind all these problems, the main question is to know if the old search for *what there is* as an ontological condition for our words is the adequate starting point for a philosophical investigation. Maybe it is not. Maybe, in the *beginning*, there is "not a Something, but not a Nothing either!" (Wittgenstein 2009, § 304), only deeds, and

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[25] A very original and relevant debate about the relationship between Wittgenstein's remarks in *On Certainty* and Descartes's arguments in the first and second *Meditations* can be found in Bento Prado Jr. 2004, 77-107; see also Carvalho 2018.

Wittgenstein's philosophy is, really, the opposite of Socrates (cf. Wittgenstein and Waismann 2003 [TS 302], 33) in departing from the game of searching for final epistemological justifications and ontological presuppositions.[26]

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[26] "Im Anfang war die Tat." Goethe, *Faust*, quoted by Wittgenstein 1974, § 402.

João Vergílio Gallerani Cuter - *Don't Forget the* Tractatus

It is possible that any theory of truth as correspondence should be condemned as a promise of realism that only delivers this or that variety of relativism. After all, if truth is to be conceived as a correspondence between something and something else, and if the two poles of this relation are inevitably locked in a universe which is essentially individual, historical, cultural or human, then all our claims to knowledge will not be entitled to go beyond those same limits. Knowledge will be only that "most arrogant and mendacious minute of world history" described by Nietzsche—an invention of "clever beasts" living in some "out of the way corner of the universe" (1979, 79). If everything that a correspondence between two things has to offer is this kind of prison, it is better to translate it more sincerely in terms of convenience, economy, usefulness or the power to enforce it on people weaker than us.

For consider a bat, and what is it like to be one. In a certain sense, each bat "knows" how to find its way out of the cave, and "knows" how to avoid collision with any other member of the cloud. But how could we ascribe such a piece of knowledge to a bat, if we are not able to find a place for what we call "cave", "collision" and "bat" in its own world? Moreover, how could we ascribe any objective knowledge to us, if our perspective is just "human", if we live in a human world instead of living as a bat does in its cave? And how can there be a place for objective truth if truth is conceived in terms of correspondence between an essentially human thought and an essentially human world?

These are some of the questions that led many people to invite us to forget about the "correspondence theory of truth"—and I think Nuno Venturinha (2018) is one of them. On different grounds (although in the same spirit), the same invitation was made by David Lewis (2001) almost twenty

years ago. Lewis's reasoning turns around a basic question. What should we take to be the *fact* to which a true proposition is supposed to "correspond"? If we say, like Frege, that a fact is a "true proposition" (1993, 50)[27] but, unlike Frege, we still want to stick to the notion of correspondence, we are left with an empty formula: a proposition is true if it "corresponds" to... itself. On this reading the correspondence theory, as Lewis says, "doesn't even get as far as the redundancy theory" (2001, 277). If we want to have any hope of going beyond the limits of redundancy, we have to take facts to be different from true propositions. At this point, "Tractarian facts" make their entrance. They are not true propositions, although each of them is responsible for the truth of at least one proposition, viz. the proposition affirming the occurrence of that fact— in this sense, facts are "truth-makers". But "there are also things which are not Tractarian facts" (ibid., 278), and the existence of things which are not facts would be a truth-maker for the proposition I quoted at the beginning of this sentence. So, we do not seem to have a theory of truth as "correspondence to facts". It is just a theory of truth as correspondence to... truth-makers. Moreover, says Lewis, the theory does not even seem to be *about* truth. It is "a theory of all manner of things" (278)—as many things as there are biconditionals expressing truth-conditions in terms of the theory. What does it mean to say, for instance, that it is true that cats purr? According to the theory, it means to affirm the existence of something "such that the existence of that thing implies that cats purr" (278)—something different from the mere purring of cats, if we do not want to go back to the initial situation, transforming correspondence into

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[27] "Was ist eine Tatsache? Eine Tatsache ist ein Gedanke, der wahr ist." "Gedanke" is the name given by Frege to what Lewis would call "proposition".

redundancy under disguise. If we want to have something that really is stronger than redundancy we should forget about the idea of correspondence. That is Lewis's argument (as I read it).

In the following paragraphs I will try to show (i) that what Lewis calls a "Tractarian fact" has nothing to do with the notion of "fact" we find in the *Tractatus*, (ii) that the Tractarian notion of correspondence is completely immune to Lewis's criticisms, and (iii) that, *pace* Nuno Venturinha, it does not involve any kind of relativism. I don't claim the Tractarian notion of truth as correspondence is right or even tenable (I do not think that it is). I just claim that we need better reasons to dismiss it.

The *Tractatus* has the most radical conception of truth as "correspondence" that was ever formulated in the history of philosophy. It is at least arguable that any conception of truth as correspondence more radical than the Tractarian one would amount to identifying facts with true propositions, as Frege had done. Indeed, a true proposition (a true Thought) in the *Tractatus is* partially identical with its truth-maker, i.e. with the fact that makes it true. Let us remember some basic Tractarian notions.

A state of affairs is a "combination (*Verbindung*) of objects" (Wittgenstein 1961, 2.01), and objects have as part of their internal properties (2.01231) a number of combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities (2.0123). Elementary propositions are immediate combinations of names (4.22), and each name incorporates in the form of syntactical rules the combinatorial possibilities of the object it names (3.334). We do not see this combinatorial order in the superficial structure of our everyday languages, but it will be seen once the logical analysis of any language is carried out to the end. What will be found exactly? First of all, the totality of names (logically proper names) out of which any elementary proposition could be built. Once this totality of

names is given, the logical form of each name must also be given immediately, i.e. not as an addition, but as part of its logical nature. This has several consequences.

First, a name can never be given in isolation. It must be given together with its combinatorial *possibilities* with all other names—both those than *can* be combined with it in elementary propositions and those that *cannot* be so combined. So when a single name is given the *totality* of logically proper names must be given with it. So to speak, we do not reach names one by one. We either have all names given at once, or we would never be able to identify anything as a Tractarian name. Second, as an immediate consequence, if a single name is given, then the totality of elementary propositions (i.e. immediate connections of names) must be given, and so (third consequence) the whole of logical space must be given. Fourth, as each name is given with the object it names, the totality of objects must also be given, as well as (fifth) the totality of possible combinations of objects into states of affairs—the logical space we have just mentioned, now seen from the perspective of the objects.

These five "theses" taken together give us the radical notion of isomorphism which is characteristic of the *Tractatus*. For each name, there must exist one and exactly one object, and vice versa. The same can be said about elementary propositions, on the one side, and states of affairs, on the other. So the totality of elementary sentences is a logical mirror, not of the world, but of the totality of combinatorial possibilities out of which any possible world can be seen as a possible "choice". If logical syntax allows a combination of names to form an elementary proposition, there must be a corresponding possible state of affairs, and the occurrence of this state of affairs will make that proposition true quite independently of the contingent production of any kind of propositional *sign* by someone, sometime, somewhere, somehow. As it was just said, once

one elementary proposition is given, all elementary propositions must be also given, although of course no corresponding sign occurs as a fact in the world. To use the Tractarian jargon, only the *symbol* is logically necessary, the *sign* is just a contingent fact like any other—a noise, a scribble, a gesture that certain animals use in their daily life. Only the symbol is necessarily given; the sign, as any other fact, can occur and can also not occur. Usually, it doesn't.

Without this very strong notion of isomorphism, we have anything in the world *except* a Tractarian fact. But, can't we affirm the existence of many things over and above states of affairs? In order to speak about "states of affairs", is it not necessary to presuppose the existence of objects as components of those states of affairs, and also the existence of a logical form which must be present both in the elementary proposition and in the possible state of affairs that, occurring, makes that proposition true? Lewis passes over the Tractarian answer, although it is essential to the Tractarian picture of language, and to the notion of correspondence that comes with it. Wittgenstein says that it is logically necessary to presuppose, but logically impossible to affirm the existence of those "things". When he wrote the *Tractatus*, he thought that logic alone was enough to show us that there must be logically simple names (this was the ultimate lesson to be drawn from Russell's theory of descriptions), that they must name logically simple objects, that elementary propositions were immediate combinations of names (given the compositional account of propositional sense), and that to each possible combination of objects there must correspond a possible combination of names affirming its occurrence (given the isomorphism between world and language). He believed that all this could be shown by logic alone, but could not be said by any language—if we assume the Tractarian point of view, we are bound to admit that logical analysis, once it is carried out, would show that

many sentences of this text, as all sentences of the *Tractatus*, are neither tautologies/contradictions nor truth-functions of elementary propositions. These sentences are just scribbles which have some use, as the scribbles left by the philosophers had always been used in academic discussions without having any sense. They are nonsense in spite of being governed by human rules of human languages. We have a "feeling of sense" when we use it—the feeling that we are describing something. We can even be "guided" by that feeling, acting in this or that way—this is what happens, for instance, when we analyze language according to what we "feel" to be the "principles of analysis". It will be impossible to "justify" or "ground" our actions. We will just show a *practical* adherence to the laws of logic, which includes a refusal to quantify over "false objects", like Socrates.

The distinction between saying and showing is central to the *Tractatus*, and should also be central to any account of "Tractarian facts". We do not find a trace of it in Lewis account of correspondence. As a matter of fact, the distinction is just the necessary consequence of what was once seen as the most convenient and even intuitive results of the *Tractatus*: the idea that (i) there is a sharp and mutually exclusive distinction between necessary and contingent propositions, that (ii) all necessary propositions are either contradictions or tautologies, and that (iii) tautologies (in contrast to all other true propositions) are not true by virtue of some fact, but only by virtue of their logical form, and so they do not say anything about anything at all—they are "senseless". Anyone who assumes these Tractarian theses will only be able to avoid something like the distinction between saying and showing by denying two other ideas that are not exclusively Tractarian: (iv) the idea that different languages are different manifestations of "the" Language, being different ways of expressing one all-encompassing "realm of sense" and (v) the idea that the sense of

propositions must fulfill necessary (logical) "conditions of possibility", whatever they are. These conditions of possibility (v) would have to be expressed in sentences of "the" Language (iv). If they are to say something, they cannot be tautologies (iii), but then they cannot be necessary (ii), and so they cannot be propositions (i). Express the conclusion as you want. Wittgenstein's choice was to express it "saying" that those conditions of possibility cannot be said, but are shown to anyone who *does* logical analysis in the only possible way.

If we do not deprive the *Tractatus* of (i) the isomorphism between world and language and (ii) the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown, then Lewis's criticisms are clearly misguided as far as Wittgenstein is concerned. They may apply to many conceptions of truth as correspondence, but *not* to its main and most radical version. Of course, Wittgenstein would agree that, in addition to facts, "there are also things which are not Tractarian facts"— this is the case, for instance, of objects and logical forms. But he would also establish a sharp division between the occurrence of a fact and the "existence" of objects and forms. This latter is not a fact, but a logical condition for the description of facts. As such, it cannot be described by any proposition, and so it cannot be a fact or "truth-maker". The sentence "there are things which are not facts" would not be counted as a proposition, but as a nonsense which may have practical effects in the language games we play.[28] One can find this paradoxical (and it is assumedly so), but one cannot ignore it while speaking about "Tractarian facts".

As to the claim that the "theory is not about truth", since the word "truth" disappears from the biconditionals used to make truth equivalent to something else, this is exactly what

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[28] Even the barking of a dog or the purring of a cat has predictable effects.

we should expect from a Tractarian point of view. A proposition describes a fact, but the sense of a proposition is not an *additional* fact that could be described by it (or by any other proposition)—the sense is shown by the proposition, not described by it. This showing is not a gratuitous claim that can be dispensed with without further examination as if Wittgenstein were just begging a comfortably ineffable question. It is grounded on the notion of isomorphism: the proposition puts us in front of a logical copy of the fact that, occurring, would make it true. So it is quite understandable that the word "truth" disappears under analysis—there is no fact behind it, no concept to be defined, not even an object to be named. Its only function in *our* language is to call our attention to a formal concept by means of sentences which, under analysis, will either collapse into tautologies or be exposed as nonsense. We could even admit that the biconditionals expressing truth-conditions are (as Lewis says) about "all manner of things", but they are not about anything over and above the purring of cats, or (even worse) behind it. When we say that it is true that cats purr, we are talking about cats. Wittgenstein is just claiming that although we cannot have verbal access to the sense of propositions, we can have *nonverbal access* to it. That is exactly what we do when we understand them or compare them with reality. This is not a philosophical monster, and should not be taken as such. Quite the contrary. It is just the natural consequence of some very general principles which are too easily accepted by philosophers who are not always inclined to stick to them no matter where they could lead us.

What about relativism? Here we come across the most interesting point of the debate. Could we find any kind of relativism hidden in the *Tractatus*? Is the strong notion of truth as correspondence that we find in the book locked into the solipsist sphere of a transcendental subject which makes

language *my* language, and the world *my* world? Is this solipsist sphere a prison?

Once again, we must remember the characteristic radicalism of the Tractarian project keeping in mind its two landmarks: the isomorphism between world and language and the opposition between saying and showing. Let us imagine that $"fa"$ and $"fb"$ are elementary propositions. They are both values of the same prototype φx, and so they share the same logical form—something that in Russellian terms we could describe as the ascription of a "first order property" to an "individual". Now let us suppose that $"fa"$ is true and $"fb"$ is false. This can only be possible because in spite of having the same logical form they mean different things. The difference is obviously given by the names $"a"$ and $"b"$, each one meaning a different object. Logical form is not enough to tell us which is which. It is only through the association between names and objects that we have the difference of meaning that allows us to say that the first proposition is true, since it corresponds to a fact, while the second proposition is false. The passage from the prototype φx to a specific proposition needs more than mere isomorphism (i.e. shared logical form); it needs the distinction between the name $"a"$ and the name $"b"$, and that is something that only some kind of intentionality can do. The sign $"a"$ must be meant as the name of the object a, and not of the object b, by a subject of representation which is not part of the represented world. This is one of the reasons Wittgenstein had to postulate the existence of a metaphysical subject as a "limit" of the world (5.632, 5.633) (cf. Cuter 2003). Notice that the subject is a limit of the world—it is not "outside" it. This difference is crucial.

Strictly speaking, there is nothing "outside" the world in the *Tractatus*. Everything which is not in the world can only exist as a "limit" of it—a condition of possibility for

representation of any world, no matter what. As a condition of possibility of the propositional sense, a "limit" is always something that can be only shown. It cannot be described.

Take objects for instance. They cannot be found "alone" in the world. A state of affairs is an immediate concatenation of objects, and when it occurs we could say that the concatenated objects are "exemplified"[29] in *that* world, but not that they "are out there", as tables and books would be. Tables and books could not exist, while objects have a necessary existence, be they "exemplified" in states of affairs or not. Without logically simple objects we could not have logically simple names, elementary propositions, or language in general. Objects are conditions of possibility for the existence of language and, in this sense, they are conditions of possibility for any world that any language could ever describe. They are a "limit" of the world—any world—a *nec plus ultra* without whose presence no world can be conceived.

The same could be said of logical forms, logical operations,[30] propositional senses and also of the transcendental subject: they are all *limits* of the world. No world can be conceived without them and, for this very reason, they cannot be conceived as constituents of any world. Their existence is shown by the impossibility of conceiving representation in general without them, but for this very reason they cannot be represented, they cannot be said. They are ineffably necessary—conditions of possibility

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[29] Wittgenstein does not use this concept. I am using it to make my point clear.

[30] No world could be conceived without negation—not even the possible world in which all elementary propositions are true. The proposition which describes a fact *must* be conceived as the contradictory of the proposition negating the same fact. It is part of the "logical identity" of a state of affairs to make false the proposition denying its occurrence.

of any representation—and so they are "transcendental". But they are not "outside" the world, since the Tractarian world has no outside. There is nothing to be said about the "outside" of the world, and nothing to be silent either. We can go to the limits of language and "see" them, but there is nothing to be "seen" beyond them. That is how I think the metaphor of the limit should be read.

Wittgenstein says (6.41) that both "the sense of the world" [*der Sinn der Welt*] and any absolute value must lie outside the world—outside "all happening and being-so". But this is subordinated to the statement that "all propositions are of equal value" (6.4), and must be read accordingly. Wittgenstein cannot be speaking here of truth-values, for propositions do not have the same truth-value. They are either true or false. He must be speaking of ethical and aesthetical values. The occurrence of *p* must be as "desirable" as the occurrence of not-*p*. Of course, this is not true from a psychological perspective, since we are often inclined to wish that *p*, instead of not-*p*. We could say the same about any shared viewpoint—be it social, familiar, religious, etc.—in so far as it shows a preference for some facts instead of others. The will that is linked to our shared or individual preferences is just a fact among facts and has as much absolute value as the opposite desire, viz. none. There is no obstacle to describing this psychological will as a fact. It is as mundane as a headache. But Wittgenstein talks (6.43) about the Will as the bearer of the Ethical [*als Träger des Ethischen*]—a non-psychological Will which can be Good or Bad, Happy or Unhappy in an absolute sense. I can only conceive the Good non-psychological Will as a metaphysical subject contemplating the world *sub specie aeterni* and accepting it as it is. The "Happy Subject" takes in the world *as if* it were the product of the Will of God, the outcome of a perfect choice guided by absolute values that would be

outside the world.[31] But this subject itself is not "outside" the world. It is the same subject that projects names into objects and builds more complex propositions out of simpler ones. It is a condition of possibility of the propositional sense, and, as such, it is a limit of the world.[32]

There is no place here to speak about something similar to the Kantian "Ding an sich"—there is not even the motivation of a representation conceived as the meeting point of an active and a passive contribution, this latter announcing, so to speak, a "foreign realm" which is beyond the boundaries of human knowledge. Nothing is announced by the Tractarian bounds of sense except the realm of propositions and the realm of possible facts that make them true or false. Logic does not show us anything over and above that.

The immediate consequence is that the point of view of the transcendental subject is not relative to "this subject" as opposed to any other. There is only one possible transcendental subject—only one possible source of sense. You may call it "solipsistic subject" if you want, but do not forget that this is not part of a skeptical narrative in which we are asking about the existence of "other minds". The subject is not a mind. It has no history, no structure, no desires, no tendencies, no capacities. It can be seen as an intentional subject, but its intentionality has nothing to do with any psychological faculty—something that I can have more or less, train to improve, or lose in old age. Wittgenstein is not considering the logical possibility of being alone in the world—he is rather stating the logical

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[31] "*Wenn* es einen Wert gibt, der Wert hat, so muss er außerhalb alles Geschehens und So-Seins liegen" (Wittgenstein 1961, 6.41, my emphasis).

[32] See Cuter 2012 for details.

impossibility of being accompanied by any other source of sense. As far as language is concerned, the transcendental subject is not "alone". It is a logical singularity. As objects are essentially many (since a single state of affairs is the concatenation of at least two objects), the transcendental subject is essentially one.

Of course, this is quite radical. As I said, I think it is the most radical version of the correspondence theory that was ever conceived: a world essentially linked to a transcendental subject that can only articulate propositions showing in their own structure how the world is if they are true. It is radical, it is strange, it is untenable perhaps. It is guilty of all kinds of sins, but not of relativism. It is perhaps the best example we have of the exorbitant price that we must pay when we are not ready to admit at least some degree of relativism linked to our too human condition.[33]

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[33] I want to thank Robert Vinten for the corrections he suggested and for a critical remark he made, which I tried to some extent to account for.

Marcos Silva - *On the Epistemology of Logic: Logical Principles as Hinge Propositions*

Venturinha's new book *Description of Situations: An Essay in Contextualist Epistemology* deals with an impressively wide range of themes and contains several penetrating ideas in few more than 100 pages. At first sight, his book seems rather like a set of short thought-provoking essays on basically everything: from language to ethics, from contemporary epistemology to metaphysics. It also includes some sharp comments about great authors from the history of philosophy, such as Aristotle, Descartes and Kant.

A first look at the summary already calls our attention to the variety and relevance of the topics in such a short book. The references in the work include major figures from contemporary philosophy but they are always placed in dialogue with figures from the history of philosophy. It also builds a seminal and welcome bridge between the continental tradition (e.g. Husserl, Heidegger, and Ricoeur) and analytical philosophy (e.g. Frege, Quine and Davidson). The book is a good example of how to take both traditions seriously in order to make advances in contemporary philosophy.

I am sympathetic to Venturinha's contextualist main line of thought which opens and guides his book. His book "takes as its point of departure the fact that we are situated beings. Every single moment in our lives is already given within the framework of a specific context in the midst of which we understand ourselves and what surrounds us." (Venturinha 2018, ix)

But while the book is a great survey of relevant work in epistemology and theory of knowledge, it does not mention discussions of the nature of logic and its principles and the possibility of their revision. It does not address recent investigations of logical revision and logical pluralism which

could enrich and be enriched by its contextualist proposal. The silence about philosophy and epistemology of logic is pretty pregnant, given the book's presumption. Even in the first chapter entitled "Language and Reasoning" a more detailed discussion of logic would have been welcome. Since Venturinha's contextualist book says little about logic I would like to propose making a connection between two themes that are important for his account, namely hinge epistemology and social dependency in the construction of normativity. In chapter 11, called "Social Dependency", Venturinha elaborates on Pritchard's influential Wittgensteinian approach against radical skeptics (Pritchard 2012, 2016) by emphasizing the "groundlessness of our believing". In chapter 12, "Moral Matters", Venturinha maintains that hinge epistemology can be applied to moral discussions: "Here we can see that in a moral scenario there is no room for an epistemic vertigo. Not even the deepest modal uncertainty dissolves my moral conscience. Like hinges, our moral commitments prevail." (Venturinha 2018, 91)

In this short contribution, I would like to assess the viability of equating logic and hinge epistemology compatible with Venturinha's contextualist proposal.

1. EPISTEMOLOGY OF LOGIC AND THE VERY POSSIBILITY OF LOGICAL REVISION

Brouwer's intuitionist program, as presented in his historic PhD Thesis (1907) and, then, in his paper "The unreliability of the logical principles" (1908), shows a genuine philosophical motivation for revising logical principles and not just for engineering or tinkering with symbols and a plethora of formal calculi. In Heyting's intuitionist systems (1928, 1930), which develop Brouwer's

thinking, an inference rule is valid if a construction can be found that makes true the statement that is obtained by applying the rule. What the principles of logic need to preserve is therefore not, as in classical logic, mind-independent truth, but mental constructibility. Various principles of classical logic, most notably the Principle of the Excluded Middle, then become insufficiently grounded.

The unreasonableness of the classical Principle of Explosion also presents compelling grounds for revising logical principles, as it becomes problematic to derive every single possible sentence from a contradiction (Da Costa 1958, 1959). It suffices to have a contradiction to lead to an explosive consequence relation in those systems. We must though distinguish trivialization from contradiction. In fact, the problem in rational domains should not be the existence of contradictions but the occurrence of an explosive relation of logical consequence. In some rational discussions or in some important domains of our lives, when we are dealing with beliefs and information, we do encounter contradictions and go on reasoning nevertheless. In science some theories could be inconsistent without being trivial (Priest, Tanaka, and Weber 2018).

These philosophical objections to the nature and scope of classical logical orthodoxy have paved the way for the emergence of two major non-classical logics, respectively, intuitionist and paraconsistent logics. They have several important philosophical and technical implications for mathematics and computation (Carnielli and Rodrigues 2015a, 2015b).

We should take the current plurality of non-classical logics as a serious philosophical question, that is, as something that calls for an explanation and forces us to reconsider the very role and purpose of logic. Two extreme views prevent us from engaging with the philosophical possibility of a plurality of alternative logics, one of which

has it that logic is some metaphysical endeavor with sophisticated intellectual tools capable of discovering independent abstract structures, while the other maintains that logic is basically an empty game governed by ad hoc and arbitrary decisions.

This scenario, in fact, offers us a relevant general epistemological problem concerning the nature of logic and the very possibility of revision of its principles and most basic rules. One can question whether it is possible to *choose* the correct set of logical rules and if so, how it is to be done. In other words, how could we *rationally* justify our logical principles, if the very possibility of rational justification presupposes them? In fact, a cluster of epistemological questions can be envisioned here: How should we argue about a basic set of rules of inference or logical principles? Which *rational* arguments could be used *to convince* a litigant that a set of basic rules is the correct one, if any argument has to be, from the beginning, based on a set of accepted inferential rules? These are questions concerning the very nature of logic and rationality and the viability of their justification. They have to do with the question of how reason can be used to ground the most basic principles of reason without circularity or infinite regress. In other words, is there a rational way of convincing someone of such a fundamental thing as a logical principle?

According to Bueno and Colyvan (2004), for instance, the emergence of non-classical logics motivates the revision of several classical and epistemologically attractive features of logic and its centrality for rationality and our daily lives. Indeed, views that take logic to be absolute, eternal, a priori, or universal have been severely challenged in recent decades**.** Concerning these difficulties Bueno and Colyvan state:

> One of the reasons that philosophy of logic is such a difficult enterprise is that, in order to

advance debates in this area, we require the very thing we are studying: logic. This difficulty is especially acute when engaging in the business of theory choice in logic. After all, in order to decide between two logical theories, we need to put forward evidence and arguments for each. This evidence and these arguments will need to be assessed, and the assessment will need to be conducted in the context of some logic or other. But how do we choose this latter logic? We appear to be headed for an infinite regress. (Ibid., 156)

Note that Agrippa's famous skeptical trilemma which challenges every single attempt to ground our justifications and beliefs epistemologically may also be applied in this context. According to Agrippa any chain of justification for our beliefs and theories will eventually face three main problems. First, as presented in the quote above, once we step into the inquiry about the nature of logical principles and how to justify them, an infinite regress threatens us. While we could avoid it by accepting a self-evident axiom or something similar, this strategy might be viewed as arbitrary or dogmatic by a skeptic. Another way out is to propose that beliefs and justifications should mutually ground each other. However if we use a net of evidence that should ground each other, a skeptic may attack it pointing out that this would entail circularity. Arbitrariness in the stipulation of a first axiom, circularity and infinite regress are skeptical challenges encountered by foundationalists in epistemology, and they also occur in the discussion concerning the justification of our logical principles.

The main agenda of contemporary discussions concerning the revision of logic, one compatible with Venturinha's contextualism, should be to develop a

philosophical theory of logical inference that explains the rules and pragmatic nature of rationality and logic itself by giving centrality to and developing the following working hypothesis: that the alleged logical laws should legitimately be taken, from a situated point of view, as a set of rules embedded in and governing our discursive practices in a determined public sphere. In other words, logical principles should be taken as rules with normative power that constitute and correct our practices in a public discursive sphere of individuals in dynamical exchanges in communities. Thus, proofs can be seen as dialogues between "opponents" in which the applicant introduces a thesis and the opponent tries to systematically block the establishment of the truth of the theory, as argued in recent work by Dutilh Novaes (2013, 2015), and Brandom (1994, 2000). In this social perspective, logic should be taken as a set of argumentative practices in which participants have different goals, recovering the very meaning of debates in ancient Greek democracy. Thus, a logical proof, before being conceived as a tool to establish eternal truths, can represent a finite and sequential itinerary of a situated discourse to convince an audience. Truth is established by persuasion resulting from the steps justified by public rules and not by an eminent transcendent truth of our practices. In this context, rules, agreements, and stipulations play the role of objective correction of discourse, which in a realist approach is guaranteed by impersonal truths, independent of our inferential practices. In a contextualist view, a realist approach to logic should be avoided as it blocks any revision of logic and prevents the emergence of a greater plurality of non-classical logics with different aims, scopes and applicability.

If we adopt logical principles as rules regulating our activities, setting rules and criteria to evaluate what is legitimate or illegitimate, we must note that we are dealing,

in this perspective, fundamentally with situated deontological notions, as authorizations and prohibitions, that allow, restrict or guide our field of action or space of maneuver (*Spielraum*). As a result, it is crucial to observe in this context that rules normatively determine the criteria by which we judge the quality of our actions and descriptions. Accordingly, rules themselves can be neither true nor false, as they lay down criteria for our evaluation of something as true or as false. Thus, it makes no sense to say that a standard or a logical principle is true or false. However, note that reference systems could have been different and can change over time according to pragmatic and environmental pressures.

For the completeness of Venturinha's contextualist line of thought, it is also crucial to take logic as a human enterprise: Formal logic (reasoning using general principles) should be ultimately based on our actual discursive practices and informal logic (local and correct reasoning). The problem of revision of logic concerns neither formal logic, nor the application of logic to natural sciences, but daily homespun reasoning. The primary locus of normativity and meaning should be our daily life, our regular daily inferences. Here it is important to emphasize the constitutive social dimension of logic, the absorption of rules by observation and instruction, and the possibility of mutual correction in communal regulative practices that presuppose training (inculcation and immersion in a human community).

2. LOGICAL PRINCIPLES AS HINGE PROPOSITIONS

By combining further insights found in Wittgenstein (1974), Dutilh Novaes (2013, 2015, 2016) and Venturinha (2018) we can motivate a contextualist approach to tackle the problem of deep disagreement about revision of logic by

offering a non-foundationalist proposal for the nature of logic. The emphasis, for making revision of logic possible without engaging in a metaphysical endeavor, should not be put on the investigation of any deep and hidden laws of nature or reality, but on some kind of reflexive equilibrium of human practices based on linguistic and social interactions, that is on the dynamical association between forms of lives and logical principles as hinge propositions. It is a false dichotomy to think that we must understand logic as being either the manipulation of empty signs or as being grounded in the reality of things. The foundation should be social and stable or regular enough. It should have normative power, that is, it should be used *by us* to correct deviant cases.

In this vein, we have good reasons for introducing *Hinge epistemology or Moorean propositions* (Coliva 2015; Moyal-Sharrock 2016; Pritchard 2012, 2016) into the context of revision of logic. Moore connects "I know" with several different empirical propositions to challenge idealism/skepticism. Some examples of these propositions are: "I am a human being", "there are other human beings", "I have a brain", "I've never been off our planet", "I've never been on the moon", "I have two hands" "here it is a hand", "Every human being has a brain". Wittgenstein, in his *On Certainty* (1974) questions how we learn those "truths". The truth of Moore's propositions is certainly not *a priori* and it is not guaranteed by empirical verification. They do not seem to rely on any formal induction either, because they are not based on a mere generalization (or if so with very few specimens).

Two properties of these "hinge" propositions are immediately apparent for Wittgenstein. First, they are required in order to investigate the truth of other claims and, secondly, they are exempt from doubt. We do not usually articulate those "truths" and do not really accept their (logically) possible falsehood. Yet, central to all of them is

the idea that they function as "hinges" that play a peculiar, rule-like role (ibid., § 95) which ultimately makes them immune to skeptical assaults while also divesting them of the status of knowledge. Accordingly, propositions like "Here's my hand" (in Moore-like situations), "Nobody has ever been on the Moon" (around 1949), "The Earth has existed for a very long time", "My name is MS", "There are physical objects", are rules of "evidential significance" (Wright 1985), or a "norm of description" (Wittgenstein 1974, §§ 167, 321). In other words, justification and knowledge, as well as doubt, are possible only *within* the limits set by taking hinges for granted, as they play a *regulative, normative* role. Thus, as we might put it, they are constitutive elements of our situated rationality. According to Venturinha:

> Hinges produce the necessary evidence to situate us in experience regulating what is and is not subjected to doubt. They immediately exclude any far-fetched sceptical possibility of global epistemological impact, not because we have provided grounds for its exclusion but rather because evidence already imposes that the situation turns around its own axis. Contrary to professed epistemic contextualists, Wittgenstein is not interested in laying down the truth-conditions of our variable knowledge ascriptions. For him, the most important contextual work to be done in epistemology is to shed light on the *thereness* of our evidence. (2018, 52)

I think this line of argument could also be applied to logic. There is also a "thereness" of our evidence in logic. Evidence has often been used to predicate logical principles

and to accommodate the changes of such principles would be very difficult. It is important to mention that Moore's work seems to have led Wittgenstein to propositions about perceptional information. But it does not have to.

Against this background, we may have a working threefold contextualist hypothesis: i) Logical principles should be treated as hinge propositions. (Although not all hinge propositions are logical principles). ii) They are determined by our education in a *Weltbild*. iii) Logical principles could be different and may change.

Hinge propositions or Moorean propositions are not metaphysical. They are not descriptions. They neither share a common logical form (in fact, they have the form of empirical propositions) nor a similar semantic content. They are indubitable due to their peculiar function in our form of life. This peculiar role makes them logical. And this role might be changed. We are educated through and by them. As in radical conflicts, in logic we also have to initiate (litigant) people into new procedures, interests and views. The basic idea is that we have a foundation, but without foundationalism. In some scenarios and situations, the opposite is never considered. Something has to be solid. It is not a matter of a special propositional content, but rather our ways of acting and judging that rule certain things out of consideration.

We can motivate the transition from hinge epistemology to logic, by stressing the analogy between hinges and logical principles. Both are required to investigate the sense and truth of other claims. They are exempt from doubt, because something must stand fast (otherwise we would lose our foothold). In systems, like logical ones, some things are unshakable and "absolutely solid and secure". Note that hinge propositions are "obvious", just like logical principles. Rejection or refusal is often taken as insane, not just false, as we would not let them go because they belong to things that

we are convinced of. As Wittgenstein puts it, "the reasonable man does *not have* certain doubts" (1974, § 220).

In order to convey a proper contextualist account of logic revision, it should entail two main ideas, namely: i) Dynamical aspect of revision of logic and ii) two-way direction of normativity between logical principles and local reasoning.

Some Wittgensteinian-oriented philosophers, like Brandom (1994, 2000) and Fogelin (1985), hold that we use logical principles to correct, to regulate our actions, perceptions, interactions, theories, information, etc. and not (primarily) to describe things. They use, in their account of logic, the antirealist tenet that logical vocabulary does not relate to any particular state of affairs in the world but to *our* criteria or norms to evaluate descriptions and actions in the world. In this vein, we might be able to develop an account in epistemology of logic dealing with i) and ii), as we are not talking about facts and truth, but about our criteria to evaluate facts and truth. Logical principles do not need to represent anything in reality. Logical systems express some of our public commitments and norms in daily rational discussions and practices. Our ruled practices, the forms we enact in the world, are inferentially articulated and can be publicly and dynamically tested and controlled.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Here I defended the application of hinge epistemology, as presented by Venturinha (2018), to the subject of revising logic. According to a contextualist program concerning logical principles, empirical propositions and logical propositions are not distinguished according to their content, nor by their logical form, but by their role in our *Weltbild*, that is, in our understanding of the world, how it

operates, and how we act in it. Propositions may also sometimes play the role of norms, as they are used to correct our perception and guide our actions and inquiry. As a consequence, the so-called normativity of logic in a contextualist proposal is not something tangential; it should be central to understanding rationality and logical necessity.

Darlei Dall'Agnol - *On Venturinha's Contextualist Moral Epistemology*

Venturinha's book *Description of Situations* is an excellent essay on contextualist epistemology with a Wittgensteinian inspiration. The work deals with a wide range of philosophical subjects: from theoretical ones such as the nature of language and reasoning, theory of truth and the fabric of the world, determinism and free will, radical skepticism and whether transcendentalism is successful in refuting it, to more practical ones such as social dependency, morality, ethics, akratic actions, moral knowledge and so on. A short review does not permit detailed comments on each of these philosophical issues; therefore, I will confine myself to the last chapter of the book ("Moral Matters") in order to better discuss whether there is moral knowledge and whether it is a sufficient condition for acting rightly.

To start with, it is crucial to reconstruct the context in which the last chapter is situated. At the end of chapter 11, Venturinha, after recalling Moore and Wittgenstein's discussions on certainty, shows some sympathy to Pritchard's problem of epistemic vertigo, that is, the supposed residuum of theoretical doubt that remains even after serious attempts to reject radical skepticism. Much of the book *On Certainty* is a discussion of Moore's proof of an external world and Wittgenstein's own approach to it. Now, if we take a direct approach, the problem can be put in this way: the skeptic can always respond that whether Moore really knows there is a tree in his garden or not is ultimately a matter of belief only since he cannot be justified in his credence corresponding to anything "out there" in the world. Vertigo is, according to Pritchard and Venturinha, caused by a recognition of "the groundlessness of our believing" (Wittgenstein 1974, § 166). Now, Venturinha rejects Moyal-Sharrock's solution, namely that vertigo is just

felt by the epistemologist who takes knowledge as "justified true belief" only, in that it neglects practical certainties such as knowing how to walk around the tree as one stands up from one's chair and moves in the garden. As I see it, however, Wittgenstein would prefer an indirect approach to skepticism that leads to its *dissolution*: since the skeptic himself must have solid reasons to doubt, and since it is not possible to doubt everything (one must, for instance, take as grounded the meaning of words while doubting), radical skepticism is pragmatically self-refuting. I will not, however, dispute this point here. Thus, according to the author of *Description of Situations*, "The only way to override vertigo is, I shall argue in the last chapter, by taking a moral-epistemological attitude" (Venturinha 2018, 87).

Arriving at chapter 12, then, Venturinha starts by making the distinction between ethics (the pursuit of the good in our lives) and morality (what is mandatory in society to achieve it). He argues that context is equally determinant in this sphere; for instance, the moral principle "you shall not kill" needs to be contextualized. For example, does it apply to humans only or to non-human animals too? Does it relate to animals that are part of our diet or ones that annoy us like insects? Are cases of self-defense and just wars exceptions? Now, since morality is mandatory, there is no room for epistemic vertigo: "Not even the deepest modal uncertainty dissolves my moral conscience. Like hinges, our moral commitments prevail." (Ibid., 91) That is why, according to the author of *Description of Situations*, in the end, morality matters deeply.

To recognize the existence of moral hinges, Venturinha invites us to apply his Disclosure Principle (ibid.): *imagine that whatever you do, even the things that only you know about, can be seen and would be seen by those you most care for.* This thought experiment makes clear that moral responsibility is an inalienable feature of our existence and that our moral

conscience speaks to us because everything could become known to our dearest. So, why do we still act wrongly after all?

This problem is discussed by Venturinha in the third section of the last chapter, on akratic actions. Since it is a short one, I would like to quote in its entirety here:

> That an agent can choose to do what she judges to be wrong instead of what she judges to be right, experiencing ethical qualms as a consequence, is, in the philosophy of action, a problem of "akrasia"—from the Greek ἀκρασία, which literally means "lack of power". Contrary to the Socratic perspective, according to which evil is only done by ignorance, unintentionally, the existence of akratic actions depends on the admission that they are intentional. It is exactly because the akratic agent can find sufficient reasons for doing *w* that she thought it would be better for her not to do *r*, even if she recognizes the latter as what should ultimately be done. What is at stake is a conflict of reasons. The Socratic argument is that the agent was ignorant when *w* was contemplated as a possibility and that under closer scrutiny *r* would have appeared as the rational decision. It is not my aim here to contribute to the debate on akrasia, which raises many other questions. […] My view is that the agent does not feel herself weak but divided. It is not because she definitely wanted to do *r* but is not strong enough to decide to do it that she does *w*. She does *w* for the simple reason that she is not absolutely sure about the value of *r*. *She may be more inclined to believe that*

> *doing r is better than doing w, but she does not know it. In fact, no one can ever claim to know something in this realm.* The ignorance Socrates talks about can be identified but cannot be dispelled. As long as the agent has a good reason for her action, its legitimation is as good as any other. (Ibid., 92; italics added)

The last section of the last chapter, then, concludes that since the application of the *r-w* standard of actions can be fluid, "there can be no such thing as moral *knowledge*" (ibid., 93). I remain, however, unconvinced that the problem of akratic actions shows us that a non-cognitivist approach in moral epistemology is the only option. In the remaining part of this review, therefore, I will question Venturinha's contextualist moral epistemology.

I believe it is important to make a clear distinction between whether there are moral dilemmas (whether to do *r* or *w*) and the akratic problem. What Venturinha seems to have primarily in mind concerns *apparent* dilemmas; that is, it concerns doubting whether there are better reasons for doing *r* instead of *w*. I would here like to consider his own example from a poet: "To you children are nothing, the flesh of your flesh are your poems"(ibid, 93). According to Venturinha, that a father is able *to repudiate his children* (*r*) only *to serve poetry* (*w*) seems unacceptable to us, but we can also form a better image of the poet who sacrifices his whole life for the sake of poetry. According to the author of *Description of Situations*, this example shows how fluid the application of *r-w* standards can be and, eventually, that there is no knowledge in the moral realm.

Could one hold that the above conflict of reasons (*r, w*) exhibits a *real* moral dilemma? I do not think so. We can represent the logical form of real dilemmas (if there are any) in this way: $(Op \wedge Oq) \wedge \neg \Diamond (p \wedge q)$. To alter slightly the

above example: it is obligatory for the poet to do p (to take care of his children); it is, at the same time, obligatory to do q (to serve poetry), and it is not possible to do both. Thus, if there were some impossibility of knowing how to act, it would be related to the *equal value* of contradictory reasons. But this is clearly not the case, and consequently the dilemma is only apparent. A pseudo dilemma is just an epistemic difficulty for the agent since most of us (including Venturinha) would not consider the repudiation of one's own children to be morally acceptable. Actually, the apparent dilemma is between choosing *morality* itself and an *aesthetic* way of life. No one can be under a *moral* obligation to write poetry, but all parents are under an obligation to take care of their children. Therefore, the apparent dilemma does not show that there is no moral knowledge. A law requiring the confused poet to provide for the basic necessities of his children would be morally justified.

   Could we say that the poet suffers from akrasia when he chooses to serve poetry? Well, this may well be the case. He could know that the moral obligation is to take care of his children, but have no strength *of will* to do so. That is to say, let us suppose that he knows, morally speaking, he must not repudiate his children, but that he acts differently and just keeps writing poetry all day long. What happened? If there are no moral dilemmas, the best explanation here is not that the poet is unsure about the *r-w* standard of action, but that he chooses *w* instead of *r*. The poet is incontinent: he knows what is right, but acts against it. Now, Venturinha is right to criticize the Socratic tradition according to which knowledge is sufficient to act rightly. The problem is, then, a *volitive* one. Aristotle has already shown that the phenomena of akrasia and of incontinence reveal that the cognitive condition is a necessary, but not a sufficient one. It does not follow, however, that there is no moral knowledge. According to the author of *Nicomachean Ethics*, knowledge is a necessary

condition, but a volitive one must also be fulfilled to act rightly. To make sense of this view, we need, of course, to show that there is moral knowledge.

I would, then, like to turn now to the problem of whether there is moral knowledge. As it is perhaps well-known, there is a fierce discussion about whether Wittgenstein kept the non-cognitivist approach to morality he expressed in the *Tractatus* ("it is impossible for there to be propositions of ethics" [1961, 6.42]) in his later philosophy. According to Simon Blackburn (1981), this is indeed the case; for other authors such as John McDowell (1981), however, the late Wittgenstein changed his mind and his rule-following considerations can be used to develop a cognitivist moral epistemology. Now, I agree with McDowell on this point: there is a way of grasping a rule which results in *going on doing the same thing.* That is to say, we can act not only according to, but actually *follow* the rule. To believe or to know whether we are really following a rule are very distinct cognitive phenomena.

Now, inspired by Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations on 'belief', 'knowledge', 'certainty', etc. and on his rule-following remarks, I have developed a moral epistemology called "practical cognitivism". This asserts that there is moral knowledge and that it is best understood as involving *knowing-how* to act. To recognize this possibility, it is important to recall another distinction related to the grammar of the word 'to know', *which is closely related to that of 'can', 'is able to'*: we say "Now I know!—and similarly "Now I can do it!" and "Now I understand!" (Wittgenstein 2009, §§ 150-151). There is, then, a *practical* sense of 'to know' that allow us to defend a cognitivist moral epistemology. As we will see, moral knowledge may well be expressed both in moral hinge-propositions and in contingent, empirical moral propositions.

To recognize this point, let us first clarify Wittgenstein's distinction between empirical and grammatical propositions. To say "Harm is bad in itself" is just to express a grammatical remark on the meaning of 'harm': it has intrinsic disvalue. This is an example of a moral *grammatical* proposition. Now, to say "do not cause physical injury", or "psychological suffering is worse than pain and should also be avoided", etc. is to express an *empirical* moral proposition. If we accept that it is true that harm is bad in itself, for coherence, we should also accept as true that we must avoid causing physical injury, psychological suffering, etc. to other people. A physician may, however, cause physical pain (e.g. through surgery) to save a life. Thus, an empirical moral proposition may be true according to the context.

I would, however, like to go a step further and propose another distinction between *hinge* and *non-hinge* grammatical propositions. A hinge proposition sets, for instance, the meaning of 'morality' itself. An ethical principle such as "first, do no harm" is a hinge moral grammatical proposition, which allows, for example a physician to deliberate and decide whether a particular course of action is *the right thing* to do: if the benefits override the malefices, then the action is obligatory; if the harms are greater than the positive results, the action is morally forbidden, etc. For example, if a surgery restores health, it is morally obligatory; if the procedure would only kill the patient, it is morally forbidden, and so on. Now, *if nothing but harm* results, then the physician is morally bound not to act. This is the right thing to do. This seems to apply to any moral context. Even commonsense recognizes that "se não se puder fazer o bem, o mal não se faz pra ninguém" (Seo Chico, from the Island of Santa Catarina). Roman law was grounded on the same hinges: *Neminem laede, immo omnes, quantum potes, juva*! These statements express the grammar of 'morality' itself; they are hinge propositions. To deny them, as Wittgenstein would say, makes 'morality'

simply *unintelligible* for members of our lifeform (*Lebensform*). I follow here the interpretation of 'lifeform' which says that sharing the human lifeform is a necessary precondition, for example, for communication (ibid., § 241). 'Lifeform', then, is not a naturalistic concept and this makes purely contextualist interpretations of Wittgenstein's ethics problematic. Wittgenstein (1965) used to insist on the difference between absolute and relative uses of 'good', 'right', etc. Moral rightness is not sensitive to context. That is to say, it seems that there are no circumstances where it would be morally acceptable for anyone to produce just harm, if nothing else results from his actions. Therefore, not only must a physician *know-how* to act; that is, he can *go on doing the same thing* (first, no harm), but we are bound also to hold him responsible if he does not comply with the requirements of morality.

In conclusion, then, I think that we can attribute to a person the cognitive condition of *knowledge* (or the absence thereof), and not only *beliefs,* to evaluate her as a good or bad moral agent. To a physician whose acts do more harm than benefit for the patient, we will not only say that (s)he must *know* better, but we will also rightly seek the moral and legal conditions to hold her(him) accountable. That is why philosophers such as Aristotle and the late Wittgenstein, etc. seem to be right in holding that knowledge is a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition to act rightly.

These differences between Venturinha's contextualist approach and my own interpretation of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following and on the grammar of 'to know' should only be seen as a sign that *Description of Situations* is an excellent work which made me rethink many important issues in moral epistemology. No doubt, Venturinha's book deserves to be read and discussed by all those interested in philosophy and related areas.

Nuno Venturinha - *Replies*

I would like first to express my deepest gratitude to all the contributors to this book symposium for taking the time to read my *Description of Situations* and for raising so many interesting questions and objections. I am sure that they deserve much more attention and thought than they can receive within the limited space of these replies, which will serve mainly as clarifications.

1. REPLY TO CARVALHO

Marcelo Carvalho's commentary is a remarkable attempt to summarize the vast array of themes addressed in my book and to make sense out of it. Carvalho shares with me an interest in both the analytic and the continental traditions looking at philosophical problems from a broad perspective. He understands why I want to frame the current debate on epistemic contextualism with analyses of issues that go back to Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Bolzano, Frege, Husserl or Wittgenstein. No matter how little these authors appear in the writings of typical contextualists, they can help us reflect on the prospects and solutions we find today in epistemology. This is what explains the somewhat kaleidoscopic nature of *Description of Situations* in which the abovementioned names and other major figures from the history of philosophy coexist with contemporary epistemologists such as Cohen, DeRose, Lewis, Pritchard, Sosa, Travis, Williams and Williamson. There are various aspects that connect them: the relationship between language, thought and world; the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism, or realism and anti-realism; and the link between relativism and scepticism.

In this context, I was particularly surprised by Carvalho's reference to Heidegger as lying, together with Bolzano, Frege and Husserl, "at the core of [my] book" since the former, contrary to the latter, does not play any role in my argument. While Bolzano is central in chapter 3 ("The Correspondence Theory of Truth") and chapter 4 ("Reality in Itself"), Frege in chapter 4 and chapter 5 ("Unthought Thoughts"), and Husserl in chapter 10 ("Bracketing Modality") and chapter 11 ("Social Dependency"), Heidegger is only mentioned on two single occasions: in chapter 8 ("Radical Scepticism"), which is devoted to Descartes, apropos of the scholastic distinction between *essentia* and *existentia* retrieved in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (cf. Venturinha 2018, 60); and in chapter 11, which focuses on Husserl and the later Wittgenstein, where I call attention to an influence of Heidegger's *Being and Time* on Husserl's terminology used in the fifth of his *Cartesian Meditations* (cf. ibid., 82). In a short book like *Description of Situations* the examination must sometimes be sketchy, but in regard to Heidegger I do not even try to make a point. In fact, I consider that Heidegger's philosophy stands completely outside the common ground shared by Bolzano, Frege and Husserl, whose views are strongly informed and shaped by the science of their time. We do not find this scientific spirit in Heidegger who just saw in Husserl's phenomenology a way to explore the subjective side of experience, not its objective counterpart. I thus reject that *Description of Situations* promotes what Carvalho calls "a Heideggerian-Wittgensteinian 'natural ontology'". The book is certainly much under the influence of Wittgenstein, but not of Heidegger.

As Carvalho points out several times, Wittgenstein's later thought is actually the driving force of *Description of Situations*, which suggests an anti-sceptical perspective akin to that elaborated in *On Certainty* for dealing with the contextualist

puzzles. But Carvalho objects in an important way that there is not enough evidence to assume that "Wittgenstein is still part of [the] Platonic-Kantian debate". Here I should remark that "Platonic-Kantian debate" is an expression that I never use in *Description of Situations* and chapter 9 ("Transcendentalism") indeed tries to show how far Kant is from a realist, Platonist stance. But I regard this as a mere detail. What comes next is more relevant for Carvalho goes on to say that "the ontological claims that can be found in the *Tractatus* do not have any place in the *Philosophical Investigations*" and that "maybe Wittgenstein presents a radical alternative to this classical formulation and opens the way to a different strategy against relativism and skepticism". I would like to make three comments on this.

First, it is absolutely true that the later Wittgenstein rejects many of the realist assumptions of the *Tractatus*, but it is worth remembering that the early Wittgenstein embraces at the same time a solipsistic-transcendental conception which is at odds with Frege's realism—the main objectivist influence upon the *Tractatus*. Therefore, the dividing line between early and later Wittgenstein cannot be simply interpreted as the transition from a realist to an anti-realist view given that the Tractarian framework already falls outside strict realism.

Second, to associate the early and the later Wittgenstein to the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations* respectively is to deny that *On Certainty* brings with it substantially new views and to admit that in the *Investigations* we find Wittgenstein's last word on the problems of philosophy. I have criticized the idea of a "third" Wittgenstein because I am convinced that what Wittgenstein wrote in the last years of his life belongs to the *Investigations* project. But this does not mean, of course, that this project is essentially established in the posthumously published *Investigations*. Quite the contrary. There is evidence in *Last Writings on the*

Philosophy of Psychology and *On Certainty* that Wittgenstein was still working on the *Investigations*, a work that should include his ultimate ruminations on epistemic and psychological concepts.[34] Some of the views articulated in these texts can be found in manuscripts dating from as early as 1932,[35] which supports my conviction that it is more appropriate to talk about an unfinished version of the *Investigations* rather than a "third" Wittgenstein. There are, however, significant novelties in Wittgenstein's final writings, especially the manuscript sources of *On Certainty*, and what *Description of Situations* suggests is that at least up to a certain point the definitive picture that Wittgenstein left us appears as more realist than the Tractarian picture allegedly was.

Carvalho cannot agree with this reading—and this is my third comment—because he takes the *Investigations* to constitute an actual turning-point in the history of philosophy doing away with "classical" attempts to solve its long-lasting problems. Does not Wittgenstein tell us that conceptual investigations are needed exactly to eradicate pseudo-questions which make us suppose that their answers lie in some ethereal place? Should not we abandon the essentialist quest for an objectivity which, after all, is a symptom of misunderstanding the practice of language where regularities are established by the practice itself? Wittgenstein definitely teaches us that many issues that characterize philosophical reflection are nonsense and that we need to dissolve them instead of searching for a solution. Yet there is a risk involved in this emancipation of philosophy, which consists of confounding the conceptual

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[34] On this subject, see Venturinha 2010, esp. 149-150. On the genesis of the *Investigations*, see Venturinha 2013.

[35] A survey of Wittgenstein's engagement with the concepts of believing and knowing can be found in Venturinha forthcoming c.

investigation that *can* lead to a logical dissolution of the problem with the dogmatic eschew of that same problem. I read Wittgenstein as inviting us to carry out conceptual investigations in an undogmatic manner with the aim of dissolving those perennial questions that, under close scrutiny, do not obey the rules of our grammar.[36] The fact that the formulations of these questions by philosophers are often nonsensical does not mean that there is nothing whatsoever in reality corresponding to them. Wittgenstein's struggle against the problem of scepticism during his entire life shows that for him it represented much more than merely a linguistic construction and that the "hinges" he found can be seen as just a better epistemological answer to virtually the same issues we encounter throughout the history of philosophy. The realism proposed by Bolzano and Frege may be unsound, and the peculiar transcendentalisms of Husserl and the early Wittgenstein look even more untenable. I do not think, however, that we can stop playing, to use Carvalho's words, "the game of searching for final epistemological justifications and ontological presuppositions". I take this to be what Wittgenstein is doing in *On Certainty* within his innovative anti-foundationalism and infallibilism.

REPLY TO CUTER

Someone who has read João Vergílio Gallerani Cuter's commentary but not my book will believe that Lewis' rejection of the correspondence theory of truth plays a more important role in *Description of Situations* than it actually does. Lewis appears in chapter 3 alongside Bolzano and Frege as

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[36] I discuss the nature of conceptual investigations in Venturinha 2020b.

reacting against the correspondence thesis held by authors such as Aquinas, Kant and the early Wittgenstein. All these conceptions of correspondence are different and so are the rejections. While Bolzano's and Frege's views can be seen as similar, Lewis stands somewhat apart. It was not my aim in *Description of Situations* to discuss the core of Lewis' conception. As a matter of fact, I limit myself to write the following alluding to Lewis' 2001 paper "Forget about the 'Correspondence Theory of Truth'":

> Among contemporary critics of the "correspondence theory of truth" we find Lewis, for whom the theory that "truth is correspondence to fact" does not go any further than "the redundancy theory", failing to challenge "the coherence and pragmatic and epistemic theories" […]. (2018, 20)

What is at the centre of Cuter's commentary is not so much this passage but something I say in chapter 2 ("What the World Is Made Of") when I introduce the Tractarian notions of "fact" (*Tatsache*) and "state of affairs" (*Sachverhalt*). It is in this context that I quote a passage from Lewis, which I reproduce again here:

> A Tractarian fact is not a proposition. It is not something true that might have been false. Rather, it might have not existed at all. (2001, 277)

Lewis gives this definition of "Tractarian fact" after asserting that "we get nowhere if we stick to the usage on which a fact is nothing else but a true proposition" (ibid.). The result is then "the truthmaker principle", according to which "for every true proposition there exists something

such that the existence of that thing implies (strictly? relevantly?) the proposition in question" (ibid.).

It is here that the main disagreement between me and Cuter lies. On his view, "what Lewis calls a 'Tractarian fact' has nothing to do with the notion of 'fact' we find in the *Tractatus*". Moreover, Cuter avows, "the Tractarian notion of correspondence is completely immune to Lewis's criticisms" and "*pace* Nuno Venturinha, it does not involve any kind of relativism". That what Lewis takes to be a "Tractarian fact" has or has not to do with what Wittgenstein calls "fact" in the *Tractatus* evidently depends on how we read this book. Lewis himself warns the reader that he does *not* "assume that a proponent of Tractarian facts must agree with all that Wittgenstein […] says about them" (ibid.). It is patently clear that Lewis is not interested in taking Wittgenstein at his word. But, with this proviso, I think we can still take "Tractarian facts" in a Lewisian way. In so doing, the Tractarian conception of *Übereinstimmung* will be in difficulties *and* can be regarded as involving a certain relativism. Alternatively, we can read the *Tractatus* as Cuter recommends and the troubles of correspondism and relativism will both vanish. Let me sketch what this reading involves, as I understand it.

Cuter reads the *Tractatus* in a completely immanent way as there being no reference for our propositions other than what we can conceive as a possible denotation. This is for him the corollary of "the most radical conception of truth as 'correspondence' that was ever formulated in the history of philosophy". I have used the terms "reference" and "denotation" deliberately because Cuter seems to subscribe to Russell's understanding of the Fregean distinction between "sense" (*Sinn*) and "reference" (*Bedeutung*) when Russell, rendering these terms as "meaning" and "denotation", states that "denoting phrases never have any meaning in themselves" and that "there is no *meaning*, and

only sometimes a *denotation*" (1905, 480 and 483, fn. 3). Despite the strong influence of Russell upon the *Tractatus*, I am convinced that Frege did influence the early Wittgenstein even more and that Frege's concept of *Bedeutung* is to be taken robustly, that is, in a realist manner. It is very significant that Wittgenstein, after affirming that a "case" or a "fact" corresponds to "the existence of states of affairs" (1961, 2), immediately makes clear at proposition 2.01 that the "state of affairs" is nothing more than "a combination of objects", i.e. "things" (*Sachen, Dingen*). And at 3.203 he writes that an "object" is the *Bedeutung* of a "name". I cannot give here all my reasons in favour of a Fregean interpretation of the *Tractatus*, but it is precisely the attention to Frege's realism that prevents the book from falling totally, as Cuter reads it, "into the solipsist sphere of a transcendental subject which makes language *my* language, and the world *my* world". While I recognize an ontological equilibrium in the *Tractatus* between the objectivity of the world and the transcendentality of the subject, which raises the problem of correspondence, Cuter's reading undercuts this balance and consequently the relativism of correspondism. He claims that "the point of view of the transcendental subject is not relative to 'this subject' as opposed to any other" and that "[t]here is only one possible transcendental subject—only one possible source of sense". When put this way, a Lewisian-style criticism of the Tractarian account of correspondence necessarily loses its point and with it the worries of relativism. However, this *solution* comes with the price of transforming the *Tractatus* into a "solipsist sphere", one in which Wittgenstein, as I read him, has always tried *not* to be imprisoned. As a metaphysical realist, it is only natural for me to prefer the shortcomings of the Tractarian correspondence theory to an infallible solipsism. I am happy to know that Cuter does not trust that "the Tractarian notion

of truth as correspondence is right or even tenable", as he interprets it.

REPLY TO SILVA

Marcos Silva's commentary presents an interesting challenge to *Description of Situations* as it consists in connecting "hinge epistemology and social dependency in the construction of normativity" or, as he also puts it, "equating logic and hinge epistemology" within the framework of a contextualist approach. My primary interest in the book was epistemic contextualism, which deals with the truth-conditions of sentences usually expressed in the form "*S* knows that *p*". What divides contextualists and their (subject-sensitive or insensitive) invariantist opponents are the criteria for establishing these truth-conditions. A fully-fledged contextualist will argue that the attribution of knowledge to a certain subject *S* in a given context *C* at a time *t* can vary according to the epistemic group of the attributor. Knowledge would be thus a wholly relative concept and the epistemological inquiry should concentrate on whether the attribution is true in *C* from the attributor's perspective. More specifically, it should focus on what can legitimately lead an attributor to ascribe knowledge to *S* in that situation. Reflecting on the norms of practical reasoning is therefore essential for any contextualist since the epistemic standards must be reasonably set. The question is different for a subject-sensitive invariantist because what matters in this case are the practical interests of *S*, what *S* needs to know in order to act in *C*. The norms of practical reasoning still apply here, of course, but they are envisaged from the subject's point of view. The only one who can apparently dispense with such norms is the invariantist for whom knowledge rests on context-independent factors. In this

scenario, *S* knows *or* does not know, *simpliciter*. My appeal to a Wittgensteinian hinge epistemology in *Description of Situations* was meant exactly to clear up some confusion that subsists in the debate about contextualism and the possibility of knowledge. Let me briefly explain what this confusion is.

While I evidently recognize that contexts are socially determined, I argue that it is a mistake to believe that they are exclusively social. Interestingly enough, this belief can be found not only among epistemic contextualists but also among many Wittgensteinians. They all share a common fear of ontological impositions and prefer to look at reality as a pure social construction. They seem willing to forego that we live in a physical world and that *our* contexts are subordinated to what nature allows us to do. To think about the universe as shaped by *our* laws is, to my mind, parochial in the sense that this *standpoint theory* disregards what reality in itself encompasses. It is indeed a natural consequence of anthropocentrism to lay all the emphasis on what *we* know about things rather than on the things themselves. I can imagine the anti-realist asking: "But how can you reach anything other than your own views about things?" And this is not, for sure, the right question to ask. If it were so, scientists would never have sought beyond their knowledge and could never have arrived at new discoveries—of what was standing there waiting to be known by them. Yet what do hinges and normativity have to do with this?

There are two ways of conceiving hinges. One way is to take them to be social constructs, something we hold fast to as the result of our cultural, religious or scientific development and that is subject to change over time. For the anti-realist, these are the only hinges that exist and their normative character will always be a question of debate. But there is another way of looking at the matter, by which the former subsist with a more profound type of hinges. They have not been established by us on the basis of more or less

reasonable agreements. On the contrary, they are the actual conditions for the establishment of any hinges of the first type. Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*, as I read it, makes room for *both* in allowing a distinction between what Pritchard calls "personal hinge propositions", which are the outcome of our revisable "personal hinge commitments", and "über hinge propositions", which turn on fixed "über hinge commitments" (2016, 95-97). It is in the latter—and clearly not in the former, as Wittgensteinian contextualists defend—that we find the most solid basis against radical scepticism.

If we read *On Certainty* along these lines, Silva's suggestion of a "social perspective" in the midst of which "[t]ruth is established by persuasion resulting from the steps justified by public rules and not by an eminent transcendent truth of our practices" would be only relevant to the "personal" hinges. On the other hand, his claim that "[i]n a contextualist view, a realist approach to logic should be avoided as it blocks any revision of logic and prevents the emergence of a greater plurality of non-classical logics with different aims, scopes and applicability" must be read with caution. The admission of "über hinge commitments", which are "arational hinge commitments" (Pritchard 2016, 69, 89, 102-103, 174-175), should not rule out that our more basic logical principles can evolve accompanying the evolution of things in general. This, however, would be something quite extraordinary and cannot be confounded with the predictable revision of normative principles proper to our "personal commitments". Wittgenstein himself has some remarks in *On Certainty* that point in the direction of what I have called "an evolutionary normativity", which "goes side by side with the static principles of thought thereby creating a *real* logic" (Venturinha 2015, 165). If I am right in my supposition, then we will not need to say, like Silva, that "we are not talking about facts and truth, but about our criteria

to evaluate facts and truth"; we will be actually talking about both.

REPLY TO DALL'AGNOL

The main objection posed by Darlei Dall'Agnol in his commentary is an expected one: how can I claim, after defending an epistemological objectivism throughout 11 chapters of *Description of Situations*, that there is no moral knowledge? This incongruence seems even more flagrant if one takes into consideration that I forcefully defend in the book the existence of hinge commitments that go beyond mere convention. So, there should be a way to conceive of moral hinges, as Dall'Agnol points out. But whereas in the theoretical sphere we seem bound to accept hinge propositions like "There are two hands writing this sentence on the keyboard" or "The world did not begin when I took my coffee this morning", in the practical sphere we are less constrained. As I explain in the book, even a moral principle such as "you shall not kill", which we would like to be universally accepted, comes with a list of possible exceptions. You shall not kill *unless* you kill in self-defence or you kill an animal for subsistence consumption, etc. The objectivity of the principle thus appears as a mere conventionalized norm that, like any other norm, can be broken in some situations. Contextualism assumes here a decisive role because whether or not the agent is allowed to break the norms depends on very specific factors of the context in which she is. For this reason, reasonable standards must be set to regulate our practice in society. Similarly to what epistemic contextualists suggest about sentences of the form "*S* knows that *p*", in regard to which someone can attribute knowledge to *S* and someone else can deny it without incurring any contradiction by employing different standards, there are cases in which

someone can consider that *S* did the right thing whereas someone else can think that *S* was unjustified in acting as she did. We encounter debates of this kind everywhere and every time.

It is in order to avoid moral relativism, as the natural consequence of a moral contextualism, that I introduce in *Description of Situations* what I call the "Disclosure Principle". As Dall'Agnol summarizes it so well, "[t]his thought experiment makes clear that moral responsibility is an inalienable feature of our existence and that our moral conscience speaks to us because everything could become known to our dearest". If you like, one can say that the "Disclosure Principle" is a subject-sensitive invariantist principle insofar as what fuels it lies in the agent's projections for her life when she is situated in a given context. As in subject-sensitive invariantism, it is the subject's—viz. the agent's—practical interests that will determine what she calls knowledge—viz. what she calls moral knowledge. Is this another form of relativism? I think it is the best we can arrive at in this domain. Note that I do not place the decision of what is morally right or wrong in the attributor, as a typical moral contextualist will do, for this takes the focus out of moral conscience. In the end, morality would be regulated by what society imposes on us. I reject that this is the right way of approaching the issue. But the promise of a moral invariantism, insensitive to context, which could lay down objective principles for action, seems to me vain. It would not take account of the circumstances in which we act nor of the freedom we have to make our own decisions. Contrary to the existence of my hands or the subsistence of the world, in which my will does not interfere, the nature of morality is found precisely in the agent's free will to do *r* or *w*. Dall'Agnol's suggestion of a Wittgensteinian "practical cognitivism", which "asserts that there is moral knowledge and that it is best understood as involving *knowing-how* to

act", can obviously work within a subject-sensitive invariantist framework. It is, from *my* point of view, absolutely sound. But it inevitably lacks, when seen from an epistemological standpoint, the *certainty* regarding the outcome of the action which it would be necessary to achieve before speaking about moral *knowledge*.[37]

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