**Which hinge epistemology between animal, bioscopic and constitutivist?[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

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**1. Some basic methodological considerations**

Hinge epistemology (henceforth, HE) is an increasingly popular trend in contemporary philosophy. Building on Wittgenstein’s insight that justification and knowledge always take place within a system of assumptions, or “hinges”, hinge epistemologists have developed a number of competing accounts of *On Certainty* (henceforth, OC) and of how best to turn Wittgenstein’s original insights into a systematic approach to issues concerning justification, knowledge, skepticism, relativism, disagreement, testimony, trust, epistemic injustice, and more.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Given its lineage, HE is naturally also concerned with exegetical issues. Not all hinge epistemologists distinguish carefully between claims advanced as exegetical and theses put forward as philosophical developments of Wittgenstein’s original insights.[[3]](#footnote-3) To some degree, this is to be expected because how one is struck by a text will reflect in the insights one will take oneself to develop in a more systematic fashion. Conversely, what strikes one in a text is often a reflection of one’s pre-existing philosophical orientation. Nonetheless, it is important to be careful to distinguish the nature of one’s claims, in the interest not only of exegetical accuracy but also of what kind of evidence should be brought to bear on their assessment – whether textual and contextual, when exegesis is concerned, or philosophical, when more systematic philosophical development is at issue.

In the following, I will consider two prominent kinds of HE, which are excellent examples of methodological accuracy – namely, Danièle Moyal-Sharrock’s (§2) and Duncan Pritchard’s (§3). Their impeccable methodology notwithstanding, I will take issue with both, and thereby defend the kind of reading of OC I proposed in Coliva (2010) and in subsequent writings, as well as (§4) the kind of constitutivist HE I have been proposing since Coliva (2015).

**2. Moyal-Sharrock’s animal hinge epistemology**

Danièle Moyal-Sharrock’s version of HE clearly belongs to those readings of Wittgenstein’s OCthat aim at exegetical accuracy, while also bringing out the significance of this work for contemporary epistemology. I will focus on some exegetical issues first, and then turn to Moyal-Sharrock’s take on the significance of OC for epistemology.

As is well known, according to Moyal-Sharrock (2005), hinges are rules and not propositions, since they fail at bipolarity.[[4]](#footnote-4) Furthermore, they typically go unspoken and, when they are spoken, they are mentioned only for heuristic purposes, such as teaching or reminding someone of the meaning of words, or of their indubitability, at least in context. According to Moyal-Sharrock, since they aren’t propositions, they are not the content of any propositional attitude either. Our certainty with respect to them is manifested in action – that is in the way we act with total confidence, thereby showing that we take them for granted. By confidently using our hands, for instance, we display in action the fact that we take it for granted that we have hands (when we do); by engaging in story-telling, history, geology, and more, we display the fact that we take it for granted that the earth has existed for a very long time, etc. Furthermore, according to Moyal-Sharrock, when we have the impression that a hinge could actually be subject to semantic and epistemic appraisal, it is because its empirical doppelgänger is being considered instead. For instance, when Wittgenstein was considering it, the sentence “Nobody has ever been on the Moon” was expressing a hinge. Now, in contrast, by that sentence, we no longer express a rule but an empirical proposition, we know to be false, based on a lot of empirical evidence.

According to Moyal-Sharrock, the significance of OC for epistemology lies in the fact that it presents an entirely new and *sui generis* form of foundationalism. At the basis of all our knowledge and justification are hinges, which are not propositional in nature and with respect to which we bear a form of animal certainty, which is enacted in our everyday actions. Thus, the quest for justifications does not lead to an infinite regress, or to circular justifications. Rather, it ends with the recognition of basic elements – hinges –, which are semantically discontinuous with respect to the rest of our beliefs and propositional knowledge, and with the recognition of the fact that such hinges are not apt for justification and knowledge or certainty, traditionally understood along Cartesian propositional and epistemic lines. Rather, the attitude we bear towards them is one of certainty in a more basic, animal and enacted sense. To ask for justification for hinges and for our certainty with respect to them would thus betray a double categorial mistake consisting in conflating hinges with ordinary empirical propositions (or even with empirical generalizations) and animal certainty with epistemic certainty.

In the following, I will put forward some criticisms of Moyal-Sharrock’s reading mostly from an exegetical point of view. As I have observed elsewhere,[[5]](#footnote-5) by the time of OC, the term “proposition” (*Satz*) had come to express a fairly relaxed notion in Wittgenstein’s writings. In OC 318-20 Wittgenstein writes:

‘The question doesn’t arise at all.’ Its answer would characterize a method. But there is no sharp boundary between methodological propositions and propositions within a method. But wouldn’t one have to say then, that there is no sharp boundary between propositions of logic and empirical propositions? The lack of sharpness is that of the boundary between rule and empirical propositions. Here, one must, I believe, remember that the concept ‘proposition’ itself is not a sharp one.

The idea, I take it, is precisely that, by the time of OC, Wittgenstein held the view that there is no sharp boundary between rules and empirical propositions, because there are propositions “about material objects” (OC 402) which, however, don’t play an empirical function in context. Yet context can change, either synchronically or diachronically. Hence, these propositions can acquire or re-acquire a purely empirical role. For instance, “Here is my hand” can cease to be a norm of evidential significance, because, after a car accident, it can actually be open to sensible investigation whether I still have a hand. Similarly, “Nobody has ever been on the Moon” can be liable to rational inquiry and may even turn out to be false if scientific progress allows for it. This, however, doesn’t mean that in the meanwhile we have substituted those hinges with their empirical doppelgängers. Indeed, there is no passage in OC that, to the best of my knowledge, explicitly states the idea of doppelgängers and of unnoticed substitutions of hinges with ordinary empirical propositions (or vice versa).[[6]](#footnote-6) The idea of doppelgängers emerges only if one takes ‘Satz’ to mean ‘sentence’ and then takes the passages for instance around OC 95-99 to suggest that one and the same sentence can be used either to express an empirical proposition or else a norm. Yet, those (and other) key passages actually suggest a different idea, when the ordinary translation is preserved. Namely, that “some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions” may be “hardened” so as to function “as channels” for ordinary empirical propositions and yet this relation can alter with time “in that fluid propositions”—not their doppelgängers—harden, and hard ones become fluid (OC 95).[[7]](#footnote-7)

Hence, while playing a normative role, hinges remain propositions with empirical import, as they convey a certain description of reality, which is not (any longer) subject to verification and control, yet is a description all the same. “The Earth has existed for a very long time”, or “Here’s my hand”, “My name is AC”, “Nobody has ever been on the Moon”, are all cases in point. And there are circumstances – either synchronically or diachronically – which, at least in some cases, could demote these propositions from their rule-like role (OC 95) to let them play their (perhaps original) merely descriptive function. Indeed, for Wittgenstein, “the same proposition” (*Satz*) “may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing” (OC 98). This is clearly the case with “Here’s my hand”, but also, diachronically, with “Nobody has ever been on the Moon”.

Indeed, at least since the discussion of family-resemblance concepts in *Philosophical Investigations* 65–71, which is only deceptively just about the concept of game, but which is in fact concerned with discarding the idea that had had a key role in the *Tractatus*, viz. that there could be something like the essence of language and the general form of the proposition (cf. PI 65, 89–108), Wittgenstein had already abandoned a unitary view of propositions. What we regard as propositions need not share a common essence, such as their bipolarity, but just a complicated network of family resemblances.

Thus, by the time of OC, “proposition” was something of an umbrella term for (purely) empirical propositions, characterized by bipolarity and serving merely a descriptive function; for grammatical propositions, failing at bipolarity, serving a normative function; and for other kinds of propositions, equally failing at bipolarity and serving functions other than the descriptive or the normative ones, such as avowals, for instance.

This doesn’t mean that, for Wittgenstein, one can no longer draw the distinction between rules and empirical propositions (OC 98). For one can draw the distinction at the level of *function* (or role), rather than at the level of content, by taking into account the actual use of the proposition at issue, and by considering whether it is exempt from doubt, or whether it is still open to verification and control.

As mentioned, according to the non-propositional reading, hinges, as such, aren’t sayable. The idea behind the non-propositional reading is that, properly speaking, only what meets the requirement of bipolarity and is therefore a proposition, can actually be said.[[8]](#footnote-8) What this means is that being sayable requires playing only a descriptive role and being a move within the language game. Yet, on this reading, hinges do not, nor can they play such a role, for they fail at bipolarity. Hence, they aren’t propositional and descriptive, and can never be passed within the language game as a piece of information. If they are uttered, they are only spoken heuristically, to remind someone of their status and role. Still, this wouldn’t amount to saying them and, as a matter of fact, hinges would manifest or show themselves as such only in action.

Now, as is well known, the saying/showing dichotomy is a sort of “technical” distinction that belongs to the *Tractatus*. By the time of OC, through the development along the years of the notion of grammar, I think it lost much of its importance and theoretical significance. After all, in the *Tractatus*, among the many things which couldn’t be said but only shown, there were the conditions of sense. Yet, after the *Tractatus*, they had become effable in the form of grammatical propositions. Indeed, much of Wittgenstein’s positive contribution to philosophy, as he puts it in a suggestive image in the *Philosophical* *Investigations*, is to let us see that whole clouds of metaphysics are condensed in a drop of grammar (PI II, p. 222). To take that dichotomy seriously is what would force one to hold that hinges *qua* hinges are only shown in action. Still, Moyal-Sharrock herself wants hinges to be effable at least when they serve the heuristic purpose of reminding a philosopher of their proper role, or of teaching someone the rules that govern our linguistic and epistemic practices. Yet, when they are spoken in order to serve these latter purposes, they are actually presented *as hinges*. Thus, there is a tension here: either, whenever spoken, hinges aren’t presented *qua* hinges, and they can manifest themselves *as such* only in action; or else, they can after all be said *qua* hinges, even though merely to serve heuristic purposes, as is actually the case when we do philosophy with Wittgenstein and engage in the more ordinary activity of teaching someone how (best) to take part in our linguistic and epistemic practices.

Notice, moreover, that for the later Wittgenstein teaching someone the meaning of our words and norms of evidential significance would be a genuine language game. For, after all, the very idea of a language game is introduced in the *Philosophical Investigations* in connection with the conditions and preconditions for this kind of teaching (PI 7 ff). Thus, hinges are effable as such within some language games, though not in ones which serve a merely descriptive purpose. Yet, I take it to be the lesson of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy that we shouldn’t be fixated with just that use of language. Once that obsession is abandoned, then a number of only seemingly clear-cut distinctions, such as propositional/non-propositional and the saying/showing dichotomy, would have to be discarded as well.

Concerning Moyal-Sharrock’s account of certainty, there is no doubt that animal certainty is a theme in OC, but I don’t think it is the focus of the book, or its most original contribution to the debate about the relationship between skepticism and common sense. The focus of OC, notwithstanding the deceptive appearance suggested by the title,[[9]](#footnote-9) are hinges and the characterization of their role within our epistemic practices. Using a helpful terminology introduced by Moyal-Sharrock, we could say that at the heart of OC lie “certainties” rather than certainty itself. Nor would the appeal to “animal certainty” be a substantially new and potentially successful anti-skeptical strategy. After all, Hume himself recognized that we act with a certainty that knows no doubt in our everyday lives and that we couldn’t but act that way. Yet, this would by no means come as a relief vis-à-vis skeptical preoccupations. For a skeptic is actually asking for a justification of the propositions, which are the contents of our most deep-seated beliefs and this is what animal certainty wouldn’t deliver, precisely because it would ultimately reduce them to mere ways of acting. Rather, by a skeptic’s lights, animal certainty is what we have to be content with, once we realize, with him, that no justification for them is attainable.

Thus, a proper anti-skeptical strategy has to confront the challenge of showing either that these propositions are after all justified, or else that, even if they aren’t, they aren’t merely arbitrary assumptions. We will briefly look at OC’s anti-skeptical import in a moment. For now, let me dwell a bit more on what I take OC’s message about certainty to be.

As a matter of fact, certainty in OC comes down to a propositional and therefore conceptual attitude of acceptance, which displays itself mostly in action but that doesn’t show itself only in action. Furthermore, it requires some conceptual repertoire on a subject’s part, to enable her to entertain, if necessary, its contents. In particular, acceptance is a genus that comes in two species. One, which we could call “epistemic acceptance”, has as contents empirical propositions and differs from belief because these empirical propositions are held with no warrant. For instance, one could assume that the butler is the culprit, having no evidence for it (whether or not one will eventually be able to collect that evidence). Another species of acceptance is what we might call “pragmatic acceptance” and has norms as content. For instance, most people accept to stop at traffic lights when red; or to say “sorry” when they step onto someone else’s foot on the street. These are all norms and their acceptance is most often tacit (or even implicit) and shown in behavior that conforms to the norm. Yet, in a Wittgensteinian perspective, it can only be attributed to creatures who can somehow grasp its content. For it doesn’t make sense to say that a 1-year old child, say, accepts to stop at a traffic light – viz. that she accepts that norm – if she has no idea of what a traffic light is, of what its being red means, etc. Thus, even if, as a matter of coincidence, she did stop at a red traffic light, that couldn’t be taken as a sign of a tacit (or implicit) acceptance of the norm. Now, pointing out that we have been trained to act that way would show the genealogy (or the etiology) of both our eventual acceptance and of the fact that we would recognize its content as a norm (or, *mutatis mutandis*, as a hinge). But it wouldn’t be enough either to turn the kind of certainty Wittgenstein is mostly concerned with in OC into merely “animal” certainty or to make it necessarily non-propositional and non-conceptual. To reiterate: the training may well be the cause of our behavior but it is only when we can somehow grasp the content of the norms we abide by that we can be said to accept them and that they can play the role of certainties for which it makes no sense to raise doubts.

Let us now briefly turn to the issue of OC’s anti-skeptical import. As said, I don’t think it lies in reminding us that we do in fact act with no doubt, since this would be perfectly compatible with Humean skepticism. I take it that the more interesting strategy against Humean skepticism proposed in OC consists, rather, in deploying a certain analogy. Just as it would be a categorial mistake to call rules into doubt, similarly it is a categorial mistake to call into question those hinges that, while having a descriptive content, are hinges precisely because they play a rule-like role with respect to our epistemic practices.

One could object that to point out the normative role of hinges couldn’t safeguard against skeptical assaults, because a skeptic could claim that we may actually have rules which aren’t at all rationally defensible. I think this objection would be unfair to Wittgenstein’s point. For he isn’t talking just of any possible rule, but of those we bump into, as it were, when we investigate our scientific and mundane epistemic practices and discover their presuppositions. Namely, those hinges that are presupposed by inquiry, at least in a given area, and that make it possible to produce reasons for or against any empirical proposition. Given their role in shaping the epistemic practice that is constitutive of rationality, hinges are not open to skeptical assault. For asking for reasons in their support presupposes the possibility of providing reasons. Yet, epistemic reasons are possible only if hinges are taken for granted. Again, it is no objection that “Nobody is ever been on the Moon” would then be a rule, which is not rationally defensible. For, as we saw, up to when it played a normative role (around 1969), it was not open to serious doubt, and, afterwards, it stopped playing a normative role. Hence, it was no longer a hinge but an ordinary empirical proposition, subject to verification and control.

Actually, in Coliva (2010, chapter 3), I have maintained that Wittgenstein also made the stronger claim that since skeptical doubts are unmotivated, for the reasons just sketched, they are actually not meaningful. They are pieces of nonsense, which, however, retain an appearance of sense because we project it onto them from ordinary contexts of doubt. Now, I think, as I have stressed in the book, that this claim is much more contentious and difficult to defend, in my view, and for this reason less fruitful. Yet, it is undoubtedly another avenue of potential development for an anti-skeptical strategy; one which would require one to be prepared to embrace a strong version of the idea that meaning is use.

Let us now turn to the issue of Wittgenstein’s foundationalism. The term “foundationalism”, in philosophy, describes a precise epistemological position. Michael Williams (2005) has usefully reminded us of its main features in connection with an analysis of whether OC can be seen as proposing a form of it. Accordingly, (i) foundations are universal; (ii) there must be criteria to tell them apart from what they ground; (iii) they must be independent of what they ground; (iv) the passage from grounds to what is grounded shouldn’t require appeal to non-basic propositions. We could also add that (v) grounds should play an epistemically supporting role with respect to what is grounded by them; and (vi) that they should be epistemically more secure than what they ground.

As to (i), of course some of Wittgenstein’s hinges are universal, but surely not all of them. “My name is AC” is a hinge for me, not for any other person, although it is to be expected that each person will have his own similar hinge—i.e. “My name is NN”. Regarding (ii), what plays the role of a hinge is contextually determined and we have to look at the practice—i.e. at how each specific language game is actually played—in order to determine what functions as a hinge with respect to it. However, the very same proposition could play a different role in a different context. This is clearly the case with “Here is my hand”. Yet, the doppelgänger view obscures this point, because it entails that those words actually express two different things and that context decides which one it is, but, whatever it is, it is either a rule or an empirical proposition once and for all. With respect to (iii), hinges, for Wittgenstein, aren’t such because they are intrinsically epistemically secure or more epistemically secure than what they are supposed to ground (vi). Rather, they are kept fixed by our very practice, by what rotates around them. Regarding (iv), it should be noticed that hinges aren’t eternal and can be demoted so as to acquire, or even re-acquire a purely empirical function. In particular, this can happen also because of empirical changes. This possibility is clearly illustrated by “Nobody has ever been on the Moon”, since it has been re-immersed in the flux of empirical propositions and has been falsified by history. Again, the doppelgänger view potentially obscures this point, because it would entail that, up to 1969, that sentence expressed a hinge and afterwards an empirical proposition. True, the sentence would have changed its role, for it would express two different contents. Still, at each point in time it would express either a hinge or an empirical proposition. Hence, there wouldn’t be any change in *function* pertaining to the content expressed by that sentence. Contrary to (v), Wittgenstein’s hinges don’t play a supporting epistemic role with respect to what they ground, because they don’t have any epistemic status. They are neither known nor certain in any traditional epistemic sense. They have to stay put, and thus play a normative role, for our epistemic practices—those in which we acquire justifications and knowledge—to be possible. They are not an epistemic ground for the rest of our epistemic practices. Rather, they belong to the *background* (OC 94) against which those practices are possible. As opposed to (vi), hinges are certain, for Wittgenstein, but not in an epistemic sense. To repeat: they are certain because they play a normative role and make our epistemic practices possible. Hence, the revolutionary force of Wittgenstein’s OC doesn’t consist in proposing a new kind of foundationalism, despite the recurrence of foundational metaphors, precisely because none of the main tenets of that philosophical doctrine was preserved in it. Rather, I take it, the revolutionary force of OC lies in the fact that Wittgenstein realized that there are propositions, which are neither about maths or logic nor derived a priori, that play a normative role with respect to our epistemic practices and can’t therefore be meaningfully doubted.

**3. Pritchard’s bioscopic hinge epistemology**

Duncan Pritchard’s (2016) version of HE does not primarily aim at exegetical accuracy but at philosophical fruitfulness. Accordingly, I will focus mostly on this aspect of the proposal, with only occasional forays into exegetical issues.

A terminological remark is apposite here and useful in order to introduce Pritchard’s proposal. Why “bioscopic”? This term is meant to indicate the fact that a complete answer to skepticism, according to Pritchard, needs to advert to two different strategies which are not normally considered even to be compatible with one another—that is, Wittgenstein’s inspired HE and epistemological disjunctivism.

According to Pritchard, the former allows us to dispense with Cartesian, or Closure-based, skepticism, by insisting on the locality of reasons. More specifically, Cartesian skeptical scenarios are meant to raise the possibility that we may be massively mistaken, in ways which would be undetectable to us. Through a Closure-based argument, then, the conclusion is reached that we cannot even know ordinary empirical propositions, such as “Here is a hand”.[[10]](#footnote-10) According to Pritchard, however, the gist of OC is that we have a über-hinge commitment to not being massively mistaken, which is variously encoded in more specific commitments, such as that we are not BIVs, that there is an external world, etc. Such commitments are not evidentially supported , or, as Pritchard puts it, knowledge-apt (k-apt) beliefs, and are not in the business for rational evaluation. For that reason, they don’t fall within the scope of Closure-based arguments, which presuppose the possibility of embedding contents into a knowledge operator, which in turn entails rationally evaluable belief. If so, HE blocks Closure-based skepticism. I will return to the details of this first part of Pritchard’s two-pronged strategy in the following.

What is relevant at this point is that, for Pritchard, HE needs to be combined with epistemological disjunctivism. For once the locality of reasons is established, we need to respond to Underdetermination-based skepticism, whereby the evidence at one’s disposal would be the same as the one we would have if we were hallucinating a hand, and would thus fail to be knowledge-entailing. Disjunctivism allows us to do so, by providing us with factive reasons for our perceptual beliefs. For, according to disjunctivism, perception reaches all the way down to the world and allows us to know, for instance, that there is a hand here, based on seeing it. Thus, perception does not leave us at the mercy of Underdetermination-based skepticism, and allows us to redeem the idea that we know that there is a hand here *because we see it*.

Of course, disjunctivism is impotent with respect to global skeptical hypotheses of a Cartesian kind. For we cannot tell, just based on our experience, that we are not BIVs, since everything would, *ex hypothesis*, look identical to us. That is why disjunctivism needs HE. For the latter dismantles Cartesian skepticism, by reminding us that “I am not a BIV” is not an ordinary belief, which is open to doubt, verification and control, but is rather a commitment of ours—it is, in fact, a possible expression of our über-hinge commitment that we cannot possibly be massively mistaken. Yet, HE needs disjunctivism, according to Pritchard, because HE cannot take care of Underdetermination-based skepticism. Thus, only taken together can HE and disjunctivism provide a comprehensive response to skepticism.

But does HE really need disjunctivism in order to overcome Underdetermination-based skepticism?[[11]](#footnote-11) In my own work on HE,[[12]](#footnote-12) I have provided reasons to think that this is not the case. Key to my proposal is the moderate account of perceptual justification, according to which once the assumption that there is an external world is in place (together with possibly other ones, such as “My senses are mostly reliable”, “I am not a BIV”, etc.) we can take our perceptual experience at face value to corroborate the truth of, for instance, the belief that there is my hand here. Without that assumption, the experience would actually also equally corroborate the truth of “I am a BIV having a hand-like experience”. Hence, that assumption is needed to favor “Here is my hand” over “I am a BIV having a hand-like experience”.[[13]](#footnote-13) Thanks to our perception and the relevant hinge assumptions, we then have perceptual justifications for such a belief. That is, thanks to the former we can take our perceptions at face value to favor the truth of the corresponding empirical beliefs. Thus, moderatism too allows us to vindicate the legitimacy of responding to “How do you know that there is a hand here?” by saying “Because I see it”. In short, invoking disjunctivism seems to me an over-reaction, for other, less costly solutions to Underdetermination-based skepticism are possible.

Let me insist that disjunctivism should always be considered a last resort, for while its epistemological payoff is appealing (at least to some), its cost with respect to psychological adequacy is excessive. Our best studies on the psychology of perception take it to be representational—proximal stimuli are converted into a (possible) representation of a distal stimulus. More than one such representation is possible given the same proximal stimuli, and the characteristics of the final representation are determined by several factors, including the specific structure of the visual apparatus, which varies across species and individuals. Furthermore, according to our best studies, the same representations may be caused other than by means of the interaction with distal objects. In fact, they can be caused by appropriate stimulations of the brain by means of electrodes. Thus, perception does not allow us to reach all the way down to the objects. Rather, it provides representations of them and these representations do not even necessarily depend on the interaction with outer objects. Hence, our best psychology of perception and disjunctivism do not seem to be compatible (at least not easily).[[14]](#footnote-14)

Let us now turn to whether Wittgenstein’s views, if not already committed to disjunctivism, are at least compatible with it. Consider the following passage in OC, in which Wittgenstein seems, strikingly, to be discussing *ante litteram* disjunctivism:

“I know” has a primitive meaning similar to and related to “I see” (“wissen”, “videre”). And “I knew he was in the room, but he wasn’t in the room” is like “I saw him in the room, but he wasn’t there”. “I know” is supposed to express a relation, not between me and the sense of a proposition (like “I believe”) but between me and a fact. So that the fact is taken into my consciousness. (Here is the reason why one wants to say that nothing that goes on in the outer world is really known, but only what happens in the domain of what are called sense-data.) This would give us a picture of knowing as the perception of an outer event through visual rays which project it as it is into the eye and the consciousness. Only then the question at once arises whether one can be certain of this projection. And this picture does indeed show how our imagination presents knowledge, but not what lies at the bottom of this presentation. (OC 90)

Wittgenstein was struck by the fact that in German the verb for “to know” is “wissen”, which has the same root as the Latin “videre” that obviously means “to see”. He also recognized the factivity of “to know”. For instance, in OC 178, he writes:

the wrong use made by Moore of the proposition “I know...” lies in his regarding it as an utterance as little subject to doubt as “I am in pain”. And since from “I know it is so” there follows “It is so”, then the latter can’t be doubted either.

Taking knowledge to be akin to seeing, together with its factivity, produces a captivating “picture”, as he calls it. Namely, a picture according to which knowledge would consist in taking outer facts into one’s consciousness. Yet this is just a picture, and a bad one at that, for Wittgenstein. For we do not take outer facts into consciousness; nor do we have knowledge only of inner facts, since the latter, being mental in nature, might be thought of being taken in consciousness directly. Rather, we only have perceptual experiences, which can lend support to our beliefs thanks to pertinent hinges. Our knowledge, as fallible as is, just consists in having true beliefs supported by defeasible reasons. Indeed, it is of the essence of knowledge, for Wittgenstein, that it be defeasible and this can be so only if knowledge does not depend on, or entail having factive reasons for the propositions known. As he writes in OC 12,

‘I know’ seems to describe a state of affairs which guarantees what is known, guarantees it as a fact. One always forgets the expression ‘I thought I knew’.

Disjunctivism, with its insistence on factive reasons, is forgetful of this grammatical fact, as Wittgenstein would consider it. For, saying that one does know that *p*, iff one has factive reasons for *p* – viz. because one has taken in the very fact that *p* – excludes the possibility of being wrong – that one’s reasons may not be conclusive – and that *p* isn’t the case. Yet Wittgenstein insists that it is only when that possibility remains open that we do have, and are allowed to claim, knowledge. When that possibility is not open, then we are actually stumbling on something categorially different. Namely, a hinge, and our use of “I know” in that connection would actually not be the ordinary epistemic use but the grammatical one, in which no epistemic relation obtaining between a subject and a proposition is expressed.[[15]](#footnote-15)

A disjunctivist might reply that one may altogether lack factive reasons and hence knowledge, contrary to one’s initial belief. This, however, would simply mean that one didn’t have knowledge in the first place and not that one’s reasons, when one *does* know, are defeasible. For, according to disjunctivism, either we have perceptual reasons, and, in that case, they reach all the way down to facts and cannot be defeated by any increment in information, or we don’t have perceptual reasons at all. Yet, the gist of OC 90 is that for Wittgenstein when genuine knowledge occurs – when “I know” expresses the obtaining of an epistemic relation between a subject and a proposition – then reasons must be defeasible. If they weren’t, given that knowledge itself is factive, it would also be infallible and that is simply impossible for Wittgenstein. That is, whenever we stumble upon a use of “I know” which seems prima facie to express the impossibility of a mistake, we shouldn’t take it to express the obtaining of a genuine of an epistemic relation, but of a grammatical fact.

Let us now turn to what is perhaps Pritchard’s most important claim, from the point of view of HE.[[16]](#footnote-16) To introduce it, it is worth contextualizing it. It is a well-known consequence of Wittgenstein’s epistemology that it gives rise to what seems, at least prima facie, a denial of the Closure principle for knowledge and other epistemic operators such as evidential warrant or justification. For we can know (or justifiably believe), according to Wittgenstein, ordinary empirical propositions about mid-size objects in our surroundings, but we cannot know the “heavy-weight”[[17]](#footnote-17) implications of those propositions, such as “I am not a BIV” or “There is an external world”, on which the very possibility of knowing ordinary empirical propositions depends. Presumably, to gain the latter piece of knowledge, we would run something like the following argument:

1. Here is a hand
2. If there is a hand here, there is an external world
3. There is an external world

Yet, any justification we have for (I)—such as perceptual evidence—depends on taking (III) for granted. If (III) were not in place, we would still have the relevant evidence—that is, our perceptual experience—but no justification for (I). According to Wittgenstein, whenever we face this kind of epistemic dependence, we ought to recognize that (III) is a “hinge” (OC 341-343, cf. 105), that which to stay put for us to have a justification for ordinary empirical propositions like (I). If so, then, an argument like the previous one, which aimed at giving us a justification for (III), would be ultimately question begging, since it is necessary to take for granted its conclusion in order to have a justification for its premise(s) in the first place. Furthermore, as we saw in §2, for Wittgenstein, hinges are not like ordinary empirical propositions, and although they retain a descriptive content, they actually play a rule-like role. If so, they are not epistemically assessable. Thus, while we may have justification or even knowledge of (I), and despite the fact that (I) entails (III), as (II) correctly states, we do not have either justification for, or knowledge of (III).

Now, several hinge epistemologists are prepared to face the situation, offering considerations to minimize the allegedly devastating effects of such an admission. Some, like Wright (2004, pp. 177-178),for instance, are willing to grant that Closure would fail for knowledge but not for other epistemic notions in the vicinity, like rational entitlement.[[18]](#footnote-18) Others, including myself, point out that Closure would fail, for principled reasons,[[19]](#footnote-19) only when the consequent of the conditional is a heavy-weight implication, but not when it is any other ordinary empirical proposition.[[20]](#footnote-20) Hence, Closure for knowledge holds, but not unrestrictedly. Yet, its limited failure would be compatible with the retention of that very principle in the vast majority of cases, when ordinary empirical propositions are involved.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Pritchard, in contrast, wants to maintain the unrestricted validity of the Closure principle for knowledge and yet, with Wittgenstein and several hinge epistemologists, he does not want to say that we can know heavy-weight assumptions, even if these are entailed by ordinary empirical propositions we do know. His way out of this impasse consists in claiming that our *attitude* towards these assumptions is not one of k-apt belief and that we would never *acquire* such a belief by means of an application of the Closure principle. Since k-apt belief is necessary for knowledge, it follows that the Closure principle is simply not applicable in those cases in which the consequent of the known conditional is a “heavy-weight” proposition, or, as Pritchard prefers to call it, a “hinge commitment”.

Now, it is important to note, first, that obsessing over the unrestricted validity of Closure is motivated only to the extent that Closure itself is seen as a generative principle. That is, only if Closure is considered to be a principle which allows us to *extend* our justification (or knowledge) from the premises of a given argument, to its conclusions, via known entailment. This, however, is not a sacrosanct reading of it. In fact, since at least Wright (1985), it has become customary to distinguish between Closure and Transmission of justification (and of knowledge as long as knowledge entails having justification). In my own work,[[22]](#footnote-22) I have explained the difference by saying that all it matters to Closure is that the same kind of epistemic operator would figure in the premises and the conclusion of the argument, irrespective of the provenance of the relevant epistemic good. Thus, for instance, if one were justified in believing that Q through testimony, and one were justified in believing that P through perception, and were justified a priori to believe that P entails Q, Closure for justification would be respected and yet it would not thereby give one a first justification to believe Q; nor would it enhance any antecedent justification one would have for Q already. Transmission, in contrast, would be the generative principle that would either give one a first justification to believe Q, or enhance one’s antecedent justification for it.

While this is important in order to differentiate various epistemic principles, which may be more or less significant to us and thus difficult to abandon, the choice of calling “Closure” what others would call “Transmission” is ultimately terminological. So, let us grant Pritchard his own reading of Closure—which makes it a case of transmission by other epistemologists’ lights (or nearly enough)—and let us turn to a discussion of his way out of the impasse.

One way Pritchard could go would be to say, with Danièle Moyal-Sharrock, that since hinges are rules and rules are not propositions, they are not apt to be contents of beliefs and of (propositional) knowledge. Yet, Pritchard does not want to take this route—and rightly so in my opinion. For, as we saw in §2, it is difficult to motivate the idea that hinges aren’t propositions, even though they play a normative role. Moreover, they can clearly figure as antecedents in conditional statements, they would admit of meaningful negations and could occur in disquotational schemas. Of course, perceptive supporters of the non-propositional reading of hinges are aware of all that and typically claim that in all these cases we would have the same sentence—a doppelgänger of the hinge—playing no hinge role, as we saw in §2. This defense, however, is problematic on multiple fronts. For instance, it would entail some kind of semantic ignorance on our part, since we would typically be oblivious to such a difference. Moreover, it would not fit well with those of Wittgenstein’s remarks in OC, in which he contends, as we saw in §2, that the very same proposition can be treated as a rule of testing and as something to be tested, depending on the circumstances (cf. OC 96-99).

As noticed, Pritchard’s solution is to retain the propositionality of hinges while making them the content of a peculiar attitude, different from k-apt belief, called “commitment”. Now, one may legitimately wonder what commitments are. Yet, Pritchard is surprisingly silent on how exactly we should understand them. To be reminded, in a Wittgensteinian spirit, that commitments encode the idea that we bear to hinges a kind of animal, visceral certainty is fine as far as it goes, but it should not obscure the fact that we can and do conceptualize hinges and that they are the content of some kind of propositional attitude after all. Indeed, this seems to be a straightforward consequence of Pritchard’s rejection of the non-propositional reading of hinges. Yet, if hinges are propositions and are the content of a specific attitude, then it is the very attitude at play that is doing all the philosophical work. Thus, the question remains as to what commitments really amount to. In fact, if they are not evidentially supported, or k-apt beliefs, then they come very close to assumptions. I will presently return to this issue.

Now, while it may be a something like a visceral commitment of mine that I have hands, I am not sure the same would hold for the myriad hinges Wittgenstein considers in OC, including “Water boils at 100 °C”, or “Napoleon won at Austerlitz”,[[23]](#footnote-23) or “Nobody has ever been on the moon”, etc. That is, stressing the visceral element quite naturally inclines one to think of commitments as enacted, but there is no enactment of “Water boils at 100 °C”. Pritchard would likely respond that the visceral commitment is only to the über-hinge that we cannot be massively mistaken and that, depending on the circumstances, it can take a certain content, like “Water boils at 100 °C”, which has nothing visceral to it, and turn the latter into a specific hinge commitment. Yet, I doubt this would be a helpful strategy. For people may be viscerally committed to all sorts of false beliefs, biases and prejudices, which we would not thereby want to turn into hinges. Thus, there may be a “demarcation problem” looming here.[[24]](#footnote-24) That is, is Pritchard in fact recommending to depart from Wittgenstein’s OC and reduce the number of hinges to those with respect to which we cannot be mistaken, for they are actually necessary assumptions of large swaths of epistemic practices, such as forming justified beliefs and acquiring knowledge by means of perception, or is he not? And, in this latter case, wouldn’t he run the risk of condoning too many “hinges”, if being viscerally committed to something is the criterion for “hinginess”?

Furthermore, we are told that commitments are a kind of propositional attitude, and that they are different from k-apt beliefs, in that they are not and need not be justified and backed up by reasons and evidence. Now, other hinge epistemologists (see Wright 2004 and Coliva 2015), have labored to develop a notion of acceptance, which is not based on evidence in favor of the proposition that constitutes it content. Acceptance, in turn, is a propositional attitude in which the subject takes or holds the propositional content to be true.[[25]](#footnote-25) It is not clear in what way, if any, Pritchard’s notion of commitment is any different from what these other hinge epistemologists call “acceptance”, or why it need be. For, after all, that attitude, like Pritchard’s commitments, would not be up for epistemic support and assessment. Furthermore, it would be totally compatible with strong commitment to its contents. After all, people are very strongly committed to things they cannot prove, such as God’s existence, their basic philosophical assumptions, or even the axioms of mathematical theories.

Be that as it may, according to Pritchard, his move would block the usual objections to deniers of Closure because Closure holds only for knowledge, which in turn entails rationally evaluable belief and thus it does not apply to commitments, which are not rationally evaluable beliefs. The proposal is simple and elegant, but on reflection it may still be open to objection. For suppose we agree that “There is an external world” is a hinge commitment of ours, which we do not acquire by running anything like the previous argument. Yet, it is a proposition, according to Pritchard. Moreover, it is entailed by “Here is my hand”. Now, if Closure holds, nothing seems to prevent us from applying it to such a proposition. We would then go from knowing that there is a hand here to knowing, and therefore (k-apt) believing, that there is an external world. That is, if Closure holds and “There is an external world” can be plugged in into one of its instances, we may not have *acquired* that hinge commitment by going through that kind of argument, but it seems that we can *bolster* it into knowledge and k-apt belief after all.

Thus, to block this objection it seems that Pritchard will have to concur with other hinge epistemologists that Closure does not hold unconditionally, after all. Rather, its validity is limited to known entailments flagging ordinary empirical propositions on both sides of the conditional, or, more generally, propositions which are not hinges and can therefore be known and consequently (justifiably) believed. This way, it would be obvious why we cannot turn our initial commitment to the existence of an external world into a knowledgeable belief.

Furthermore, as we have seen, Pritchard insists on the fact that commitments are visceral—that is, a-rational. Their being outside the scope of justification ensures that they are not k-apt beliefs, which could then be impugned by means of a Closure-based skeptical argument. Yet, on reflection, to insist on the a-rational aspect of commitments, while perhaps of help against Cartesian skepticism, may not be so wise a move vis-à-vis a Humean skeptic. For a Humean skeptic would in fact agree that we are a-rationally and viscerally committed to holding that there is an external world, and yet insist that since we don’t possess any epistemic justification for it, it is no more than an arbitrary assumption. Thus, by going a-rational, one might shun the Scylla of Cartesian skepticism, but only to fall in the Charybdis of Humean skepticism.

**4. Coliva’s constitutivist hinge epistemology**

My own version of hinge epistemology is meant to address Humean skepticism head-on. To that end, I depart considerably from Wittgenstein’s OC, by restricting hinges to those “heavy-weight” assumptions, which make the acquisition of justification—in particular, of perceptual justification—possible. That rules out many of Wittgenstein’s own hinges, like “Here is my hand”, “My name is N.N.” and many more. This is a price worth paying, however, because no doubt those propositions are de facto exempted from doubt and inquiry, but they need not be presupposed in order to acquire justification—perceptual or otherwise—and may, conceivably, turn out to be false. Furthermore, being too liberal with respect to hinges may easily open the way to epistemic relativism—something I would rather avoid. In addition, it would give rise to a demarcation problem, since there would be almost no principled difference between hinges and entrenched empirical propositions or generalizations.

Thus, I focus on hinges such as “There is an external world” (or “There are physical objects”), “My sense organs are mostly reliable”, “I am not a BIV”, and “I am not the victim of a lucid and sustained dream”, which are all necessary assumptions for perceptual justification and knowledge to be possible. As remarked in §3, thanks to such assumptions, we can take the content of our experiences at face value to form defeasible justifications for beliefs about objects in our surroundings. Indeed, this is the gist of the moderate account of perceptual justification I have defended at least since Coliva 2015.

Again, as already at least implicitly remarked in the previous section, if that is the nature and role of these hinges, then arguments such as

1. Here is a hand
2. If there is a hand here, there is an external world
3. There is an external world

cannot generate a justification for the conclusion, since the perceptual justification we have for (I) depends on taking (III) for granted. That is, such an argument would fail to transmit justification from the premises to the conclusion, since presupposing the latter is necessary to have justification for (I) in the first place.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Since, for reasons I have explored at length in Coliva (2015, chapter 2), I do not think it is possible to justify (III) independently by means of a priori arguments or through Wright-style entitlements, it turns out that (III) is in fact unjustified and unjustifiable (and, a fortiori, neither known nor knowable). Yet, if this is correct, it means that Closure for knowledge fails in this case, and in all other cases in which the conclusion of this pattern of argument would be a heavy-weight assumption which is necessary in order to have a justification for a premise like (I). Thus, in my view, Closure does not hold unrestrictedly. Yet, its failure in such cases is compatible with its retention in all those cases in which ordinary empirical propositions are involved.[[27]](#footnote-27)

This, in turn, allows me to counter Cartesian skepticism by holding, first, that “I am not a BIV” and “I am not the victim of a lucid and sustained dream” play a hinge-like role and need to be presupposed in order for perceptual justification to be possible. If so, they cannot be justified either through an argument like the previous one (with either of them in place of (III) “there is an external world”), or in any other way. Hence, Closure fails for them. Therefore, even if we don’t know either of them, we can still know ordinary empirical propositions such as (I).

Notice that this style of reply to Cartesian skepticism does not take issue with the conceivability of Cartesian skeptical scenarios. In this sense, my account departs from Wittgenstein’s, who notoriously claims that since “I am dreaming” cannot be coherently asserted or thought,[[28]](#footnote-28) its negation can’t either. In other words, for Wittgenstein, “I am not now dreaming” would be a piece of nonsense, which could not figure as a conclusion of any sensible argument. Yet, I think this is actually for the better, since Wittgenstein’s claim is contentious, as it depends on a conception of meaning as use that is not without problems and that may not be commonly agreed upon. Furthermore, it allows us to engage contemporary epistemologists, who tend to proceed by taking for granted that such scenarios are at least conceivable. Interestingly, moreover, it allows bringing a Wittgenstein-inspired conception of the role played by such assumptions with respect to our epistemic practices to bear onto present-day discussions of skepticism.

Yet, as I said, my main preoccupation is with Humean, rather than Cartesian skepticism. Humean skepticism does not make play with far-fetched skeptical scenarios, whose conceivability may be contentious. For Humean skepticism arises, simply, from considering arguments like the one rehearsed above, with “There is an external world” as a conclusion.[[29]](#footnote-29) By noticing that (III) needs to be presupposed in order for (I) to be justified, a Humean skeptic would conclude that the argument cannot generate a justification for its conclusion. If, moreover, it is agreed that there is no other way to justify it, “There is an external world” turns out to be an a-rational and arbitrary assumption. Of course, we may be compelled by our psychological nature to hold on to it, or be viscerally committed to it and even enact it in our life by behaving in keeping with it. None of this means, however, that we are epistemically and hence rationally within our rights in doing so.

What needs to be redeemed, then, to confront such a challenge, is the rationality of that unjustified and unjustifiable assumption. That is where the constitutivist view comes in. In my view, it is true that hinges themselves are beyond epistemic appraisal. Yet, we are actually mandated by epistemic rationality itself to hold on to them. For they are constitutive of the practice of gathering evidence for or against ordinary empirical propositions, which is itself constitutive of epistemic rationality. On a Wittgenstein-inspired epistemology, notions such as the one of epistemic rationality don’t hang in the air. Rather, they depend on human practice and, in particular, on the practice of forming, assessing and withdrawing from beliefs about physical objects on the basis of one’s perceptual evidence. Hence, either a Humean skeptic is a skeptic about epistemic rationality itself, or else, if she is merely a skeptic about a class of targeted propositions, like hinges, she won’t be allowed to conclude that they fall beyond epistemic rationality. For, though unwarrantable, they are part of epistemic rationality as they are its constitutive elements. To exclude them from epistemic rationality would then be a categorial mistake just like the mistake of excluding rules from a game simply because they aren’t moves *within* the game. The correct notion of epistemic rationality is therefore the following, extended one:

**Epistemic RationalityExt**: a proposition is epistemically held if and only if either there is a (evidential) justification for it, or, while being unjustifiable, it is necessary in order to have epistemic justifications.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The skeptical mistake would thus reside in holding on to too narrow a notion of epistemic rationality, which confines it only to evidentially warranted propositions. Moreover, it would depend on a misconception of the structure of justifications and knowledge, which requires them to spring only from more basic, yet similarly justified or even known propositions. This view can be defined as follows:

**Epistemic Rationalitysk**: a proposition is epistemically rationally held if and only if there is a (evidential) justification for it.

It seems to me that stressing the analogy with games and their constitutive rules, while not itself already an element present in OC, is a move in keeping with Wittgenstein’s approach and claim that hinges play a rule-like role (OC 95). Of course, contrary to Wittgenstein, I am not capitalizing on their semantic discontinuity with respect to ordinary empirical propositions, but I am insisting on their epistemic discontinuity, just like Wittgenstein does, and on their rule-like role with respect to rationality. For to claim that hinges are constitutive of epistemic rationality is to claim that they function as its constitutive rules.

**Conclusion**

In the foregoing, I hope to have shown not such much what the answer to the titular question – “Which hinge epistemology between animal, bioscopic and constitutivist?” – should be. That answer would depend on various interlocking factors, having to do with one’s interests, whether more exegetical in nature, or systematic, and on the answer to the myriad questions the interpretation, as well as the development of Wittgenstein’s ideas in OC give rise to. Rather, I hope to have shown the interest of pursuing hinge epistemology both in its historical and theoretical dimension, and to have elucidated some of the key issues that anyone doing either or both will have to confront. Whatever the details and differences, I think that the protagonists of this discussion and I all agree that Wittgenstein’s ideas in OC are of profound significance for present-day epistemology and should be properly attended to.

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1. \* I would like to thank Danièle Moyal-Sharrock and Duncan Pritchard for helpful comments on the penultimate draft of the paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Prominent works in HE are Strawson (1985), Williams (1991), Wright (1985, 2004, 2014), Moyal-Sharrock (2005), Coliva (2010, 2015), Kusch (2016a,b), Pritchard (2016), Boncompagni (2016), Schönbaumsfeld (2017). For the extension of HE to social epistemology, see Boncompagni (2019) and Coliva (2019, 2020a). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Wright 2004 and Williams 2004a,b, I have discussed both of them in Coliva 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The fact that they fail at bipolarity is compatible with the possibility that hinges could be used as paradigms of truth, in context, contrary to what Moyal-Sharrock maintains. For that would preclude their being false, and hence would make them fail at bipolarity. It would also be compatible with their truth being neither correspondentist nor epistemic in fashion, but only minimal (cf. Williams 2004b). This is an extremely subtle issue, one for which OC doesn’t provide a clear-cut view. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Parts of this section draw on Coliva 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In *The Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Wittgenstein 1967), Wittgenstein suggests that since “propositions of logic are so constructed as to have no application as information in practice (…), it could very well be said that they were not propositions at all”. Yet, the *Remarks* are a much earlier text and there is no reason to suppose that OC should comply with everything in it (cf. OC 320). Moreover, Wittgenstein is here talking about propositions of logic, such as, I assume, tautologies, and not of hinges. While in OC their role is likened in some respects, this doesn’t imply that they are exactly on a par and, in particular, it doesn’t entail that hinges should be devoid of any informational content whatsoever. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Notice, furthermore, that if ‘Satz’ were translated with ‘sentence’, the passages around OC 318-20 would hardly make sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Notice that Moyal-Sharrock allows also for “avowals” to be sayable (cf. her 2005, p. 45 and fn. 23), while they are neither bipolar or descriptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. As is well-known, the title was given by the editors. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Here is an instance of such a Closure-based argument: If one knows that “Here is my hand” entails that “I am not a BIV”, and one doesn’t know “I am not to be a BIV”, then one doesn’t know “Here is my hand”. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In Coliva 2018, I have looked at Pritchard’s proposal from a slightly more historical angle and have argued that Wittgenstein too seems to conceive of perceptual justification as taking place within a system of hinges, while not requiring perception to provide us with factive reasons. In the following, I will consider whether his views are compatible, if not already committed to disjunctivism—a view that is gaining currency in recent interpretations of OC, such as Pritchard’s and Schönbaumsfeld 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Coliva 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This is why the liberal account of perceptual justification, due to Jim Pryor (2004), is problematic, in my view. The moderate account is a better alternative than Wright’s (2004) conservative proposal too, since his account requires hinge assumptions to be independently justified either a priori or through entitlements. Neither option looks promising to me. For a discussion, see Coliva 2015, 2016, 2020b. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For more on this issue, see Burge 2010, and Coliva 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The grammatical use of “I know” does not express genuine knowledge, for Wittgenstein, but certainty and it applies to hinges, not to ordinary empirical propositions. For a discussion, See Coliva 2020c. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The following draws in part on Coliva 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The term is notoriously Dretske’s (1970). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Wright 2014 (pp. 232-235), which represents a considerable change of mind with respect to Wright 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See §4. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. I myself have defended this strategy in Coliva 2015, chapter 3. Dretske 1970 and Nozick 1981 have too, although they differed about the principled reasons why Closure should fail. Their reasons were grounded in their respective accounts of knowledge. Mine are in fact grounded in the “moderate” conception of the structure of empirical justification, according to which the latter is due to having a certain course of experience, absent defeaters, once certain heavyweight assumptions—like “there is an external world”, or “our sense organs are mostly reliable”, etc.—are in place. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Coliva 2015, chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Coliva 2015, chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cf. OC 183. I doubt that nowadays anything related to Napoleon’s history, would play a hinge a role for anyone, save maybe historians specializing in that topic. This is related to the thorny issue of hinges’ demarcation. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. In Coliva & Palmira 2020 a demarcation test is proposed. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Wright thinks that it involves a form of trust in which one is taking a risk. I do not think this is a necessary component of acceptance and I believe Wright’s reading is at odds with *On Certainty*. See Coliva 2010 (pp. 135-138). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This kind of transmission failure would differ from Wright’s insofar as it would not depend on presupposing that (III) needs to be independently justified in order for the perceptual justification of (I) to be possible. For a detailed discussion, see Coliva 2015, chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See Coliva 2015, chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Cf. OC 383, 676. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. In Coliva (2010) I have argued that for Wittgenstein it plays a grammatical role and is not nonsense. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. In the former case, the proposition would be believed, in the latter it would be accepted, where acceptance, on my account, is possible without epistemic evidence backing its content. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)