Chapter 7
Introduction

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Abstract We introduce the key ideas of foundationalist, coherentist and pragmatist theories of knowledge. We then use these ideas as background for presenting the work on knowledge and perception in this part, work by Grace Andrus de Laguna and Marie Collins Swabey. We will see that these authors critique the idea of sense data that was central to the foundationalist theories of knowledge of Bertrand Russell and other early analytic thinkers, though de Laguna’s critique leads to perspectivism about perception and knowledge while Swabey rejects perspectivism. So too, we will see that de Laguna and Swabey develop epistemologies with strong coherentist elements, much as did their idealist teacher James Edwin Creighton. De Laguna’s is a sophisticated form of naturalism that is built on a critique of pragmatist naturalism and is similar to the one made famous later by Willard V. Quine. Swabey rejects all forms of naturalism, arguing that knowledge requires an a priori foundation in reason.

7.1 Introduction

Foundationalism about justification is the view that some of the items we are justified about, e.g., some of our ideas, beliefs or judgements, are justified without argument or inference. Moreover, these non-inferentially justified items are the foundations for the rest of what we are justified about. Anything that is inferentially justified is justified by inference from non-inferentially justified items. Coherentism about justification is the view that none of the items we are justified about are justified without inference. On such a view, our beliefs, say, are justified by being part of a coherent set of

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beliefs; beliefs are inferentially related to each other and thus support each other, and
our beliefs are justified because they together form a system of mutually supporting
beliefs. The relationship between knowledge and justification is complex but, in
what follows, we shall assume that when our justified items fulfill certain conditions,
such as being true, they comprise knowledge. Thus, foundationalism/coherentism
about justification is supposed to come with foundationalism/coherentism about
knowledge.

Many absolute idealists working at the turn of the twentieth century were cohere-
entists (about justification and knowledge). The absolute idealist, James Edward
Creighton, is an example. On his view, whenever we make a new judgement, we
are bringing some new item of experience into an inferential relation with all our
previous judgements and testing our new judgement against all those previous judg-
ements (Creighton, 1898; Katzav, 2022). The turn of the twentieth century also saw
the emerging analytic tradition providing a foundationalist alternative to the idealist,
coherentist epistemology. Two of the most influential analytical figures were George
E. Moore and Bertrand Russell. Russell thought that our beliefs about material objects
are inferentially justified. Moreover, on his view, these beliefs are justified by our
immediate perception of sense data (Irvine, 2004). On such a view, we are immedi-
ately aware of how things appear or seem and these seemings comprise sense data,
for example, patches of colour, short stretches of sound and tactile sensations of
smoothness. On the basis of this data, we justifiably infer the existence of material
objects, e.g., the chair we are sitting on or a friend. Moore and other early members of
the analytic tradition, such as Alfred J. Ayer and Charles D. Broad, endorsed the idea
of sense data (Hatfield, 2021). Intuitively, the fact that material objects often look
differently from the way they are, suggests that we cannot perceive them directly but
only indirectly on the basis of sense data.

Another rival to absolute idealist coherentism came from pragmatists such as
John Dewey and William James (de Laguna & de Laguna, 1910). The pragma-
tists shared the view that human cognition is a tool that evolved to handle concrete
problems in specific circumstances. As a result, a proper understanding of philosoph-
ic and scientific problems is to be found in the guidance they offer to behaviour
in specific circumstances. Beliefs are thus to be thought of as concrete guides to
behaviour, linking specific stimulus conditions, that is, specific perceptions, with
specific behaviours. On such a view, beliefs are not justified by their fit within a
system of beliefs or by their being supported by foundational beliefs. Rather, a belief
is justified by its ability to resolve uncertainty about how to behave in a specific
situation.

In the first pair of essays in this part, Marie Collins Swabey and Grace Andrus de
Laguna focus on how to understand perception and, to some extent, on how percep-
tion relates to knowledge. They both critique the idea that perception involves sense
data, though de Laguna’s critique comes with a perspectivist view of knowledge
and perception while Swabey rejects perspectivism. In the second set of essays, the
same authors look more directly at the broader question of the nature of knowl-
dge. This set of essays counters foundationalism and pragmatism. However, de
Laguna’s rejection of these positions, which we will see is developed with her
husband, Theodore, is naturalistic while Swabey rejects all forms of naturalism. Naturalism tells us that human knowledge is to be investigated by the same empirical means as all phenomena. Swabey’s position is supernaturalistic, emphasizing the importance of knowledge of reality that is a priori, that is, knowledge of reality possessed independently of sense perception.

Importantly, the four essays by the two speculative women are part of a broader, idealist and pragmatist inspired, critique they and other women and men offer of the idea that knowledge is built on the foundation of a non-inferentially given (see, e.g., de Laguna & de Laguna, 1910; (Grace) de Laguna 1916; Swabey 1930; Katzav, 2023). Within the analytic tradition, the critique of the idea of an epistemically given starts later, with Otto Neurath in the late 1920s, and only really gains force towards the middle of the twentieth century, with authors such as John L. Austin and Wilfred Sellars (Hatfield, 2021; Uebel, 2021). Perhaps the most influential rejection of foundationalism within that tradition came with Willard V. Quine’s work in the middle of the twentieth century. As we will see, he reprises ideas from de Laguna, while Swabey’s critique of naturalism is reprised by critics of Quine’s naturalism.

7.2 Swabey on Perception and Knowledge

In ‘Mr. G. E. Moore’s Discussion of Sense-Data’ (1924), Swabey considers what role sense data might have in justifying beliefs. She explores this question through an examination of Moore’s paper, ‘The Status of Sense-Data’ (Moore 1914, pp. 357–358). One of Moore’s main questions in there is: what is the relationship between sensibles—Moore called sense data ‘sensibles’—and physical objects? He aimed to answer this question by assuming that we know, with certainty, that certain claims about sensibles are true and figuring out what interpretation of the claims explains their truth and certainty. The interpretation that explains their truth and certainty, according to Moore, is the correct one (ibid., 370–373). Thus, for example, Moore assumes that, when seeing two circular coins lying on the ground at a distance, it is true that our sense data are of two coins rather than of images or hallucinations, and that the coins are circular, though their sense-data are elliptical. We are to ask how these truths might be interpreted so as to explain their truth and our certainty about them.

Swabey, however, disagrees with Moore that we are entitled to assume that such common sense truths are known with certainty (1924, 467–469; this volume). Her first objection is that, in order to relate a sensible to a physical object, one must identify the sensible as a certain type of sensible, e.g., as a sensible of a physical object rather than an image or hallucination. But such identification is always subject to correction by subsequent experience. So too, our ‘certainty’ regarding sense data is merely psychological, reflecting our inability to control them rather than their evidential veracity. She thus rejects Moore’s view that knowledge starts with certainty about sense data and, by implication, his assumption that we should develop a theory of knowledge by analysing certainties about sense data. She proposes instead that
our minds are not passive. Knowledge is not simply an “acquiescence” to sense experience, as many foundationalists would have us believe. In her view, our theory of knowledge needs to recognize the active role of our minds in drawing conclusions about the nature of reality.

Yet she recognizes that this leaves open the question of how to understand the relationship between sensibles and physical objects. She, accordingly, considers the four options presented by Moore in his paper, of which we consider the two main ones. The first main option, which she rightly notes was popular at the time, is phenomenalism and tells us that claims about physical objects are to be analysed using conditionals of the form “if certain conditions were fulfilled, I or some other person, should directly apprehend certain other sensibles” (1924, p. 469; this volume). Talk about the existence of the coins I can perceive is then to be analysed in terms of talk about the coin-related sensations we would have when, e.g., walking into the room.

One worry here is that, when it comes to affirming the existence of objects prior to their being perceived, we would be interpreting what we say about the past in a way that is strongly contrary to what we mean. Thus, saying that certain coins existed before our perception of them would be interpreted as saying that if certain unrealized conditions were realized, certain sensations would be had that we did not actually have. But the statement that the coins existed does not really say how physical objects differ from mere sensibles and thus does not say that the physical object has to do with possible but not actual sensibles. Another worry about the conditional analysis is that saying that objects existed before being perceived does not tell us anything about the conditions under which any sensations would be had. So, the analysis in such cases really is that if certain unspecified conditions were fulfilled and if we had certain sensibles, they would be of a certain sort (the sort associated with coins). And there is no justification for asserting this conditional. We have no idea what to expect in unspecified conditions. Moore, Swabey notes, agrees that we should reject such an interpretation of assertions about physical objects (1924, pp. 469–470).

The second main option considered by Swabey and Moore is representational realism, which is standardly attributed to John Locke. On representational realism, our sense data are caused by physical objects and, in some respects but not others, resemble physical objects. Typically, it is assumed that the resemblance extends to extension and shape but not to colour. Swabey takes Moore to be non-committal but to have an inclination to prefer this view over the others he considers. She, however, rejects it as it seems to imply that we can never know whether physical objects exist never mind exist and resemble our ideas of them. After all, representational realism tells us that we are never directly aware of physical objects and thus implies that we are never in a position to compare our sense data with their physical causes (1924, pp. 470–471; this volume).

Fortunately, Swabey proposes a position not considered by Moore. On her view, what makes an object an object is that, by its nature, it is subject to the laws of thought and to laws of nature. This, she argues, means that the natures of objects are such that they will, if they exist, feature in a network of interrelationships with each other, a network that exhibits uniform patterns. Crucially, sensibles, whatever their nature, will also be subject to the laws of thought and to laws of nature. Thus, the apparently
subject-relative or non-objective sense data are subsumed in an objective order, one that in fact makes no essential reference to subjects or experience, and that exhibits permanence. Sense data, conceived of as private objects of immediate awareness are thus excluded from Swabey’s ontology (Swabey, 1924, pp. 472–473; this volume; 1930, pp. 258–259).

In summary, Swabey rejects the idea, then popular among analytic philosophers, that knowledge is justified by perception of sense data. Perceptual knowledge is always fallible and ultimately tested by how it stands up in a system of judgements. Indeed, Swabey is elsewhere clear that justification is always inferential and is, ultimately, a matter of systematicity (1930, pp. 83, 153–159). There is, nevertheless, a non-coherentist element in Swabey’s view of knowledge. On her view, what justifies our inferences about perceivable objects is in part a priori knowledge that these objects do feature in a logic and law-abiding universe. Empirical judgement thus has a foundation that is a priori. A priori judgements are at the same time justified by their coherence with each other (see Part III: ‘Scientific Knowledge’, p. 115).

7.3 De Laguna on Appearance and Knowledge

In ‘Appearance and Orientation’ (1934) de Laguna addresses the nature of perception and of knowledge. Moreover, she too, like Swabey, rejects the idea of sense data, albeit on different grounds.

De Laguna’s solution to the puzzle of how we manage to perceive objects themselves despite the fact that they look, or more broadly appear, differently to different perceivers is to turn to perspectivism, a move that is especially fitting for a philosopher who crossed disciplinary boundaries, particularly between philosophy and anthropology. In philosophy, perspectivism has an important place in the phenomenological tradition and, in the last few decades, has become an important position in the philosophy of science (Berghofer, 2020). A version of it was introduced in anthropology by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro in the 1990s, as an alternative to relativism and continues to be under discussion within the social sciences (Heywood, 2020). In her discussion of perspectivism, de Laguna asserts that knowledge, including as a special case perception, is always from a standpoint (1934, pp. 72–73; this volume). We never know things in themselves, but only aspects of things from our own perspectives. Perception is one such perspective. Recognizing that she has affirmed a kind of relativism, de Laguna further asserts that the reality of perspective itself is objective, because perspectives are objective, insofar as they always have objects as constitutive ingredients, and because the characteristics of objects revealed in perspectives really belong to the objects. The perspective belongs to the subject and to the object in tandem. It is a relationship between the two that is constitutive of each—peripient and perceived. The object is inherently something that appears thusly to agents with the appropriate apparatus and the converse is the case for the agent. Perception itself is thus not mere presentation/appearance. Instead, it is apprehension of an
object/entity from a given standpoint. Neither is perception simply a set of circumstances or “external fact” in which a person encounters the object/entity before them. Instead, perspective is “a factor internal to perception” (1934, p. 73; this volume). De Laguna underscores this point. Perspective/standpoint is not an object-as-it-presents-itself (an outdated metaphysical claim about sensation/experience), but instead is the object-as-experienced by a percipient.

De Laguna further establishes (1934, p. 73; this volume) her own position on the nature of experience/perception: (1) Everything is apprehended from a standpoint. There are no “sensibles” as in Moore’s system—no “bare given,” no “datum” that is unmediated, then cognitively synthesized by us. (2) A given percipient perceives from a standpoint, which may mean they perceive only aspects of an object/entity, yet they do perceive how the object really is, from their own standpoint. And in this sense, their knowledge is unique.

While Swabey’s motivation for rejecting sense data is epistemological, de Laguna’s, at least in this article, is conceptual (1934, p. 74; this volume). The sense datum theorist wants to distinguish between the real circular shape of, say, a penny and the penny’s apparent one. When we see a circular penny from an angle, for example, we do indeed see that it is circular but, says the sense datum theorist, what is really going on here is that we are immediately aware of an ellipse and our imagination recognizes this ellipse as belonging to a series of shapes that are the various appearances of a circle. Such a theory is conceptually untenable because an ellipse too appears differently from different angles, so that our imagination would be required to identify the ellipse as being part of a series of appearing shapes. We are thus led to an infinite regress of imaginings and, at no point can we make sense of an immediate apprehension of anything.

Thus, although we make use of analogies like “ideas” or “images” in our discussion of perception/knowledge, de Laguna is clear that perceptions are not ideas or images in the traditional sense within epistemology. Instead, they are psychological representations, which are not “before” our mind (which would be to characterize the mind as passive) but are relations constitutive of perceptual states. In her view, this establishes the mind as an active entity that engages with other entities in the world, perceives and makes sense of reality.

De Laguna concludes by considering why it is that, despite the fact that all perception is perspectival, we mistakenly tend to think of only one perspective as giving us the real shape of what is perceived. Here, she acknowledges that there is a privileged standpoint in perception but offers a psychological explanation for this rather than one that appeals to what is real. When we say that a penny is circular, we do implicitly refer to a perspective, namely that in which the penny appears right in front of us and in a plane perpendicular to the line of our vision. We ordinarily suppress reference to this perspective because it is a perspective in which objects are best perceived, because it is one in which we are well balanced and because it is the one from which we cannot ‘catch’ an apparent shape. None of this, claims de Laguna, indicates that the privileged perspective is the one real or ontologically privileged perspective (1934, pp. 74–76; this volume).
One might be tempted to respond to de Laguna that science provides us with a privileged perspective. For example, it can tell us what the shape of the penny is using measurements, and thus vindicates the view that some perceptual perspectives are ontologically preferred. But this would be to beg the question against de Laguna. She thinks that the different sciences also provide no more than perspectives. She argues that when scientists evaluate their claims they only do so for specific purposes and thus only reveal aspects of reality relevant to those purposes (de Laguna & de Laguna, 1910; Katzav, 2022).

In summary, de Laguna’s critique of the idea of sense data supplements Swabey’s critique. And thus, although de Laguna is not primarily concerned with what serves to justify our beliefs in presenting her view of perception, it does bring with it a critique of the kind of foundationalism found in the writings of Russell. However, de Laguna’s commitment to perspectivism also indicates that she and Swabey disagree fundamentally and thus must ultimately develop their theories of knowledge in different directions. While Swabey’s epistemology indicates that, on her view, what we are developing is a single, unified understanding of nature as governed by a single set of laws, de Laguna’s perspectivism indicates that no such single perspective is to be had. In particular, no further development of science can eliminate the perspective of perception.

7.4 De Laguna’s Naturalistic Critique of, and Alternative to, Pragmatism

In *Dogmatism and Evolution: Studies in Modern Philosophy* (1910), de Laguna and her husband co-authored a critique of pragmatism. A particularly important part of this critique is found in the chapter ‘Pragmatism and the Form of Thought’, which is included here. In this chapter, the de Lagunas target the core pragmatist claim that thought has as its function addressing concrete problems in specific circumstances. An important implication of this general claim is the claim that formal logic cannot provide general rules for reasoning and thus does not allow evaluating instances of reasoning for validity apart from how these instances guide behaviour in the specific circumstances in which they occur. Reasoning, according to the pragmatist, does not have some kind of intrinsic validity (ibid., pp. 202–203; this volume).

We here follow Katzav (2022) in presenting the de Lagunas’ position and argument. As the de Lagunas understand the pragmatist view, it tells us that each concept is merely a function that links specific stimuli and with specific responses. A concept merely tells us that, in such and such external circumstances, such and such actions should be taken to attain such and such a goal. The de Lagunas agree that part of the meaning of a concept has to do with its *import*, that is, with how it links stimuli and behaviour. However, they think this link is not direct, so that the meaning of a concept has another dimension, its *content*. On their view, the content of a concept is
fixed by the concept’s place in a system of concepts, more specifically by the logical
relations it bears to other concepts. As they put it,

the reference of a concept to a mode of conduct is never direct. The concept never directly
bridges the gap between stimulus and response. On the contrary, thought is a long-circuiting
of the connection, and its whole character depends upon its indirectness, its involution, if
we may use the term. Though concepts, apart from the conduct which they prompt, mean
nothing, yet their meaning is never analyzable except into other concepts, indirect like the
first in their reference to conduct. (1910, p. 206; this volume)

Thus, in order to understand the concept of a coat, we need to understand other
concepts, such as those of clothing, bodies, arms, sleeves, shirt and the like. In turn,
an understanding of these concepts, requires an understanding of yet further concepts.
And our understanding of a system of concepts includes our ability to see how they
are related, e.g., to see that if something is a coat, it is an item of clothing or can
be used as protection from the elements. What this implies is that a concept only
links stimuli and a response via a host of assumptions or beliefs. The view that the
meaning of a concept depends on the system of concepts to which it belongs is called
meaning holism.

Meaning holism implies that there is no simple correlation of stimuli and response.

Instead,

[a] concept is never univocal in its reference to a mode of conduct; that is to say, its meaning
is never limited to the correlation of a certain type of stimulus with a certain response. On
the contrary, its import invariably embraces a variety of actions. (1910, p. 205; this volume)

Meaning holism also, according to the de Lagunas, implies confirmation holism,
the view that our beliefs are tested in systems rather than individually. Moreover,
confirmation holism implies fallibilism, that is, the view that all our beliefs, including
those of logic itself, are tentative. Why so? When our behaviour does not lead to the
results we expect, we can in principle blame any of the assumptions we made that led
to that behaviour, so that it is the system of relevant assumptions that is effectively
tested by the frustration of our expectations. Similarly, because no belief is tested in
isolation, no belief is immune from revision. In the de Lagunas own words:

every concept involves an indefinite number of problems; and these cannot be stated except
in terms which themselves in turn involve indefinite series of problems. Nowhere is there
an absolute given, a self-sufficient first premise. From this, as well as from the indirect and
equivocal nature of the reference of thought to conduct, it follows that the confirmation or
invalidation of a concept by the result of the conduct which it serves to guide can itself be
no more than tentative. (1910, p. 206; this volume)

A further implication of the de Lagunas’ argument is that there is, after all, a
non-pragmatic element to evaluating our hypotheses. While they acknowledge that
all beliefs are revisable in light of experience, and thus that, strictly speaking, there
is no such thing as truth by virtue of meaning, they note that the indirect nature of
thought implies that thought must have a structure that is relatively independent of
our future behaviour. Only if the logical relations between concepts are relatively
stable, can our conceptual system guide our behaviour across a diversity of contexts.
Indeed, we need something like formal logic if reasoning is to work at all. As they put it,
with respect to thought and conduct it must be said that the very indirectness and equivocality
of the reference of the former to the latter gives thought a character of its own, which is as
independent of aught beyond as can well be imagined (1910, p. 207; this volume).

Thus, already in 1910, (Grace) de Laguna rejects foundationalism for a view that gives
coherence within a system of beliefs centrality in all justification. Her 1934 arguments
against sense data discussed above are a more specific critique of foundationalism
than her 1910 criticism of it. Indeed, the appeal to coherence in 1910 is also more
radical, given that even the beliefs of logic are revisable. At the same time, de Laguna
may not be offering a purely coherentist view of justification. Perhaps she agrees with
the pragmatist that a concept’s actual success in guiding behaviour, which is captured
by its import, also has a role in determining whether it is justified.

As Katzav (2022) points out, de Laguna here articulates a sophisticated alternative
to foundationalism that later came to be associated with Quine’s influential 1951
paper ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism.’ But, as Katzav also points out, de Laguna
goes beyond Quine’s paper in a variety of ways. For example, while Quine does not
explain why logic has, despite everything, a special status, de Laguna’s critique of
pragmatism comes with such an explanation.

Swabey’s Critique of Naturalism

Swabey contributed to the discussion of realism, naturalism, and pragmatism with a
chapter on ‘The General Nature of Reason’ in her book Logic and Nature (1930). She
opens by asserting that reason must be understood either as one of/as a function of
several natural capacities, or as a distinctive capacity that gives us “supremacy over
nature” (ibid., p. 33; this volume). The first of these options was preferred by many of
the philosophers in America in the early decades of the twentieth century, including
by the pragmatists, and by de Laguna and some of the other women philosophers
working before Swabey, women such as Eliza Ritchie.1

Swabey divides her critique of naturalism into two, one targeting a more extreme
form of naturalism (‘extreme naturalism’) and one targeting a more sophisticated
version of naturalism (‘sophisticated naturalism’).2 According to Swabey, extreme
naturalism posits that all action, including that of reason, is a response to a specific
environment, a response that serves the evolved function of self-preservation and
that can be explained as an evolutionary adaptation. Since this form of naturalism
takes reason to be an adaptive response to specific evolutionary circumstances, it
“denies the pretensions of reason to envisage genuinely formal and universal, as

1 See Eliza Ritchie, asserting that we are physical and psychological entities with a fixed nature, in
The Problem of Personality (Ithaca: Andrus & Church, 1889), pp. 30–33.
2 In what follows, we borrow from Katzav’s (2020) discussion of Swabey.
opposed to material and particular, objects. Concepts or generic notions are accounted as nothing more than “generalizations”; while theoretical grounds and reasons are denied efficacy, being considered as idle compensatory “rationalizations” after the event (1930, p. 40; this volume). The reader will quite clearly recognize that, here, Swabey’s target includes de Laguna’s 1910 target, namely pragmatism.

One of Swabey’s objections to extreme naturalism is that it takes the mind to be akin to a biological adaptation but that “the chief mark of most biological tools is the fact that they are bound up with the structure and locus of the organism” and “require some direct contact with the environment for any experience or knowledge of it” (1930, p. 42; this volume). Reason, by contrast, is not obviously constrained in this way by direct contact. It has the ability to envision possibilities and theorize about what it will never have contact with. Swabey recognizes that the naturalist might respond with scepticism about such abilities, but she worries that, then, the naturalist will have to be skeptical about much of science and thus about what they themselves rely on in developing their own positions (1930, pp. 43–44; this volume).

More, fundamentally, however, Swabey worries that extreme naturalism is, by its own lights, a kind of idle, compensatory rationalization. The hypothesis that life has the teleological function of maintaining life is “a teleological-metaphysical theory about the world which goes far beyond the warrant of direct experience, yet which seemingly must be granted if the results of the sciences are to be construed by it as either trustworthy or significant” (1930, p. 41; this volume). The problem here, according to Swabey, is that naturalism of this kind presupposes, but cannot justify, its own truth.

Swabey thus rejects the pragmatist middle ground between foundationalism and coherentism. Any adequate theory of knowledge will have to allow that reason is capable of more than local solutions to problems. Sophisticated naturalism does allow this. According to it, reason is still a proper part of nature but is distinguished by its ability to address general problems. Reason makes use of abstract schemas of objects without grasping them as particulars and is able to do this because of the relational nature of its concepts (1930, pp. 45–46; this volume). Another mark of reason, on this form of naturalism, is that it tends to organise data into systems, thus disclosing previously unknown relations between objects. Further,

[i]n conformity with this inclination, understanding never apparently accepts a “fact” off-hand at its face value or takes an isolated judgement as more than provisional; but requires that each shall be confirmed by linkage with other facts and judgments which mutually sustain and support it…. (1930, pp. 46–47; this volume)

In the end, although reasoning presumably never realizes the ideal which is that of a single, all-inclusive system with no grounds outside of itself, it is customary to assume that, other things being equal, the more comprehensive a coherent body of judgments is and the richer in interconnections, the more reliable it is likely to be (1930, p. 47; this volume).

Swabey, however, thinks that sophisticated naturalism, no less than extreme naturalism, undermines itself. On her view, if we assume that our minds are proper parts
of nature, we will be committed to the paradoxical assumption that the human intellect is “both the source and the product of nature” (1930, pp. 48–49; this volume).

She offers a number of supporting arguments for this claim. Here is one: if our minds are proper parts of nature, then any theory of nature will always extend beyond what experience might by itself support. In particular, experience will then never be able to provide any reason to suppose that survival value is a test of the truth of our theories. So, the naturalist will be forced to conclude that nature is, contrary to his or her initial assumption, a construct rather than a cause of our minds (1930, pp. 51–52; this volume). Another of Swabey’s supporting arguments tells us that even the distinction between theory and fact will have to be taken to be a construct of the mind once the naturalist accepts that “our contact with facts is always in the context of theory” (1930, p. 49; this volume).

Sophisticated naturalism bears a striking resemblance to the naturalism developed by de Laguna and her husband. They too recognize that the simple stimulus–response model of reason is inadequate and that reason needs, in any adequate account of human knowledge, to be supposed to have a substantial degree of autonomy from specific problem situations. Moreover, they too take systematicity to be a hallmark of reason. Sophisticated naturalism also resembles more recent forms of naturalism, such as that of Quine. He too thought that there is no a priori justification for our claims about reality and that the only way to evaluate the criteria of success of science is to do so empirically. Indeed, one of the important lines of response to Quine is akin to Swabey’s critique. Barry Stroud and Michael Williams, like Swabey, think that a rejection of a priori knowledge of reality will, when applied to itself, lead to scepticism (Stroud 1981; Williams 1996).

How, then, would the de Lagunas respond to Swabey’s worries about what happens when our minds are assumed to be proper parts of nature? They would respond that Swabey’s ideal of knowledge is unattainable. As we have seen, their view is that all claims, including those of logic are, in principle, revisable and subject to criticism. So, they accept that it is not possible to justify any criterion of truth. In a sense, then, it has been misleading when we have, above, described them as offering a theory of justification— they do not think we can give positive reasons to believe in the truth of our claims. Nevertheless, on their view, it is possible to subject our system of knowledge, including its standards of knowledge, to criticism and thus potentially to learn how we are wrong even at the most fundamental level (see Part III: ‘Scientific Knowledge’, p. 115).

References


