

Intuitions: Reflective Justification, Holism and Apriority

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The paper discusses Sosa's view of intuitional knowledge and raises the question of the nature of reflective justification of intuitional beliefs. It is assumed, in agreement with Sosa, that pieces of belief of good researchers are typically reflectively justified, in addition to being immediately, first-level justified. Sosa has convincingly argued that reflective justification typically mobilizes and indeed should mobilize capacities distinct from the original capacity that has produced the belief-candidate for being justified, in order to assess the reliability of the original capacity. It has to go beyond justifiers that are of the same-kind ("homogeneous") as first-level immediate ones, in order to enlarge the circle of justification (and thus avoid viciousness), and is, therefore, holistic and coherentist. But if this holds, it seems that reflective justification of armchair beliefs, presumably produced by intuition and some reasoning, should revert to empirical considerations testifying to the reliability of intuition and reasoning. Therefore, it typically combines, in an articulated way, a posteriori elements contributing to the thinker's reflective trust in her armchair capacities. In short, the paper argues that Sosa's own view of second-order justification goes better with a more aposteriorist view, if it does not even force such a view.

Keywords: Virtue epistemology, a priori, a posteriori, two-level epistemology, intuition.

1. Introduction

The paper discusses Sosa's view of intuitional knowledge¹ and raises the question of the nature of reflective justification of intuitional beliefs. I agree with him on many crucial matters, and have basically followed his

¹ My deepest thanks go to professor Sosa personally, for inspiration and support.

footprints in opting for a version of virtue epistemology and indeed, a two level one, familiar from his writings.

Reflection plays a paramount role in the biography of most serious intuitions, so what ought this role to be like? How does this strongly rationalistic approach fit his second-level epistemology, and perspectivalism (which I like and endorse myself), virtue-gear or otherwise? I shall argue that it does not fit well, and that the holistic character of the second-level perspective points in a very different direction. A thinker reflecting on her first-level armchair beliefs is expected to mobilize, should the need arise, literally all sorts of first-level beliefs of hers, in the hope that these belong to her first-level, animal knowledge. This might routinely include pieces of a posteriori knowledge. Can the armchair belief, thus justified, retain its aprioristic purity? Note that Sosa himself sometimes admits “[t]hat the reflective defense of our mathematical and other beliefs will not be purely a priori (...)” (2000: 13), although he then almost takes the admission back, and never develops it to any extent.

Here, then, is the plan of the paper. Section two offers a brief overview (with apologies for brevity) of Sosa’s subtle, interesting and original views, in particular about reflective justification in general, and about intuitions and intuitional beliefs. Section three is the central one: there it is argued that the proposed accounts of the two topics just mentioned do not fit well with each other: the general story of reflective justification stresses the role of broad coherence and a holistic web of belief, the particular story of justification of intuitions insists on homogenous justification of the a priori by the a priori. In the concluding section I shall briefly sketch my own proposal that the full justification of the deliverances of intuition is a highly structured one, as one would expect from the holistic character of second-level, reflective considerations, with some a priori elements, but with a sufficiently large a posteriori component to ultimately make it predominantly a posteriori. I conclude by reiterating three main questions for professor Sosa, thanking him in advance for an answer I know will be illuminating.

2. *Sosa’s proposal*

a) reflective knowledge, broad coherence and the web of belief

Let me first remind you of Sosa’s highly original proposal of a systematic virtue epistemology, and in particular of his views on two connected subtopics that we shall discuss in the rest of the paper: first, reflective knowledge, and second, intuitions and their justification.

The basic idea, with which I very much agree, is the general framework, stressing epistemic competences-virtues, and their truth-directedness. A crucial element characterizing Sosa’s approach is the idea of the general epistemic structure, contrasting and combining the basic

level of first-order (“animal”) competences-cum-performances with a reflective, second-order level (2007, 2009b).²

What characterizes reflective knowledge is “perspectival endorsement of the reliability of one’s sources”. (2009b: 136). It nicely brings together coherence and understanding, Sosa argues (2009b: 138). He illustrates it by bringing in Descartes’s strategy of supporting first-level intuitional beliefs, prominently mathematical ones, by theological reasoning guaranteeing the coherence of the whole, and thus turning the mere *cognitio* of mathematical truths into *scientia*. The feature of reflective knowledge which will interest us most is what he calls “broad” or “comprehensive” coherence.

This stands in contrast with other theories of reflective knowledge, of a different kind, which argue that a first-level competence can be second-level justified, just by being re-applied, or again appealed to, in a reflective manner. Sosa (1994), criticizes W. Alston, the main proponent of this same-sort or homogenous second-order justification. It is combination of competences that does the work. Here is a characteristic passage:

How does internal coherence, of little significant epistemic value in itself, become more valuable when combined with external competence? Coherence-seeking inferential reason, like retentive memory, is valuable when combined with externally competent faculties of perception, because when so combined it, like retentive memory, gives us a more comprehensive grasp of the truth than we would have in its absence. (2009b: 191)

The broad coherence goes beyond relations among the thinker’s first-order beliefs, and involves coherence between them and the thinker’s experiences, as well as comprehensive inter-level coherence (2009b: 192). It is necessary, Sosa claims, for the kind of reflective knowledge traditionally desired and desirable for its contribution to truth. One important component of the broad, comprehensive coherence is explanatory coherence, the contribution of some beliefs to a deeper understanding of others, and perhaps vice versa. Interpreting Descartes in an interesting and original way, Sosa stresses the “epistemic power” of such explanatory coherence. Even our mathematical knowledge can be helped by “a view of ourselves and our place in the universe” that is sufficiently comprehensive and coherent to bring us “into the realm of higher, reflective, enlightened knowledge, or *scientia*” (2009b: 150).

Let me finally mention the metaphor which will be crucial in the discussion section: the pipeline/web contrast (2009b: 239, reiterated in 2011b: 150). The role of reflective epistemic justification is not well

² In his (2011b), and then further in (2015), he introduces an additional component of, or condition upon, reflective knowledge, characterizing an epistemic performance as fully apt “only if its first-order aptness derives sufficiently from the agent’s assessment, albeit implicit, of his chances of success (and, correlatively, of the risk of failure)” (2011b: 11); we shall leave this refinement aside in the present paper.

characterized by the metaphor of the pipeline. The right picture is the coherentist one of the web of belief. Sosa talks about “an intricate spider’s web” with its many nodes. He mentions that the position of each node (the status of each belief, we are allowed to suppose) might depend causally (to some extent, perhaps to a small extent) on the positions of the other nodes. This would yield a “distributive dependence on each and also collective dependence on all” (2011b: 150). That option, he claims, “explains a web model for belief”, adding that perhaps even more data should be added, having to do with the dynamical, historical dimension. Here, I am in broad agreement with Sosa and will appeal to these ideas when it comes to the issue of a priori justification.

We now pass to our specific topic, intuition. Sosa agrees with the tradition, in particular the rationalist one, that there are intuitions, which form a distinct group of phenomena, and that there is an intuition-disposition/competence. Intuitions are a special sort of intellectual seemings, attractions to assent to a proposition triggered simply by considering a proposition consciously with understanding. Sosa is, to my mind correctly, optimistic when it comes to the reliability of intuitions: “By analogy to the seemings delivered by our visual system, the intuitions immediately delivered by our rational competences are preponderantly true, even if occasionally false. This is why those rational mechanisms are intellectual *competences*, because they systematically lead us aright.” (Sosa 2007: 60).

The epistemic quality of the intuitional (as well as perceptual or introspectional) appearances depends on the quality of the underlying virtuous dispositions, formed in normal circumstances. And this brings us to issues of justification: “All seemings delivered by such competences are thereby epistemically justified”, writes Sosa in the immediate sequel.

So, appearance is fallible, but still a fundamental source of justification. It is such even in the case of paradoxes, robust, powerful and entrenched, and thus a source of justification. But sometimes it can fail to be a source of knowledge, e.g. in the evil demon world, or in a world where one memorizes arithmetic tables by using a manual containing a large number of errors. For the sake of coherence we have to find some correlation between appearance as a source of justification and appearance as a source of knowledge. When is appearance a trustworthy justifier? Intellectual appearance is a trustworthy justifier when based on understanding, we are told. And here is the gist:

S *rationally* intuits that p if and only if S’s intuitive attraction to assent to <p> is explained by a competence (an epistemic ability or virtue) on the part of S to discriminate, among contents that he understands well enough, the true from the false, in some subfield of the modally strong (the necessarily true or necessarily false), with no reliance on introspection, perception, memory, testimony, or inference (no further reliance, anyhow, than any required for so much as understanding the given proposition). (Sosa 2007: 61)³

³ Here is a longer quote, Sosa’s answer to the question of “Just How Can Understanding Function as a Source of Epistemic Standing for Intuitions?”:

So much about the first level justification of an intuition, with apologies for brevity.

At the second, meta-cognitive level, we encounter the thinker's reflective awareness of the quality of her first-level source, e.g. her reflective questioning of or trust in her intuitions. Thinkers, including ourselves, spontaneously find their intuitions true in a very compelling manner, and therefore, on a reflexive level, consider their intuition-capacity and their reason generally *de facto* reliable. This reliability of the first-order source, if available, yields an external, third person justifiedness. In contrast, the reflexive or meta-cognitive, second-order trust in one's own reliability, if justified, would make us, the thinkers, reflectively justified on the second level. As reflective creatures aiming at truth, we need both levels of justification for our first-order beliefs, including the intuitional ones. Such a two-level view of justification has been probably implicit in classical epistemology (Descartes), and is nowadays proposed by various authors, not only Sosa, but also K. Lehrer, W. Alston and J. van Cleve, with a lot of difference of detail. With Sosa's general view of reflective justification one would expect that the thinker may and ought to use on the second level of reflexive questioning all the available sources in order to assess the reliability (and other virtues) of a given first-order source, in this case of intuition or reason. However, when we look at Sosa's actual pronouncements, it seems as if with intuition and introspection the reflective justification is just a matter of indubitability. As regards the latter, Sosa is clearly in favor of circular self-validation, an appeal to the deliverances of our introspective faculty under reflective perspectival consideration (2000: 10). At the second level we are prompted to see necessary infallibility (reliability) of our first level introspective thoughts. And no causal knowledge is to be involved: "For the cogito the explanation of infallible reliability... skirts both causal tracking and construction or judgment dependence."

Fundamental, intuitive rational beliefs are based at least on understanding of the propositions believed, or so it has been argued above. It is not, however, just the understanding of a proposition, whatever its content, that gives a proper basis for believing it. Otherwise, it would also constitute a basis for believing its negation, which must be equally well understood. Not even the highest pitch of clarity and distinctness will suffice. (...) What suffices is rather the being understood (shared by a proposition and its negation pretty much equally) along with the specific content of that very proposition. Can we go beyond this to some general feature that, when combined with the being understood, will properly yield acceptance? As we have seen, neither simplicity nor truth is such a feature, either singly or in combination.

Nevertheless, something distinguishes simple truths of arithmetic or geometry, for example, making them suitable objects of immediate acceptance upon understanding, and giving them their attraction to normal human minds universally (upon understanding). Whatever it is, whether innate or socially instilled, its yield is uniform and general enough to suggest dispositions at work (whether wholly individually seated, or partially socially seated). Given how epistemically benign they are, finally, such dispositions seem not inappropriately considered "competences." (Sosa 2014: 49)

(2002: 376). Note that this is not an account of first-level justification but an account of “the required epistemic perspective” on the reliability of our source of a priori justification. “It is only when we see the cogito as not just infallible, but also indubitable (upon consideration) that we grasp the fuller Cartesian account” (Ibid.). The same holds for typical intuitional beliefs. Their reliability is comprehensible “through reflection about the content-determining conditions of our thought.” (2003:183). Take logic: “Results in proof theory, or in metatheory more generally, might thus explain why it is that our thoughts in the relevant fields are likely to be right, or even *bound* to be right, if we follow certain methods” (2003: 183–4). And Sosa then raises the crucial, albeit rhetorical question: “What rules out the possibility of such general understanding of our own reliability on the *a priori*, precisely by means of properly directed *a priori* theorizing?” (Ibid.) We justify the a priori by the a priori.⁴ This will be the main topic of our discussion.

3. Discussion and open questions: epistemic perspective and its requirements

a) First level: the sources of competence

The first question that I would like to raise is a relatively minor one. Sosa claims that the foundationalism/coherentism contrast is a false dichotomy, and accepts coherentism at the reflective level. But what about the first component, foundationalism? In the case of intuitions one often has strong seemings in favor of some given option, for instance, in the case of the Ship of Theseus that the still sailing ship is identical with the original one. Sosa interprets these seemings as conceptually grounded inclinations to believe (e.g. in 2011a: 456; he explicitly mentions logic but the context seems to point to a general view encompassing philosophical intuitions as well). Now, he finds them justified only if they derive from reliable competence; the fact that the thinker is responsibly responding to the seeming itself, independently from the externalist considerations of reliability, does not even *prima facie* justify her (if I got Sosa right). But then, it is strange that coherentism appears at the sophisticated level, one of reflection, and the traditional foundationalism of clear and attractive appearances plays no role: the dichotomy seems to re-emerge, although it was deemed to be false. If Sosa accepted that at least some *prima facie* justification is bestowed to the belief by the seeming-attraction he would end up with two tiers, the coherentist and the foundationalist, in addition to the

⁴ Here is another formulation from the same context:

“Whether that project can succeed or not, anyhow, the fact remains that its success would give us an *a priori* component for our desired epistemic perspective, a component that in the respect of being substantially *a priori* would match the Cartesian epistemic reflections traditionally accorded the highest explanatory efficacy in epistemology” (Sosa 2003: 85).

two levels. The question for professor Sosa is then whether this would be acceptable for him, and if not, why.

The second question concerns competence. It is the central factor both in the production and in the justification of intuition. But what explains competence? Sosa is hopeful that “epistemic competences can be of use in epistemology even in the absence of a detailed theory of their nature and operation.” (2013: 200). He claims that we can appeal to them “even with limited understanding of their *modus operandi*” (Ibid.) and directs the reader to his “Minimal intuition” (1998) paper. However, this early paper offers only a minimal(ist) answer: one can restrict one’s confidence in intuitions worthy of being trusted, and this will yield some perspective on one’s capacities (1998: 267).

And this low level of demands for reflective justification holds for all competences, perception included. Having read *Reflective knowledge* one would have expected more. And a specific worry about intuition also arises here. For perception, people had some idea of things acting upon our senses through some kind of medium. Even a moderately sophisticated person, at any time in written history, would be aware that she sees things through the intermediary of light: no light, no seeing. The same for hearing, taste and touch. She would know that a rough surface acts upon her fingers when she is touching it, and that the touching becomes more risky if the surface is hot, turning the sensation of touch into intense pain. However, as we are painfully reminded in the discussion of Benacerraf’s dilemma, there is no convincing commonsense story about the build-up of our numerical competence. What about philosophical intuitions? Metaphysical ones, moral ones and so on?

We can gauge the importance of the question by taking a glance at Sosa’s main resource for dealing with criticism of intuitions for their unreliability, alleged or real. When presenting his theory that the attraction or belief is justified because it is competent (2007: 59), and facing the problem of fallacies in reasoning, Sosa introduces the Chomskian performance-competence distinction:

Fallacies can thus be viewed as performance errors chargeable against the subject, by contrast with deliverances of a competence. Unlike the Cartesian assimilation model, this account *can* admit the fallibility of intuition, can allow that paradox-enmeshed propositional contents exert proper attraction, on which one might even base justified intuitive belief. (Sosa 2007: 59)

His account is subtle: some errors are due to performance deficits, other to natural defects of the competence (early formulation already in Sosa 1998: 261). I agree with him that this is a perfect starting point for settling problems with X-phi, and I applaud most things he has to say in this context (in his (2010), and (2011a) papers).⁵

⁵ He brings in comparison with perceptual illusion, using the Mueller-Lyer one as his example. And he notes that the attraction is a deliverance of the normal human visual system, and is to be put on the account of the competence itself.

Two questions arise at this point for the epistemologists constructing a theory. First, how do we distinguish between performance errors and the deficits of competence unless we know more about how the latter works? Second, if Sosa is really alluding to the Chomskian performance-competence distinction, his use of “competent” is a thick one; the attraction and belief are competent only if they are derived from the corresponding (virtuous) competence. The same presumably holds for beliefs that $\langle 3+2=5 \rangle$, or that $\langle \text{A square has four sides} \rangle$, listed earlier in the chapter (Sosa 2007: 46). It is here that the Chomskian problematic shows its bite: mental linguistic competence is reliable, even virtuous in Sosa’s term, because *it* dictates what the corresponding language is and is like. The order of determination goes from competence to its product. And the order of determination secures the lion’s share of justification: I am competent in believing that my linguistic judgment is OK because I am judging *my* language(modulo all the reservations having to do with thorny issues of the relation between idiolect and various sociolects; here we only rehearse the main point.)

This order of determination is not available for examples like *Modus Ponens*, $\langle 3+2=5 \rangle$, and $\langle \text{A square has four sides} \rangle$, unless one goes strongly anti-realist and response-dependantist about logic, arithmetic and geometry. Of course, Sosa does not take this line. Here, it is not the thinker’s competence that makes it true that a square has four sides, and the like, but rather the opposite holds: the mental structure-module and its functioning is virtuous *because* it conforms to an independent mathematical fact. And indeed he reiterates the contrast between justification by testimony and justification by understanding. He distinguishes between *determination of best opinion* and *tracking by best opinion*. *Determination by best opinion*: 5 being prime because best opinion would think it prime. *Tracking by best opinion*: 5 being thought prime by best opinion because it is prime (Sosa 2002: 370).

But once the realist stance is taken, the issue of explanation becomes pressing. How is the tracking secured? Sosa appeals to the alleged origin of intuition from understanding, primarily a conceptual one. But we need more. To return to the Ship of Theseus example, what is it about concepts that makes one think that the still sailing ship is identical with the original one? Something about the concept “ship”? Or “material object”? But what makes our concept track reality in these matters? Similarly with simple mathematical beliefs. If our concepts have the impressive power to put us in touch with mathematical reality, we should at least have some inkling of how this is possible. Sosa’s role-model epistemologist, Descartes, was ontologically committed to the existence of God, and used that commitment as the epistemic guarantee of the cogito propositions. *Scientia* (reflective knowledge) is all about such a commitment. Remember that the reflective perspective has to give us a substantive understanding of our first-level beliefs, at least in cases in which we want to say that we know full well what we are talking about.

Here, then, is the second question for professor Sosa: do you have a view about how our intuitional competence connects with the world it produces judgments (more precisely, attractions to judge) about? Intuitions seem to connect us to mathematical and modal reality, to facts of metaphysical significance (the Ship of Theseus), moral significance (the Trolley problem), and perhaps more (linguistic intuitions, etc.). Let us agree that concepts are somehow involved in the feat; but how precisely?

b) *Second level: intuition, broad coherence and the web of belief*

Let us now pass to our main topic, the reflective justification of intuitions and the role and character of epistemic perspective, and to some possible substantive disagreement. Since Sosa often discusses introspection in the same breath with intuition, as a related a priori source, we shall follow him and occasionally mention introspection in the context. What does reflective perspective involve in the case of intuition and introspection?

We know that it cannot be just a reiteration of the first-level thought (this much is clear from Sosa's criticism of Alston); it seems then that coherent perspective is the only candidate. The reader who has formed her impression from reading Sosa's main statements on the nature of reflective knowledge in his (Sosa 2009a and 2011b) would probably expect the stress on broad coherence: after all, it is such coherence that takes us from mere *cognitio* to *scientia*. She would also remember the metaphor of the web, and its strongly coherentist morals: every node (belief) is to some extent justificationaly connected to every other. She would keep in mind that the web of belief is connecting us causally to the facts in our environment (Sosa 2011b: 150).

Of course, such a reader is in for surprises. It looks as no appeal to coherence is involved, not even the very narrow one, let alone the broad one praised as crucial for the reflective level in the general cases. How significant and how *ad hoc* this exception is can be seen from comparison with Sosa's general reading of Descartes, which stresses the importance of a circle, and of a more systematic, coherence-seeking reflection at the second level.

We noted that with intuition and introspection it looks as if justification is just a matter of indubitability and of circular self-validation, an appeal to the deliverances of our introspective faculty under reflective perspectival consideration. (Sosa 2000: 10). We are prompted to see necessary infallibility (reliability) of our first-level introspective thoughts. And no causal knowledge is to be involved: "For the cogito the explanation of infallible reliability ... skirts both causal tracking and construction or judgment dependence." (Sosa 2002: 376). Note that this is not an account of first-level justification but an account of "the required epistemic perspective" on the reliability of our source of a priori justification. "It is only when we see the cogito as not just infallible, but

also indubitable (upon consideration) that we grasp the fuller Cartesian account” (Ibid.). How does this differ from Alston’s same-sort reflective justification, in which a capacity is second-order justified just by the re-application of itself, the very competence to be justified? And Sosa has been quite critical of Alston’s strategy (1994). He has insisted on the holistic character of reflective justification, in contrast to Alston’s project of “homogenous” justification of the similar by the similar.

Again, as mentioned in section 2, we are offered an analogous account of human knowledge of elementary mathematical truths and other necessary propositions. Intellectual appearance is a trustworthy justifier when based on understanding. Sosa reiterates the claim in a more recent paper: “What distinguishes intuitive justification is that the entertaining itself (with adequate understanding) of that specific content exerts its attraction while rationally unaided. Intuitions are reason-based in a way that does not go beyond conscious grasp of the specific propositional content” (Sosa 2014: 48). Sosa is happy to note that this circumvents the challenge of Benacerraf’s dilemma: we do not need to connect the Platonic facts with our knowledge of them by any sort of explanatory route, other than the claim that our concepts (or even mere symbols) can put us in touch with relevant mathematical properties (Sosa 2002: 380). Not much is left of the web metaphor, and the claim that it connects us with facts in our environment in an intelligible way. Remember, it was claimed that “[j]ustified beliefs are nodes of a web properly attached to the environing world through perception and memory” (2011b: 150).⁶

The web-pipe contrast is also gone: the understanding that produces intuition justifies it on the reflective level. Connections of every belief (node) with all other nodes seem to be totally irrelevant; even the connection of any kind with any of the non-homogenous nodes disappears!

Let me then try to reconcile Sosa’s holistic, web-guided understanding of reflective justification in general with his non-holistic understanding of reflective justification for intuitions (and of introspective beliefs). First, we both agree that pieces of belief of thoughtful researchers are

⁶ Sosa claims that no causal relation between our cogito (or mathematical) belief and the fact believed would explain the reliability of that belief:

Take an intricate spider’s web with its many nodes, attached at various points to various surfaces. The position of each node might then depend causally (to some extent, perhaps to a small extent) on the positions of the other nodes. Here there is distributive dependence on each and also collective dependence on all. That explains a web model for belief (though beliefs also occupy an important dynamical, historical dimension, one that requires a more complex web model). Any given belief node is in place through its connections with other nodes, but each of them is itself in place through its connections with the other nodes, including that original given node. (Sosa 2011b: 150)

Not a single element from this general characterization of reflective justification applies to the particular cases of intuition and introspection. What could justify making such an exception, without even presenting it as such?

typically reflectively justified, in addition to being immediately, first-level justified. (We also agree that reflective justification at its highest involves meta-knowledge of risks, but we shall leave that aside here).

Second, we agree that holism is feasible, the way Sosa presents it in his *Reflective knowledge* (2009a) and in *Knowing full well* (2011b). We agree very much with the following claim of his:

Reflective endorsement may now take its place in the web with no apparent special problems. Through our growing knowledge of ourselves and of the world around us and of the relation between the two, we come to see our modes of rational basing and other belief acquisition as sufficiently reliable. This enables us to endorse such modes reflectively as truth-reliable, of a sort to lend epistemic justification to our commitments and beliefs. (Sosa 2011b: 151)

Thirdly, and most importantly, reflective justification typically mobilizes and indeed should mobilize capacities distinct from the original capacity that has produced the belief-candidate for being justified, in order to assess the reliability of the original capacity. It has to go beyond justifiers that are of the same kind (“homogeneous”) as first-level immediate ones, in order to enlarge the circle of justification (and thus avoid viciousness), and is, therefore, holistic and coherentist. Sosa is quite explicit about this in his writing about broad coherence, and explicates of the web-metaphor underline it, with insistence of the connection of each with every node. Moreover, such a holism is commanded by the requirement of total evidence.

If this holds, reflective justification of armchair beliefs, presumably produced by intuition and some reasoning, should revert to empirical considerations testifying to the reliability of intuition and reasoning.

This brings in the *a priori/a posteriori* contrast. The last paragraph, if correct, suggests a further conclusion: reflective justification of armchair beliefs typically combines, in an articulated way, a posteriori elements contributing to the thinker’s reflective trust in her armchair capacities with some, presumably *a priori*, components.

Let us be a bit more specific. In his general exposition(s) Sosa stresses the importance of explanatory coherence. Apply this to intuitions and armchair beliefs. Note that the reliability of armchair beliefs is *prima facie* puzzling. A reflective assessment of armchair beliefs is therefore incomplete in total absence of explanation of their having and reliability (as is the case with perceptual beliefs). The explanation has to be to some extent causal or causal-like. Barring the Cartesian style *a priori* theological grounding, which is very dubious, any such explanation will involve appeal to empirically believed assumption. So, the explanation of having and reliability will have essential empirical explanatory components. Therefore, reflective justification of armchair belief will have essential empirical components. It will have an important *a posteriori* component, with a clearly defined role.

Another candidate for a reflective source of information about reliability is the well-known appeal to global unavoidability and indis-

pensability: unavailability and indispensability of logic and elementary mathematical understanding for any kind of cognitive project, call them global unavailability and indispensability, are an important reflective justifier of logical and mathematical beliefs and inferential propensities, perhaps the most important one. This justifier can justify the target beliefs and propensities, only if our global cognitive project is a meaningful one, with some chances to succeed. The issue of success of our global cognitive project is to a large extent an empirical matter, so that we are justified in being optimistic about it on the grounds of already achieved empirical and empirically detectable success. The issue of reflective justification of logical and elementary mathematical beliefs and inferential propensities is to be decided to a large extent on the basis of global successfulness of our cognitive effort, which is largely an *a posteriori* matter. If this holds, logic and elementary mathematical understanding are reflectively justified *a posteriori* to a significant degree.

Interestingly, Sosa himself has been aware for a long time of some of the difficulties listed above. In his 2000 paper he notes, among possible objections, the “locality of cogito”: cogito is a single proposition, but we need certainty over a wider span of propositions. He answers that the relevant feature of the cogito is not restricted to a single belief. Unfortunately, he does not discuss the analogous “locality” of many necessary propositions, which seem to cry for a more holistic treatment. More importantly, he notes that “reliability of our a priori beliefs could hardly be sustained purely a priori. For we need a grasp of the mechanisms participating in the beliefs’ acquisition, which is a posteriori.” (Sosa 2000: 14). He seems to endorse the claim and answers: “Second-level defense (revision) of our a priori dispositions is also not purely a priori” (Sosa 2000: 13). He directs the reader to a claim stated on the preceding page: “[I] agree that the reflective defense of our mathematical and other a priori beliefs will not be purely a priori” (Sosa 2000: 13). But again, after having said this, he retreats, and stresses the possibility that in the case of the cogito, nothing will be needed beyond a priori beliefs, and no causal commitments will become prominent (Sosa 2000: 14). Elsewhere, he stresses the positive consequences of dropping the claims of apriority: “And once any claims of priority are dropped, as I am proposing, then it might well be held that *cognitio* that *p* and *cognitio* that one enjoys *cognitio* that *p*, are both required for *scientia* that *p*” (Sosa 2009a: 150, fn. 14).⁷

⁷ And there is a streak of explanationism and interest in causal dependence in Sosa’s general picture of justification:

Epistemology too, like the aesthetics of dance, reverses the import of causality found in instrumental value. The distinctively epistemic evaluation of a cognitive performance can depend substantially on its source, unlike the instrumental evaluation that depends on effects rather than sources. Consider thus the justification of a belief derived from a good inference, as when a detective figures out who did it, or when you determine how much you owe a shopkeeper.

Let me conclude with an example which shows that Sosa does in fact recognize the importance of empirical, a posteriori data for the full reflective justification of intuitional beliefs, in this case philosophical ones. In his paper on possible intuitional foundations of philosophy (2011a) he confronts the issue of possible serious divergence in subject responses to questions in thought experiments. He comes up with a dilemma: “Either experimental inquiry will uncover serious divergence in subject responses or it will not”, and argues that in the latter case there is no serious problem (Sosa 2011a: 465). If the first horn turns out to be actual, we still have a way out: explain away the disagreements by differences in semantic understanding. (I apologize for brevity of presentation). Note that the moves are made in response to empirical findings, and that the last, rescuing move, would also need empirical confirmation, namely the finding that in fact the subjects have different meanings on their minds when performing the armchair experiment. It is all a piece of clearly a posteriori reflection on philosophical intuitions, geared to offering a sophisticated second-level justification, and indicating the limits of thought experimenting, thus resulting in our knowing full well the philosophical propositions in question.

To reiterate. The puzzle concerns the question of what reflective knowledge in the domain of intuitions involves? The options seem to reduce to the following three:

(a) localistic ratification and self-validation: this is how Sosa characterizes the Reflective condition for introspection, and by implication, intuition: seeing the necessary infallibility (reliability) of our first level introspective thoughts (Sosa 2000: 9), or

(b) rather holistic coherence, in line with the general picture of reflective justification. The resulting picture is then either (i) narrow, involving only a priori materials, or (ii) wide? If (ii) wide, then reflective justification becomes to a significant degree a posteriori. If (i) narrow, it is unclear why an exception is made for intuitional beliefs.

My final question for professor Sosa is then concerned with his considered judgment about the role of the a priori and a posteriori in the reflective justification of intuitions: how are reflective knowledge, broad coherence and the web of belief related in the case of intuitional knowledge? And in particular, in the case of armchair philosophical intuitions?

Something is then believed because it is concluded from prior information already in the thinker’s possession. To draw it as a conclusion and to believe accordingly for that reason is, moreover, a broadly causal matter. It is a matter of believing such and such *because* of so and so, or *on the basis* of a prior belief that so and so. Accordingly, the conclusion belief gains its epistemic status through being *based* on the premises inferentially. One believes the conclusion at least in part on that basis, *for the reason* that, as one can see, it follows from the already accepted information. The fact that one’s belief in the conclusion is thus “motivated rationally” (Sosa 2007: 80).

4. Conclusion

Let me conclude with two points. First, I would like to sketch the road a two-level virtue epistemologist could, and perhaps should, take, if she takes seriously the broad coherence (and in particular, its explanatory component) at the second reflective level; I myself did take such a road in writing about intuitions and the a priori (Mišćević 2006, 2008). Second, I would like to reiterate my three questions to professor Sosa.

The first task first. Both Sosa and I agree that obviousness and indubitability give the thinker a *prima facie* reason for accepting one's intuitions. Neither a Sosa-style moderate externalist nor any naturalist should deny this; the latter since for a naturalist normative acceptability should follow from descriptive compellingness. In the next step, as Sosa has taught us, the thinker tries to achieve a general coherent view of her cognitive abilities and their outputs. Of course, one can distinguish degrees of reflective, meta-cognitive achievement on the second, reflective level. The lowest degree is guaranteed by the immediate attraction-compellingness of contents, i.e. of intuitional propositions. If the thinker psychologically cannot doubt some such proposition, then she is *prima facie* allowed to believe it: epistemic *ought* implies epistemic *can*. Still, a more conscientious thinker would want to have a coherent meta-cognitive perspective on deliverances of her cognitive abilities, and an explanatory view on functioning of abilities. Again, we may distinguish the immediate or folk view (of e.g. perception or intuition-ability) from a theoretical perspective on these abilities.

As Sosa puts it in his general proposal, it is the interplay of (the deliverances of) all capacities, plus the best explanation of the whole, that indicates whether a particular capacity, in this case intuition is reliable. (I assume that merely negative coherence with explanation is sufficient: in other words, if the explanation does not seriously contradict the explanandum (and we have argued that it does not), we have good reasons to trust our intuitions.) If we apply it to intuitions, we note that the explanation-based doubts about intuition, for example, make it vivid for the thinker that the immediate compellingness of an intuition need not be sufficient. But then, the indispensability and success come in. Our intuitions cohere with our empirical hypotheses, and enable these hypotheses to be tested and confirmed. Indispensability and success are thus capable of almost completely justifying the reliance on intuitional knowledge. They come in very handy since they point to the massive empirical success of everyday knowledge and of science in which such beliefs are essentially used. The success does a posteriori vindicate the certainty of elementary logical and mathematical intuitions, for which there is a massive overlap with the factual domain.⁸

⁸ There is a reasonable philosophical worry that some flaw in the origin of our intuitions might annihilate their justification. What if they come from a demon, Descartes asked. What if they are just figments of our imagination? How can information coming from within have any "validity" for a mind-independent world,

What about concepts and understanding? How do our concepts guide us? My answer is more extroverted than the traditional conceptualist one: the crucial quality about our competence is that it carries correct information about the world, and concepts are just a means for encoding such information. Intuitions are concerned with their external objects, the domain of items and facts, rather than with concepts. Further, they require an explanation of having and reliability, if possible a causal one. Concepts often play a role in the process, but they are not the object of intuitions, and their role is subordinate to the role played by the external referential domain. But why are they normally so helpful? My own favorite line is summarized in the following paraphrase of J. L. Austin (where the term “words” is replaced with “concepts”):

...the stock of our deepest concepts embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth making, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up on the spot. (Austin 1979: 182)

This accumulated wisdom then allows the philosopher to anticipate the experience from the armchair. At the same time, the double fallibility of these intuitions accounts for the limits of philosophical autonomy: armchair research should be open to corrections from empirical science.

Also, our partly innate endowment might explain at least the very origin of the intuition-capacity and the initial stages of the formation of our intuition-states with their contents. For instance, it might consist of innate structures, some corresponding to concepts and some to inner, spatio-temporal “frames”, responsible for an innate spatial-geometrical know-how. Note that intuitions are often rather scenario-based than inference-based. Imagining scenarios, typically particularized ones play the main cognitive and justificatory role, whereas inference typically plays a subordinate role.

All this explains some of the objective validity of our intuitions. But nativism should be restricted to the origin of the system and to the relatively initial stages of processing. An intelligent nativist-adaptationist should allow for a wide margin of influence from individual empirical learning, which may overthrow even some deeply ingrained pre-conceptions to the contrary. And most importantly, intuition is doubly fallible. It can misrepresent the contents of our cognitive apparatus, and is thus internally fallible. But, the contents themselves—including their core, the innate assumptions—are also fallible, as Sosa has noted, yielding

Kant asked (and opted for an anti-realist solution). It is here that the evolutionary explanation comes in. Its role is remedial, i.e. to alleviate or to forestall the subtle, purely philosophical skepticism focusing upon a distantly and merely possible flaw in the causal ancestry of our intuitions. It thus removes the lingering perplexity about the mystery of scientific applicability and success of our logical and mathematical intuitions.

the external fallibility of intuitions. Our innate geometry might be false, our possibly innate folk-physics certainly is. No deep or strong apriority is involved in their deliveries. In short, we can admit an important role of intuitions, and preserve some of their special status, intimated by their phenomenology, without falling into the dangerous traps of classical Cartesianism.

Finally, concerning the justificatory status of intuitions, one needs to combine *a posteriori* considerations with the *a priori* ones; the result will be a structured justification, with distinct elements coming from distinct sources. So much about the reflective-level proposal, to some extent inspired by Sosa's stress on broad coherence and the role of the web-of-belief as a whole.

Let me conclude by re-iterating my questions for professor Sosa:

If Sosa accepted that at least some *prima facie* justification is bestowed on the belief by seeming-attraction, he would end up with two tiers, the coherentist and the foundationalist one, in addition to the two levels. The question for professor Sosa is then whether this would be acceptable for him, and if not, why.

The second question: how does our intuitional competence connect with the world it produces judgments (more precisely, attractions to judge) about? Intuitions seem to connect us to mathematical and modal reality, to facts of metaphysical significance, moral significance and perhaps more (linguistic intuitions, etc.). Let us agree that concepts are somehow involved in the feat; but how precisely?

My final question for professor Sosa is then concerned with his considered judgment about the role of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* in the reflective justification of intuitions: how are reflective knowledge, broad coherence and the web of belief related in the case of intuitional knowledge? And in particular, in the case of armchair philosophical intuitions?

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