

*Knowledge, Reflection, and Action*¹

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Our main topic is epistemic agency, which can be either free or unfree. This aligns with a distinction between two sorts of knowledge, the reflective and the animal. We first take up the nature and significance of these two sorts of knowledge, starting with the reflective. In a second section we then consider the nature of suspension and how that relates suspension to higher orders of meta-belief. Finally, we consider a distinction in epistemology between animal competence and reflective justification. All of these topics and distinctions are important for virtue epistemology, in ways to be considered.

Keywords: Epistemic agency, reflective knowledge, animal knowledge, suspension of judgment, reflective justification.

A. Introduction: Agency and Reflection

Our main topic is epistemic agency, which can be either free or unfree. This aligns with a distinction between two sorts of knowledge, the reflective and the animal. We first take up the nature and significance of these two sorts of knowledge, starting with the reflective.

Reflection has two aspects: first, reflection as careful, conscious thought, as meditation; second, reflection as thought that turns back on itself, as higher-order thought. The two aspects come together in Descartes's *Meditations*. And both are present also in British Empiricism, where reflection is the operation of the mind by which it is consciously aware of its own contents.

The two aspects are separable, since higher-order reference to one's own mind can be *subconscious*. So we can distinguish two degrees of reflection. A first degree involves the mind's turning back on itself, whether consciously or subconsciously. A second degree also requires the higher-order thought to be conscious.

¹ What follows will lay out and extend key aspects of the virtue epistemology expounded most recently in my *Judgment and Agency* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

Both aspects of reflection are important in epistemology—both its conscious and its higher-order character—each in its own way.

The importance of the *higher-order* emerges, first, with epistemic suspension of judgment. Suspension is constitutively a second-order mental phenomenon, or so I will argue shortly, in section B. The higher-order is also important, second, because of our aim to keep epistemic risk within proper bounds in our search for truth. This risk-assessment is inherently second-order. It is an assessment of how risky it would be to judge that *p*. Does the risk permit judgment, or does it require suspension instead?

So much for the *higher-order*. The importance of *consciousness* emerges in contexts of critical assessment, whether in private thought or in public dialectic, when one must weigh all pertinent reasons, while judging in light of the total evidence. Among the relevant reasons as one ponders a question is the fact that one already holds a certain belief on that question, if one does, even if it is just stored in memory. Take any context of critical assessment: that of legislation, for example, or of the courtroom, or the doctor's office, or the lab, or the criminal investigation, or the philosophy seminar. Questions in such contexts must be addressed by weighing all the reasons in view. Yes, the fact that one already believes a given answer is among the reasons in view. But it cannot be allowed to trump automatically any contrary reasons that may also come into view. Nor will the stored answer necessarily outweigh the newly available reasons *simply because of how very reliable is the perception-plus-memory that diachronically delivers that stored answer*. A believer who has forgotten just how reliably he acquired and retained his belief cannot now draw the belief from storage *with a weight determined simply by its diachronic reliability*. The believer now needs reason to self-attribute such reliability. And this self-attribution will be on the second order and also conscious.

Reflective knowledge of the highest degree involves reflective thought that is both conscious and higher-order. This is the *scientia* that Descartes takes as his epistemic aim. It is knowledge consciously endorsed on the second order as reliable enough, as belief whose correctness manifests superlative competence. Here we have both components required for appropriate reflection of the higher sort. A first-order belief is endorsed *consciously* on the *second order* as one whose correctness manifests superlative competence.

Should we also allow a lesser degree of reflective knowledge requiring no *conscious* awareness? Nearly all one's knowledge remains implicit at any given time, and not all implicit beliefs are epistemically on a par. Only some derive from proper risk assessment, for one thing, and from a proper grasp of one's relevant competence. Some are on an animal level, unaccompanied by sufficient assessment of risk or grasp of competence, whether conscious or subconscious. For example, the beliefs of a blindsighter ignorant of his competence fall short epistemical-

ly, despite their animal epistemic standing. We should thus recognize a distinction between knowledge that is merely animal and knowledge that is reflective even subconsciously. This distinction is epistemically worth drawing not just because the knowledge that is thus modestly reflective already seems superior *in that respect* to the knowledge that falls short. Our distinction is epistemologically significant also for a further reason: because main traditional arguments for skepticism threaten reflective knowledge irrespective of whether the second-order endorsement is conscious or subconscious.

What is that threat? We attain the reflective level of knowledge only when we self-attribute the competence manifest in the correctness of a first order belief. It is the ostensibly vicious circularity involved in seeking knowledge of such competence that poses the threat. The targets include first order sources like perception, testimony, and introspection, but also the faculties of armchair thought, such as rational intuition and deduction. Reflective knowledge would allegedly involve a vicious circle or regress because it requires second-order endorsement of the reliability of one's first-order sources. This gives us reason to distinguish between animal knowledge on one side, and reflective knowledge on the other, whether this latter derives from subconscious or from conscious endorsement. Either sort of reflective ascent would be blocked by the skeptic's argument.

B. *Suspension and Reflection*

1. *What is suspension?*

Often enough the right choice when we consider a belief is not to endorse it but to suspend judgment. Sometimes that is *epistemically* the right thing to do. What is involved in such suspension?

What *is* it to suspend judgment on a given question? Is it just consciously neither to believe nor to disbelieve while consciously considering the question? There are reasons to doubt that answer.

For one thing, that is what one does while still deliberating, undecided whether to suspend.

Secondly, what if one decides to suspend until further consideration? What about the suspending one does when the question has faded from conscious view? What constitutes one's suspending at that point, when one is neither believing nor disbelieving, nor even consciously considering the question?

Objection: "One *does* already suspend while still deliberating, so one does not really deliberate on whether to suspend. One deliberates rather on whether to *continue* suspending. As for suspension after one stops considering the question, this can just be a dispositional suspension, the disposition to forbear both affirming and denying upon considering the question."

Reply: Fair enough. But consider what happens when one *concludes* inquiry. This might happen when one has “conclusive” evidence to affirm, or to deny. When one concludes inquiry, as when one concludes armchair pondering, this might be because one settles into an attitude of positive affirmation, occurrent or dispositional, or of positive denial. One reaches a point where one finds it appropriate to settle into such an attitude indefinitely. If one does not reach that point, this might be for either of two reasons. One might be in a position to settle indefinitely into an attitude of double-omission, and this is the true suspending, the settled, conclusive suspending that might conclude inquiry in a way analogous to how affirmation or denial might do so. Alternatively, one might stop inquiry by deferring it, not by concluding it. Here one continues either active or dispositional *provisional* suspension. This is not the settled suspension that is one of the three ways of truly concluding inquiry, along with settled affirmation and settled denial.

2. *Is suspension always second-order, irrespective of whether it is provisional or settled? Suspension is plausibly a second-order phenomenon, moreover, whether the suspension is provisional or settled. Let us look into this.*

Compare first one’s actions as one drives home while engrossed in conversation. There are many things one does intentionally while unaware that one is doing them. There are even choices that one freely determines without doing so consciously. When one puts on the brakes in response to a red light, one does so intentionally. One intends to do so, and one’s intention *to put on the brakes* derives from the combination of a certain policy and a certain perceptual belief. It might be thought that one intentionally does so with no prior or concurrent intention to do so. Even when thwarted by stuck brakes, however, one at least *tried* to stop. And what is it to try if not to act on a present-directed intention?

One might thus view suspending as *intentionally neither-affirming-nor-denying*. Moreover, this can be similar to the actions we perform automatically and subconsciously while driving. Such actions answer to intentions that derive by some sort of reasoning from policies that implicitly guide us.

Epistemic policies can concern, among other things, the evidential requirements for proper cognitive attitudes. And the attitude of main interest here is not just confidence above a certain threshold. Nor is it just a stored state that can play its role unattended. Our focus now is rather on judgment, or on a disposition to judge, where to judge affirmatively is a distinctive all-or-nothing conscious mental act. Note well the distinction introduced. On one side is (a) the act of judgment, of conscious episodic affirmation, of affirming to oneself. On the other side is (b) a disposition to so judge. This latter is what we appeal to when we say of someone sleeping that “in his judgment” we should follow a certain course of action. We are not saying that he is at that moment performing the relevant mental act. We are saying rather that he would

perform that act if he were then to entertain the relevant question with the aim of answering correctly.

Action-guiding belief can remain on an animal level when, being inexpressible, it is inapt for proper reflective endorsement. It would be wrong to denigrate such deeply animal belief. Nevertheless, articulable judgment is obviously essential for a social, linguistic, and rational species. By judgment I mean, again, either the act of affirmation, in thought or speech, or the disposition to so affirm when sincerely aiming to affirm with truth. Something important happens when we conclude pondering and opt to judge (rather than suspend, or deny). Even if one has not yet voiced this judgment it is now ready for voicing, so that the information stored is suitable for sharing.

Suppose one *could* suspend without ascent to the second order while intentionally omitting both affirmation and denial. Even so, *proper* suspension is still plausibly second-order, since it cannot amount just to omission oblivious to the relevant risks. On the contrary, in order to be epistemically proper it must be properly responsive to such risks, which must be perceived adequately.

If proper suspension is plausibly second-order, since it requires intentions that target first-order conduct, also plausibly second order is then the judgment assessable epistemically *in the same sort of way as suspending is assessable epistemically*. Accordingly, such judgment would be *first-order judgment in obedience to second-order intentions that guide the believer implicitly*.²

Granted, such judgment does differ significantly from its paired suspending. On the first order there is not much, if anything at all, that constitutes the suspending. Of main relevance on the first order are simply *absences*: the absence of affirming/believing and the absence of denying/disbelieving. What positively constitutes suspending lies on the second order. It is the intending to not affirm/believe and not deny/disbelieve, or to persist in doing so. Perhaps the forbearing that derives from that intending is on the first order. I mean the forbearing constituted by (*intentionally*) *omitting affirming/believing and denying/disbelieving*. But the being intentional of this double-omission derives from something constitutively positive and on the second order: namely, the subject's *intention* (conscious or subconscious) to *not affirm/believe* and *not deny/disbelieve*. And this intention may implement an evidential policy (where the policy and the implied choice, the coming to intend, can be either conscious or subconscious).

² This makes problematic the well-known view that epistemic reasons for believing that *p* are just reasons that bear positively on the truth of *p*. We now see why the pertinent epistemic reasons must likely bear (also?) on the epistemic risk undertaken by one's own believing that *p*. As to whether *the* aim of belief is truth, a second-order aim here (also?) comes into view: The rational believer aims to take appropriate epistemic risk, no less and no more, in opting on the relevant threefold choice: affirming, denying, suspending.

3. *How general is the interest of second-order assessment?*

The interest of assessment on the second order goes beyond Pyrrhonian or Cartesian epistemology. Even in the most ordinary assessment of someone's judgment as epistemically justified or rational, the sort of rational justification involved is often on the second order, or is at least dependent on the second order, since it is justification of that judgment as superior to suspension, and concerns therefore a performance that is an alternative to suspension (or dependent essentially on an alternative to suspension). Such an alternative would be one among mutually exclusive and exhaustive options: affirming, denying, suspending. If suspending constitutively involves the intention to *not* first-order-believe and *not* first-order-disbelieve, then plausibly the relevant alternative affirming will constitutively involve the intention *to* first-order affirm, and the relevant alternative denying will constitutively involve the intention *to* first-order deny.

The believing (and disbelieving) of interest now can be either occurrent or dispositional. That is to say, it can be constituted either by an act of judgment or by a disposition to so judge. Either way, it is an *intentional* act or state. We have reached this result through the parity of such belief with its correlated suspending, and through the reasoning that supports our conception of such suspending as intentional double-omission, whether the intention is consciously episodic or subconsciously ongoing.

That is so even if ordinarily one's animal knowledge needs no reflective endorsement. Animal beliefs *can* often come under rational scrutiny, after all, in one or another setting where we focus on certain questions and beliefs, as in the law court, or the criminal investigation, or the doctor's office. And they can come under rational scrutiny more generally, as in the philosopher's reflection or seminar discussion. A belief under such scrutiny is not properly affirmed merely on the basis of its diachronic standing, no matter how excellent this standing may be. Synchronic justification is now required, which imports second-order assessment of first-order beliefs. Reflective assessment need not but often does rely on such second-order inquiry, properly so. We must rely on it, of course, when our *first-order competence* is itself explicitly under attack. But we can rely on it also when we more directly scrutinize the first-order *question* rather than the first-order competence. We may need to base our continuing first-order judgment on a positive view of our relevant first-order competences.

4. *What determines whether, on a certain question, suspending is epistemically justified?*

If the foregoing analysis is correct, what justifies our (intentionally) suspending is what justifies our intending to withhold belief and disbelief. What justifies our so intending? What might one endeavor to accomplish thereby? One cannot attain truth by *forbearing* from af-

firming/denying and from believing/disbelieving. One's objective in so forbearing is rather to avoid falsehood. One might conceivably pursue that objective by arbitrary suspending on the specific question. But the relevant objective is not *just* to avoid falsehood, but to do so properly, wisely, which requires attention also to the pursuit of truth. Cost/benefit analysis is required.

What are the costs and benefits relevant to epistemic choices? On a given question that one takes up, a main cost is false judgment or belief, a main benefit true judgment or belief. What is the likelihood that one will attain truth and avoid falsehood by affirming? What is the risk that one will fail instead? A justified attitude responsive to these queries, be it judgment or suspension, needs to manifest epistemic competence.

In arriving at the correct attitude one must assess one's level of *complete* competence with respect to the question addressed. This includes three components. The first is one's basic constitutional competence, one's skill in answering such questions. The second is one's current shape for employing that skill. Is one awake, alert, sober, etc.? Third and last is one's situation, including any relevant external relations. Is the light adequate? How far is the object? And so on. All three of these— skill, shape, situation—are constitutively involved in one's complete competence. Only such complete SSS-assessment (however quick and subconscious) can properly determine whether one is likely enough to answer the question correctly. A negative conclusion would require one intentionally to forbear from answering. Instead one would need to suspend.

One affirms with full epistemic competence, by contrast, only if the epistemic risk is competently assessed as low enough. One then affirms on a basis shared with the intention implemented: the basis provided by the favorable risk assessment. One hence falls short in so affirming unless that basis amounts to knowledge. It follows that the affirmation will itself fall short unless it amounts to reflective knowledge. In order to affirm properly, one must answer the first-order question correctly, manifesting thereby one's relevant first-order competence. Moreover, the exercise of that competence must itself be intentional, based on the second-order assessment of the relevant risk. Of course *this* assessment must in turn manifest sufficient competence.

Reflective epistemic status is therefore a status above animal-level fixation of belief, no matter how reliable the latter may be. This calls for an epistemology with both animal and reflective components. Reflective competence is required for the higher epistemic status. We need not always be seeking that status, nor is it a status required for proper trust in our first-order beliefs. Even when we need not, however, we often do seek that level of scrutiny and endorsement, as we consider a question in a setting that requires reflection. Plausibly enough, moreover, a belief would always attain a higher epistemic status if it *did* gain proper endorsement through such scrutiny.

C. Animal Competence and Reflective Justification: the Interest of the Synchronic

1. Much of our knowledge serves us well with no need of reflection. It would be practically inadvisable to scrutinize the trust we place on our own stored beliefs, or on the testimony of others, as we go through an ordinary day. Such quotidian trust is appropriately blind, unaided by reflection. Not so in the law court, or the legislature, or a detective's investigation, or the scientific lab or philosophy seminar. These settings call for critical scrutiny; it will not do just to voice our stored animal beliefs or to take on trust the say-so of others. Questions here present three options: affirming, denying, suspending. Opting properly on a question under reflective scrutiny requires a synchronic rational basis.

The fact remains that much everyday knowledge is not consciously reflective. Such animal knowledge permits—may even *require*—blind trust rather than consciously deliberate choice. This knowledge will often have been acquired competently, reliably enough, and will have been stored through competent retentive memory. Once stored, it will have done its work unseen, with no need of conscious attention. Much of our animal knowledge is acquired through normal childhood development, much absorbed from the culture. By contrast, the reflective knowledge of interest to us is normally attained through the conscious weighing of reasons.³ Judgment-involving knowledge requires us to opt among affirming (or reaffirming), denying, and suspending. And this choice must be made in the light of the reasons available at that time. Suppose we can draw from storage an answer superbly acquired and retained. Even so, it would seem stubbornly irrational to just voice our belief despite the weight of synchronic reasons tilted against it.⁴

Judgment should be based on the total evidence available at the time. It must be so based in the law-court, the lab, the seminar room, and the criminal investigation. It takes priority when we must reason consciously to an answer for a question posed explicitly. The premises adduced in such reasoning ought not to be retrieved dogmatically from storage, not based just on the epistemic quality of the storage and retention. The first-order judgments that provide premises for critical reasoning require the rational support of any evidence synchronically available. Such rational support is required both for private thoughts in conscious reasoning, and also for public assertions whereby we convey information to others by speaking on our own behalf.

True, we can often endorse what memory delivers if nothing in view tells against it. "Methodological conservatism" is thus right to bestow squatter's rights on beliefs already in storage. Nevertheless, counter-evi-

³ Through "ratiocination"—to use Wittgenstein's term in *On Certainty*.

⁴ Note well: "reasons tilted *against* it." Again, this is supposed to be so despite whatever reason the believer may have—and it may be quite considerable—for conservatively trusting his own belief on the subject matter involved.

dence synchronically in view might still properly trump the conservative claim of the belief in storage *even when such synchronic evidence is far less reliable than the diachronic process that lies behind the stored belief.*

2. Again, plenty of beliefs are initially acquired through competent introspection, perception, or reasoning, and then stored in memory. Such a belief will often linger even after you forget how it was initially acquired. You might then be able to say little more than “I just remember.” What then is the later standing of that belief?

We are focused on a time late in the life of the belief. No-one can now detail how it was acquired and retained. Suppose only slight direct evidence is now available for its content. If we go by this evidence, the belief no longer counts as justified. How competently can you now retain it? Its epistemic standing will now depend essentially on two things about your memory: first how good it is for that sort of belief, second how well qualified you are to assess it on that occasion. You must now assess how well your belief is likely to have been acquired and sustained. But your full competence for this second-order assessment might be inferior to the competence that yields the belief itself on the first order. First-order competence will often combine excellent perceptual acquisition with excellent mnemonic retention.

What then is the believer to do as time passes? Should confidence dwindle in tandem with reduced qualification to endorse? Consider the steady decay of the information required for endorsement. Despite such second-order weakening, the believer’s retentive memory can remain strong indeed. The retained belief is very probably true, given the perception that originally produced it and the memory that has kept it securely stored. That belief may thus constitute first-order, animal knowledge of the highest quality. Quite often what decays over time is just the reflective, second-order perspective.

Here is an example. At noon on a certain date you are mistreated as a child. You know extremely well that it is noon on that date. You store that belief for years, retaining it through excellent memory. In general people would not remember so well. In general your own memory may not work so well. But it does in this case, on this sort of subject matter. That event stands out in your mind, and your memory of it is outstanding. The perception-plus-memory manifest in your continuing belief is of the highest quality. Compatibly with that, your second-order competence can decay. Just based on common sense, you may come to doubt your memory of that event. You may even learn that ostensible memory of such mistreatment is far less reliable than common sense had supposed. Human beings in general do not recollect as reliably as had been thought, especially not on *such* subject matter. By hypothesis, however, *your* memory *is* in this case extremely reliable.

That is one example of the phenomenon I wish to highlight. But we need not invoke abnormal powers. Another example might involve just normal human perception and memory. In combination these might

lead reliably to a correct present belief, even if the believer is now unable to detail how he acquired and retained his belief. He knows who directed a certain film but cannot detail how he acquired that information, nor how reliable his source may have been.

There can thus be a clash between the diachronic and the synchronic, either of which can be excellent while the other is poor.

3. Our puzzle does not arise merely from a clash between externalist reliabilism and internalist evidentialism. The important clash is between two epistemic statuses that a belief can have:

First, there is the status a belief gains *diachronically* through the subject's thinking and memory, no matter how internal such thinking and memory may be over time, nor how internal the subject's initial data may have been.

Second, there is the status a belief gains *synchronically* through the support of reasons present to the thinker's consciousness at that very moment.

The problem thus transcends two familiar divides: one between externalism and internalism; another between evidentialism and reliabilism.

Such disparity between animal quality and reflective quality would involve a divergence between

first, the high status a belief derives diachronically from a retention-involving first-order competence, and
second, the lower status that same belief might have synchronically, due to the diminished epistemic quality of the believer's second-order competence, because it is less reliable or anyhow less productive of justification.

Earlier we considered examples of long-term memory. A similar example involves arithmetical calculation. You may doubt your ability to perform a complex addition without flaw (despite performing it flawlessly). Although initially you may have believed the result without a second thought, doubt sets in when you recall how unsure you are of your competence.

Suppose your reflective capacity to endorse a given first-order belief is thus diminished. What about your *judgment itself*, on the first order? Here are questions on the first order as you view a hand, or a fire: Is this a hand? Is that a fire? What attitude should you adopt on such questions within the privacy of your own thought, and what can you properly assert to others? Judgment, rather than suspension or inattention, is required for conscious reasoning, and for proper assertion when speaking in your own person.

Two issues thus arise concerning a pondered first-order question. First, how if at all should it be answered? What attitude should you adopt from among the relevant three: judgment, denial, suspension? Second, how should you assess epistemically whatever attitude you do

adopt? For example, what determines the epistemic standing of your first-order affirmation/belief or denial/disbelief? Is it the quality of your total first-order competence, including its diachronic components? Or is it rather the quality of your synchronic rationale, including the contribution of your second-order competence to exploit what is synchronically available to it? These two ways of assessing a first-order judgment might differ dramatically, since the two sets of factors can differ greatly in epistemic quality.

Again, it is not just the *assessment* of a first-order judgment that may derive either from a first-order animal competence or from a second-order reflective competence. There is also this question: *Which perspective should have priority in determining how to judge on the first order?* Should you trust your excellent first-order competence, or should you trump that competence once your belief is under scrutiny, with the inevitable bearing of the second-order perspective? Should you now decide whether to trump based on *all* the reasons *presently* available to you for conscious consideration?

Suppose we give priority to the reasons presently available. This in effect recognizes the bearing of a kind of reflective knowledge, involving a second-order judgment (or disposition to judge). This second-order judgment itself depends for *its* standing on the quality of the competence that *it* manifests. Reflective knowledge will thus enable your conscious reasoning, and sustain your place in the community as testimonial transmitter. Such reflective knowledge is constituted by a judgment (or disposition to judge). Indeed it is regularly constituted by two such attitudes: one an endorsing judgment on the second order, and the other a judgment on the first order—whether disposition or act. These attitudes often figure in our conscious reasoning, and in our sincere assertion when we inform others.

We have been considering this question: What should determine one's act of judgment, and one's disposition to so judge? Is it *diachronic* competence, even if its initial inputs have long receded, or is it rather the reasons *synchronically* available and operative? If we opt for the present-time-slice, we upgrade the second-order perspective. This is because synchronic reasons for stored beliefs are so often to be found within that perspective.⁵

⁵ Recall the examples wielded by internalists against reliabilist externalism, such as BonJour's Norman, the clairvoyant-out-of-the-blue, and Lehrer's Truetemp, unaware of the thermometer embedded in his brain. In these cases too a belief derives with high reliability from some process or faculty relevantly beyond the subject's awareness. Here again reliability clashes with rationality. But there is a significant difference between those cases and our case of diachronic/synchronic clash. Our clash does not occur in remote, contrived examples. It is rather a familiar and pervasive feature of everyday cognition. Moreover, this diachronic/synchronic clash does not reveal a deep, unbridgeable chasm. On the contrary, consider the knowledge of the blindsighter, and our knowledge of simple math or logic. These cases plausibly suggest that rationality itself is to be explained at fundamental levels by appeal to relevant, reliable competence. Compare even a familiar bit of knowledge that

We have focused mainly on an important sort of belief that is not just a degree of confidence above a certain threshold, nor just a stored state that subconsciously guides behavior, as when one conducts everyday business on automatic pilot. Instead, the belief of interest to us is a judgment. It need not be an episodic conscious affirmation. It might be the sort of judgment that one attributes to someone when one says "In his judgment, p." This attribution can be correct even if the subject is not at that moment affirming that p. A judgment can be constituted rather by a *disposition* to affirm if sincere, to oneself or to others. This is a disposition to affirm if under the influence of no conscious aim beyond answering the question correctly. Important synchronic reasons for or against such belief will often reside on the second order. What you can consciously affirm depends on your synchronic rational basis. Endorsement of your stored beliefs may now turn on how well you can defend the quality of your acquisition-plus-storage.

4. Justified judgment will thus involve your second-order competence to assess your first-order competence. As memory dims on how you initially acquired your first-order belief, you must increasingly rely on your epistemic self-trust. Suppose the first-order belief to be put in doubt, either through overt disagreement, or through a challenge to your relevant competence. In responding you need to defend your competence. You must now defend your belief from a second-order perspective on your relevant first-order competence. After all, how properly you endorse that first-order belief is determined by the reasons you may now have in view. A major portion if not the whole of this rationale will include whatever you can adduce in favor of your relevant first-order competences, and will reside on the second order.

you might have some morning: namely, that more than two seconds have elapsed since you awoke. You can have this knowledge even without having looked at any timepiece. Your belief is surely rational, moreover, even with no rational basis on the first order. The corresponding seeming, the inclination to believe, is itself rational and justified despite its lack of rational basis. What could possibly give it this status (an epistemic status withheld from a bigot when someone seems dumb to him based just on facial appearance; and withheld also from a gambler to whom it seems that 7 or 11 will come up next).

What matters for human rationality is whether the relevant competence is a fundamental component of the human cognitive structure. And this reveals a further reason why human diachronic competence is epistemically important. Human diachronic competence differs importantly from the competences distinctive of Truetemp or of clairvoyant Norman. Human diachronic competence *is* after all a fundamental component of the human cognitive structure. For example, it can simply involve a familiar combination of basic perception with retentive memory. Yet it can clash with the rationale synchronically available to the subject at some later time. In order to proceed rationally, the subject must favor what is then, at that later time, available to his synchronic consciousness. The defense against diachronic reliability must in this way go beyond the defense against clairvoyant or Truetemp reliability. It must now appeal not only to what is fundamental to the human cognitive structure. It must *also* appeal to *synchronic, conscious* factors.

A belief that is apt through diachronic competence falls short if it is *not* endorsable synchronically through the balance of available reasons. In that case you cannot rely blindly on your stored belief and on the diachronic competence that sustains it. Often enough only reflective knowledge can fully serve our needs as conscious reasoners and speakers.

