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Rossian Conceptual Intuitionism*

Abstract: In this paper I assess Rossian Intuitionism, which is the view that the Rossian Principles of Duty are self-evident. I begin by motivating and clarifying a version of the view – Rossian Conceptual Intuitionism – that hasn't been adequately considered by Rossians. After defending it against a series of significant objections, I show that enthusiasm for Rossian Conceptual Intuitionism should be muted. Specifically, I argue that we lack sufficient reason for thinking that the Rossian Principles are self-evident, and that insisting that they are self-evident (perhaps in an attenuated sense) may commit Rossians to radically expanding the scope of self-evidence.

Ethical Intuitionism is standardly characterised as the view that ordinary agents have non-inferentially justified substantive ethical beliefs and knowledge. It is primarily motivated by the following commitments¹: (i) a linear (rather than a holistic) view of justification, (ii) the autonomy of ethics, and, (iii) non-scepticism about the epistemic status of ethical beliefs. Regarding (i), Intuitionists worry about the epistemic regress of justification and posit non-inferential justification as the only plausible way of halting it. Regarding (ii), Intuitionists think that an ethical judgment can't be justifiably inferred (deductively or non-deductively) from purely non-ethical premises. There being non-inferentially justified non-ethical beliefs is insufficient for justified ethical beliefs. So, given (iii), there must be at least some non-inferentially justified ethical beliefs.²

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¹ Intuitionists are also motivated by the supposed fact that many of our everyday ethical judgments are made in the absence of inference or an ability to offer inferential support.

² Similar points can be made about knowledge. As an epistemological thesis, Intuitionism doesn't have straightforward metaphysical or normative entailments. It is, however, associated with robust non-naturalist realism and pluralism about fundamental ethical principles.

Intuitionism has recently undergone a renaissance, with a series of articles and books clarifying, defending, and discussing the view.³ Although some have explored the prospects for an Empiricist Intuitionism⁴ most contemporary proponents have defended a Rationalist view, according to which non-inferential ethical justified belief/knowledge is a priori and is in some way dependent upon intuition or understanding. Among Rationalists it is popular to claim that some substantive ethical propositions are self-evident: understanding of the proposition puts one in a position to non-inferentially know it. Leading members of this group such as Robert Audi and Philip Stratton-Lake defend Rossian Intuitionism,⁵ which is (inter alia) the view that the Rossian Principles of Duty, e.g., *acts of promise-keeping are prima facie right*, are self-evident.

In this paper I assess Rossian Intuitionism. In §1 I highlight that the account of self-evidence which some leading Rossians are attracted to – Perceptualism – involves a commitment to an immodest philosophy of mind. I then clarify an alternative theory – Conceptualism – that hasn't been adequately considered by Rossians and which apparently avoids this commitment. In the remainder of the paper I assess Rossian Conceptual Intuitionism as it is, *prima facie*, the more attractive theory. In §2-3 I defend the view against significant objections. While some of these are well-known, e.g., the objection that substantive propositions like the Rossian Principles can't be self-evident, one of the objections I respond

³ See, e.g., Robert Audi, *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character*, (Oxford University Press, 1997); "Self-Evidence", *Philosophical Perspectives* 13 (1999): 205-228; *The Good in the Right: A Theory of Intuition and Intrinsic Value*, (Princeton University Press, 2004); "Intuition, Inference, and Rational Disagreement in Ethics," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 11(5) (2008): 475-492; "Intuitions, Intuitionism, and Moral Judgment," in Jill Graper-Hernandez (ed.) *The New intuitionism*, (Continuum, 2011); Matthew S. Bedke, "Intuitionist Epistemology in Ethics," *Philosophy Compass* 5 (12) (2010): 1069-1083; Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence*, (Oxford University Press, 2002); Philip Stratton-Lake, (eds.) *Ethical Intuitionism: Re-Evaluations*, (Oxford University Press, 2002); "Self-Evidence, Intuition, and Understanding," in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics 11*, (Oxford University Press, 2016); Elizabeth Tropman, "Renewing Moral Intuitionism," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 6 (4 (2009)): 440-463; Pekka Väyrynen, "Some Good and Bad News for Ethical Intuitionism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 58 (232) (2008): 489-511.

⁴ See, e.g., Andrew Cullison, "Moral Perception," *European Journal of Philosophy* 18 (2) (2010): 159-175.

⁵ See William David Ross, *The Right and the Good*, (Oxford University Press, 2002 [1930]), edited by Philip Stratton-Lake.

to – that agents are disposed-to-believe self-evident propositions, but that there is no such disposition for the Rossian Principles – has been hitherto undiscussed. Despite these successes, I end by showing that enthusiasm for Rossian Conceptual Intuitionism (and thus, Rossian Intuitionism more generally) should be muted. Specifically, in §4 I argue that we lack sufficient reason for thinking that the Rossian Principles are self-evident, and that insisting that they are self-evident (perhaps in an attenuated sense) may commit Rossians to radically expanding the scope of self-evidence. I thus reach a conclusion of significance for those interested in Intuitionism, ethical epistemology, and ethical theory more generally: despite a resurgence of interest in the view, Rossian Intuitionists have significant work to do in order to make their theory acceptable.

1. Rossian Conceptual Intuitionism

1.1. Intuitionism

Intuitionism is typically distinguished by its commitment to non-inferentially justified substantive ethical beliefs (I'll focus in this subsection on justification, but similar points hold for knowledge). Although there are competing accounts of non-inferentially justified belief, the view favoured by Intuitionists⁶ (which I'll assume) is that S has a non-inferentially justified belief that p iff S is justified in believing p and is justified independently of (explicitly or implicitly) inferring p from other supporting propositions q, r, etc. Intuitionists claim that non-inferential justification is defeasible, i.e., non-inferential judgments are negatively epistemically dependent upon the absence of defeaters.

There are two general ways of cashing out the claim that there are non-inferentially justified ethical beliefs (I'll say more about substantivity in §2). The first – and most popular – is what

⁶ See, e.g., Audi, "Intuition and Rational Disagreement," 485-6.

I call ‘Grounds Intuitionism’, according to which a non-inferentially justified ethical belief that *p* is epistemically based upon a non-doxastic mental item of some kind, e.g., an intellectual seeming state that *p*.⁷ Such items allegedly serve as non-inferential reasons or evidence for ethical beliefs partly because they stand ‘beyond’ justification from further reasons or evidence, i.e., they are positively epistemically independent sources of justification.⁸

The alternative – what I call ‘Groundless Intuitionism’ – is that some ethical beliefs have no evidential basis yet are epistemically justified. In this way non-inferentially justified beliefs are positively epistemically independent. A proponent⁹ thinks that there are *non-evidential* justifiers of beliefs, i.e., items or properties that are relevant to the justification of beliefs yet don’t themselves constitute epistemic reasons or evidence. An example of this is *reliability*, i.e., Intuitionists might claim that some ethical beliefs are justified simply because they are produced by a reliable process. Note that Grounds Intuitionists can afford an important role to non-evidential justifying properties like reliability, e.g., perhaps intellectual seemings justify beliefs only if they are produced by a reliable process.

1.2 Self-Evidence

Among historical and contemporary Intuitionists, it has been popular to claim that some substantive ethical propositions are self-evident. What is a self-evident proposition? W.D. Ross¹⁰, for instance, thought a self-evident proposition was one whose truth is evident in

⁷ See Elijah Chudnoff, *Intuition*, (Oxford University Press, 2013) and Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism*, Ch. 5 for the view that intuitions are intellectual seeming states, i.e., non-doxastic states with propositional content that are in some way connected with Reason. Audi, “Intuition, Inference, Disagreement,” 477, defends the view that intuitions are non-inferential judgments.

⁸ This view of non-doxastic states has recently come under attack. See, e.g., Susanna Siegel, “The Epistemic Impact of the Etiology of Experience,” *Philosophical Studies* 162 (3) (2013):697-722.

⁹ No-one I know of explicitly endorses this. Daniel Star, “Moral Knowledge, Epistemic Externalism, and Intuitionism,” *Ratio* 21 (3) (2008):329-343, comes close. See also Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism*, Ch. 12.

¹⁰ Ross, *Right and the Good*, 21

itself. This has been sharpened by contemporary Intuitionists who subscribe to the following view: a self-evident proposition, *p*, is a truth such that adequate understanding of *p* entails powerful (but defeasible)¹¹ non-inferential justification for believing it (even if it isn't believed); if *p* is believed wholly on the basis of adequate understanding then it is non-inferentially known.¹²

The standard characterisation of self-evidence prejudices the account in favour of Grounds Intuitionism, e.g., talk of “basing” beliefs on understanding. On this view, adequate understanding is a non-doxastic mental item which is a positively epistemically independent source of non-inferential justification and knowledge. In what follows I'll assume a Grounds account, but nothing turns on this.¹³

What does adequate understanding involve? Audi characterises it as follows:

“Adequate understanding of a proposition is more than simply getting the general sense of a sentence expressing it, as where one can parse the sentence grammatically, indicate through examples, something of what it means, and perhaps correctly translate it into another language one knows well. Adequacy here implies not only seeing what the proposition says but also being able to apply it to (and withhold its application from) an appropriately wide range of cases, and being able to see some of

¹¹ Audi thinks of the justification as *pro tanto* rather than *prima facie*, i.e., it can be overridden, but not eradicated. This is related to his view that there can be knowledge of self-evident propositions despite defeated justification. See Audi, “Self-Evidence,” 219.

¹² See, e.g., Audi, *Good in the Right*, 48-9.

¹³ According to Groundless Intuitionism, when one possesses adequate understanding of *p*, forming a belief that *p* is reliable, even though the belief isn't based upon adequate understanding.

its logical implications, to distinguish it from a certain range of close relatives, and to comprehend its elements and some of their relations.”¹⁴

I’ll say more about adequate understanding shortly. In the meantime, note that adequate understanding allegedly puts agents in a position to know the truth of the relevant proposition, not its epistemic or modal status, e.g., as self-evident or metaphysically necessary. Also, a proposition can be self-evident even though non-inferential reflection on its content is required to know it, i.e. there are cases of *mediate* self-evidence,¹⁵ contrasting with *immediate* self-evidence where reflection is apparently unnecessary. Importantly, Intuitionists have claimed that apparently substantive ethical propositions, e.g., the Rossian Principles, are mediately self-evident.

Rossian Intuitionists follow W.D. Ross in thinking that there is a plurality of fundamental moral principles of *prima facie* duty: principles of *fidelity*, *reparation*, *gratitude*, *beneficence*, *justice* and *self-improvement*, and *non-injury* (Audi adds duties of *liberty* and *respectfulness* to the list). Although Ross himself used the term ‘prima facie duty’, as Stratton-Lake points out, the term is “doubly misleading, for Ross intended it to pick out a feature of actions that is neither a type of duty nor *prima facie* (in the sense of being merely apparent).”¹⁶ Instead, to say that there is a prima facie duty to (or not to) perform act A, is to say that A has a feature which always gives us a moral reason to perform (or refrain from performing) it, i.e., A has a feature that constitutes a *ground* for a moral reason. These are features that we should take into account when deciding what to do. More specifically, Audi¹⁷ suggests that we understand the relevant moral reasons as *overridable* but *ineradicable*, given the presence of

¹⁴ Audi, *Good in the Right*, 49-50.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Audi, “Self-Evidence,” 214.

¹⁶ Stratton-Lake, *Right and the Good*, ‘Introduction’, xxxiii.

¹⁷ Audi, *Good in the Right*, 23-4.

grounds. So, according to the Rossian Promissory Principle, there is always an overridable but ineradicable moral reason to keep promises that one has made. Hereafter I'll use the term 'moral reason' to refer to what Ross meant by 'prima facie duty'.

I'm focusing on Rossian Intuitionism, i.e., the view that Rossian Principles are non-inferentially knowable wholly on the basis of adequate understanding. This is partly due to space constraints, but also because leading contemporary Intuitionists such as Audi and Stratton-Lake endorse it, and because it strikes me as the most plausible extant self-evidence account (as compared with, e.g., a Consequentialist Intuitionism).

The quotation above from Audi is the standard account of adequate understanding offered by contemporary Intuitionists. However, there are different ways of further characterising what adequately understanding a self-evident proposition involves, e.g., concerning the relationship between concept possession and understanding, and what grasping concepts involves. In the next subsection I outline and reject the characterisation of adequate understanding – what I call 'Perceptualism' – which Intuitionists like Audi are attracted to.

1.3 Perceptualism

According to Perceptualism an occurrent adequate understanding of a self-evident proposition, p, crucially involves standing in a non-causal, non-sensory, but perceptual-like relation to the concepts (which on this view are abstract entities, e.g., Universals) figuring in p, e.g., an 'apprehension' or 'acquaintance'.¹⁸ In recent work, Audi suggests that this is his considered view, e.g., he writes approvingly of the "direct apprehension" of concepts.¹⁹

¹⁸ A dispositional (non-occurrent) adequate understanding doesn't require currently standing in this relation but instead involves the 'retention' of the comprehension involved in occurrent understanding. See Audi, "Self-Evidence," 208.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Audi, "Intuitions and Moral Judgment," 172-4.

On one account, sketched by Audi,²⁰ there is a conceptual *containment* relation between the concepts MORAL REASON and, e.g., ACT'S BEING THE KEEPING OF A PROMISE, such that when one adequately understands the Promissory Principle one intellectually apprehends its truth. This containment relation is similar to that allegedly found in paradigm 'analytic' propositions, like *all vixens are female foxes*, e.g., VIXEN *contains* FEMALE and FOX. Note that the containment view is apparently compatible with there being no full analysis of MORAL REASON.²¹ On another – historically more typical – account there is no containment relation between the concepts constitutive of the Rossian Principles – they are examples of synthetic propositions – yet their truth can be intellectually apprehended.

In any case, Perceptualists claim that one can (occurrently) adequately understand a Rossian Principle by reflecting upon cases where the proposition is relevant, e.g., cases of promise-keeping. One sees how the proposition applies in particular scenarios, and thereby sees the truth of the general proposition via this consideration. Typically, the process of recognising the general proposition's truth is expressed in terms of *seeing the general by way of the particular*, i.e., so-called 'Intuitive Induction'.²² The idea is that one gains a better apprehension of concepts and their relations by considering particular cases.

On this view, adequate understanding may itself ground justification (by constituting evidence or reasons), or perhaps apprehension produces intellectual seeming states that

²⁰ Audi, "Intuitions and Rational Disagreement," 478-9.

²¹ See Bedke, "Intuitional Epistemology," 1072 for a more specific worry about the containment view: roughly, he worries that if MORAL REASON contains AN ACT'S BEING THE KEEPING OF A PROMISE then the proposition *an act's being supported by a moral reason is an act of promise-keeping* is conceptually necessary. But this is implausible, since there are multiple conceivable actions that are supported by moral reasons but which have nothing to do with promise-keeping. Rossian Perceptualists can respond by claiming that the concept of MORAL REASON conceptually contains a disjunctive concept, e.g., AN ACT'S BEING THE KEEPING OF A PROMISE, OR, AN ACT'S BEING THE AVOIDANCE OF CAUSING INJURY, etc. This allows that there are a number of conceivable act types that have nothing to do with, e.g., promise-keeping.

²² See, e.g., Audi, *Good in the Right*, 62-3.

themselves justify beliefs. This latter account sits happily with a general epistemology of intellectual seemings according to which they justify in virtue of their presentational phenomenology, i.e., they seem to make subjects aware of abstract truth-makers for propositions.²³ Regarding knowledge, a natural thought is that intellectual apprehension grounds knowledge partially because it genuinely makes subjects aware of abstracta. Reliability may also be a necessary condition.²⁴

I suggested that contemporary Intuitionists endorse, or are attracted to, Perceptualism. Whether or not they are, Intuitionists have reason to find an alternative. This is because Perceptualism requires an extravagant philosophy of mind; namely, a capacity for, or faculty of, non-sensory awareness of abstracta. Adoption of this view jars with the claims that (at least some) contemporary Intuitionists make to the effect that the view only requires modest commitments. For example, Stratton-Lake²⁵ claims that Intuitionism only requires the “ability to understand and think”, while Crisp²⁶ – not a Rossian Intuitionist – writes of a seemingly innocuous “capacity for forming beliefs of a certain kind, with the possibility thereby of acquiring knowledge”.²⁷

To further press the point: contemporary Intuitionists have been keen to stress that the view doesn’t require what Hooker²⁸ calls “Faculty Intuitionism” – a dedicated faculty of moral perception or intuition of the sort that Mackie²⁹ emphatically dismissed. Although Perceptualism doesn’t obviously require a unique faculty of moral intuition (it’s presumably a

²³ See, e.g., Chudnoff, *Intuition*, for this account. See also Terence Cuneo and Russ Shafer-Landau, “The Moral Fixed Points: New Directions for Moral Nonnaturalism”, *Philosophical Studies* 171 (3) (2014):399-443.

²⁴ See, e.g., Huemer, *Intuitionism*, Ch. 5.

²⁵ Stratton-Lake, “Introduction” in Stratton-Lake, P. (ed.), *Re-Evaluations*, 21.

²⁶ Roger Crisp, “Sidgwick and Intuitionism”, in Stratton-Lake (ed.), *Re-Evaluations*, 58.

²⁷ Admittedly, these are both consistent with Perceptualism. My point is that neither suggests anything about perception of abstracta.

²⁸ Brad Hooker, “Intuitions and Moral Theorizing”, in Stratton-Lake (ed.), *Re-Evaluations*, 161.

²⁹ John L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

general capacity operative in all cases of a priori knowledge), it does implicate features associated with Faculty Intuitionism. For example, Perceptualism requires that we have a sort of direct access to non-natural objects, which sounds somewhat like what Gibbard³⁰ disparagingly refers to as the “mysterious psychic powers” posited by Intuitionism. Further, it may also require that the relevant capacity is informationally encapsulated (at least to some degree) so as to survive changes in belief and theory adoption. Allied with the idea that non-sensory awareness makes us aware of a domain of abstracta, the capacity in question apparently possesses some of the features associated with Fodorian Modularity.³¹ These are highly controversial theoretical commitments.

Given this, Rossians have a reason to adopt an alternative account of adequate understanding which doesn’t require perception of a third-realm. In the following subsection I outline such an account, found in the work of Christopher Peacocke.³²

1.4 Conceptualism

According to what I’m calling ‘Conceptualism’³³ adequately understanding p requires possessing the concepts in p and appreciating their mode of combination. Although concepts are on this view abstract, crucially, understanding doesn’t require standing in a perceptual-like relation to abstracta. Before outlining this in detail, it helps to locate Conceptualism

³⁰ Alan Gibbard, “Knowing What To Do, Seeing What To Do,” in Stratton-Lake, P. (ed.), *Re-Evaluations*, 228.

³¹ See Jerry Fodor, *Modularity of Mind*, (MIT Press, 1983).

³² See Christopher Peacocke, *Truly Understood*, (Oxford University Press, 2008) for this general view of concept possession. See also his “Moral Rationalism,” *Journal of Philosophy* 101 (10) (2004):499–526. See also Paul Boghossian, “Analyticity Reconsidered,” *Nous*, 30 (3) (1996): 360-91.

³³ Chudnoff, *Intuition*, Ch.4, labels this view ‘Understanding-Based Reliabilism’. I use ‘Conceptualism’ partly for brevity, but also because it better reflects that *concept possession/conceptually guided reflection* performs the key epistemic work. Despite terminological differences, this subsection is partially indebted to Chudnoff’s discussion as well as that in Joshua C. Thurow, “The Implicit Conception and Intuition Theory of the A Priori with Implications for Experimental Philosophy,” in Albert Casullo and Joshua C. Thurow (eds.) *The A Priori In Philosophy*, (Oxford University Press, 2013). My discussion differs from these in terms of its focus on Rossian Intuitionism and connections it makes between Conceptualism and the Intuitionist literature.

relative to linguistic theories of the a priori.³⁴ On these theories, the objects of a priori knowledge are meanings of sentences. A priori knowledge is thus allegedly demystified because it only requires the mundane resources implicated in our knowledge of meanings. As will become clear, although Conceptualism rejects the idea that the objects of a priori knowledge are meanings (instead, they are facts about the ‘world’³⁵), the view is similar to linguistic theories inasmuch as Conceptualists claim that a priori knowledge deploys only ordinary cognitive resources (those involved in concept possession and reflection).

According to Conceptualism, concepts are individuated by their possession conditions, and are thought to be abstract. Possession conditions are not tied to any particular agent but can be realised in particular agents. For an agent, S, to possess a concept, C, involves S (at least) possessing an *implicit conception* of C, the content of which specifies some set of conditions for something’s falling under C. In individual agents this involves being in possession of informational content – typically a sub-personal representation – that underlies the judgmental and inferential dispositions associated with C regarding particular cases.³⁶

One way of thinking about implicit conceptions is that in possessing a concept, C, the subject has a sort of tacit knowledge of conditions for something’s falling under C. Indeed, Peacocke thinks that “It is very plausible, on grounds having to do with the theory of interpretation and content, that there will be a core of cases in which a thinker will make judgments correctly”³⁷. Despite this, one needn’t always make correct judgments with respect to C in order to possess it. Importantly, one needn’t be able to articulate the content of the implicit conception in order to be credited with possessing the concept, e.g., one’s reflection on a

³⁴ See Chudnoff, *Intuition*, 122-3, and A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, (Gollancz 1946 [1936]).

³⁵ See Boghossian, “Analyticity Reconsidered,” 365.

³⁶ Compare with the account in Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem*, (Blackwell, 1994).

³⁷ Christopher Peacocke, “Implicit Conceptions, Understanding, and Rationality,” in Martin Hahn and Bjorn Ramberg (eds.) *Reflections and Replies: Essays on the Philosophy of Tyler Burge*, (MIT Press, 2003), 137.

particular case might be subject to distorting factors such as the commitment to an erroneous theory, or uncovering the implicit conception in question may be difficult.

A Rossian Conceptualist thinks that the implicit conception which individuates the concept MORAL REASON encodes the Rossian Principles. Individuals who possess that concept are in possession of informational content such that their judgmental and inferential dispositions reflect a tacit commitment to the Principles.

Although Conceptualists can agree that possessing the concepts in *p* is required for adequate understanding of *p*, they may differ regarding the relationship between concept possession and adequate understanding. There are broadly two sorts of view. On a Weak account, adequately understanding *p* *just is* possessing the concepts in *p* and appreciating their mode of combination. On a Strong account, adequate understanding of some propositions, e.g., general principles constitutive of the implicit conception, requires that one partially articulates – makes explicit – the implicit conception for one (or more) of the concepts figuring in *p*, e.g., by reflection upon particular cases.

To illustrate and relate to the case at hand: on Weak, adequately understanding the Rossian Promissory Principle simply involves possessing the concepts MORAL REASON, PROMISE, etc. and appreciating their mode of combination. On Strong, adequately understanding the Rossian Promissory Principle involves making explicit the partial content of the implicit conception underlying the concept MORAL REASON, which on the Rossian view will be tantamount to making explicit one's commitment to the Promissory Principle.

This distinction – between Weak and Strong – is connected to the question of how reflection and adequate understanding are related. Recall that Intuitionists think that the Rossian Principles are mediately self-evident, i.e., only knowable by us on the basis of reflection. On both Weak and Strong there is an important role for reflection: coming to know the Promissory Principle will require that one considers and perhaps forms judgments about hypothetical cases of promise-keeping where the principle applies. However, the two views locate reflection differently vis-à-vis adequate understanding. On Weak, reflection on particular cases is something *over-and-above* understanding, while on Strong this reflection enables one to *attain* an adequate understanding. On both views adequate understanding plus reflection (Weak) or simply adequate understanding (Strong) allegedly puts agents in a position to know the general proposition. This doesn't require perceptual-like awareness. When one comes to believe on the "basis" of adequate understanding one is simply drawing – in some sense – upon the informational content associated with the implicit conception.

Note that on Conceptualism – either Weak or Strong – propositions about hypothetical particular cases could be self-evident, e.g., *if I were to promise to meet a friend and there were no overriding factors present, then I would have an all-things considered moral reason to keep it*. Indeed, some of them might be *immediately* self-evident. This is because judgments about them draw on the informational content associated with the implicit conception, and presumably could constitute knowledge.

How does adequate understanding ground justification and knowledge? Regarding justification, there are several options available. On one view, adequate understanding constitutes evidence for a self-evident proposition. This might be most attractive to proponents of Strong, who think adequate understanding involves articulation of the implicit

conception. Proponents of Weak may claim that understanding plus reflection constitutes evidence for the proposition. However, suppose that one doubts that (even with reflection) understanding a proposition could constitute evidence for it.³⁸ An alternative view is that understanding p or understanding plus reflection on p *causally produces* or *constitutes* an intellectual seeming that p.³⁹ This sits most comfortably with a general view according to which intellectual seemings constitute evidence and justify in virtue of their etiology, e.g., they are produced by a reliable process. For simplicity I'll assume the view that understanding a self-evident proposition itself (or understanding plus reflection) constitutes evidence or reasons for believing it (readers can substitute for their favoured view).

It's plausible that adequate understanding grounds knowledge only if forming beliefs about self-evident propositions on the basis of adequate understanding plus reflection (Weak), or, adequate understanding (Strong) is a reliable process.⁴⁰ How could it be reliable? According to Conceptualism, concepts are individuated in terms of their implicit conceptions. For some concepts – the 'good ones' – there are semantic values (entities of the appropriate kind) such that the principles required by the implicit conception come out as true. For example, the implicit conception associated with the concept MORAL REASON can be partially cashed out in terms of the Rossian Promissory Principle and the semantic value of MORAL REASON and, e.g., PROMISE-KEEPING, is such that the principle *there is always an overridable but ineradicable moral reason to keep promises that one has made* comes out as true.

³⁸ As Philip Stratton-Lake does in his "Intuitionism in Ethics," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014). In Stratton-Lake, "Intuitions", 31-32, he limits this claim to synthetic propositions.

³⁹ Another view is that understanding is a reason for believing a self-evident proposition but doesn't constitute evidence. Perhaps understanding is a case where reasons and evidence come apart.

⁴⁰ As Chudnoff, *Intuition*, 120-1, points out, they needn't think that adequate understanding grounds knowledge *because* it's reliable. Reliability may simply be a necessary condition.

Note, again, that the *possession conditions* that individuate a concept – the implicit conception – are abstract. However – and this is the crucial reason that Conceptualism has a prima facie advantage over Perceptualism – concept possession and adequate understanding don't require non-sensory awareness of a third-realm. Subjects with adequate understanding simply possess/or have articulated an implicit conception that corresponds to the implicit conception constitutive of possession of the relevant concept.⁴¹

Although Conceptualism's advantage is only prima facie, for the remainder of this paper I'll focus on Rossian Conceptualist Intuitionism (RCI) rather than Perceptualism.

2. The Substantivity Objection

Many ethicists think that there are self-evident ethical propositions. However, the majority of those think that only non-substantive propositions are self-evident. Rossian Intuitionists have thought that some substantive ethical propositions – the Rossian Principles – are self-evident.

It is alleged that Rossian Intuitionism is vulnerable to the Substantivity Objection:

P1: The Rossian Principles are substantive propositions.

P2: If a proposition is substantive then it is not self-evident.

C: The Rossian principles are not self-evident.

⁴¹ In Carrie Jenkins, *Grounding Concepts*, (Oxford University Press, 2008), Ch.2, she argues that there is a lacuna in Conceptualism. Specifically, Conceptualists owe us an account of how concepts – moral or otherwise – can encode accurate information about the world in a way that's compatible with their grounding knowledge. After all, our concepts could have been widely inaccurate, even if they aren't. Thus a Conceptualist story about the origin of moral concepts which doesn't make the accuracy of those concepts 'lucky' seems necessary. Jenkins' solution appeals to the empirical "grounding" of concepts. I don't have space to discuss her view, or how it might apply in the moral case. However, note that her view is a form of Conceptualism (perhaps more naturalistically respectable than Peacocke's) and thus should be of interest to Intuitionists.

Concerning P1, contemporary Rossian Intuitionists have thought that the Principles are substantive: e.g., “substantive propositions like Ross’s principles... can be candidates for a priori justification and even (as he claimed) self-evident.”⁴²

Here is a recent expression of P2:

“a priori ethical intuitionism requires that there be self-evident ethical truths. But how is it supposed to be possible to have justification to believe substantive synthetic ethical truths solely on the basis of an adequate understanding of them? A priori intuitionists must explain how this can be so.”⁴³

The Substantivity Objection doesn’t express a radical empiricism which doubts the existence of any self-evident truths. Rather it is a moderate objection, which countenances self-evidence for non-substantive propositions but doubts that substantive propositions are self-evident. Apparently there is some property or properties of substantive propositions that precludes their being self-evident.

Before considering what that property is, here are examples of what many regard as paradigm true non-substantive propositions:

- (a) All wrongful actions are wrongful actions.
- (b) Murder is wrongful killing.

⁴² Audi, “Self-Evidence,” 223.

⁴³ Väyrynen, “Good and Bad News,” 507. See also Matthew S. Bedke, “Ethical Intuitions: What They Are, What They Are Not, and How They Justify”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 43 (3), 25, and Stratton-Lake, “Intuitions”, 31-32.

- (c) If scenarios x and y are identical in all their non-ethical respects then x and y are identical in all ethical respects.⁴⁴

And here are some true (let's assume) substantive propositions (assume a universal reading of each):

- (d) All acts of euthanasia performed towards, and at the uncoerced request of, an adult in order to end terrible and debilitating suffering, are pro tanto right.
- (e) A world, x, containing a very large number of people, N, each with lives barely worth living is worse than a world, y, containing a smaller number of people, N-x, each with a higher quality of life.
- (f) All acts of lying to a known assassin in order to save the life of an innocent individual, where this won't have disastrous consequences, are all-things-considered right.

A plausible Substantivity Objection must do two things: first, provide a satisfactory account of the substantive/non-substantive distinction, and, second, the distinction must be such that it makes the Substantivity Objection sound (without ruling out self-evidence for paradigmatic non-substantive propositions). In this section I first defend RCI against the version presented by proponents of the objection. I then reject further versions of the objection, which are based on alternative accounts of substantivity/non-substantivity.

⁴⁴ Some have pressed doubts about (c). See, e.g., Nicholas Sturgeon, "Doubts about the Supervenience of the Evaluative," in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 4, (Oxford University Press, 2009), 53–92; Gerald K. Harrison, "The Moral Supervenience Thesis is not a Conceptual Truth," *Analysis* Vol 73 (1) (2013): 62–68. I don't have space to consider these, except to say that I doubt that they undermine the claim that (c) is a self-evident non-substantive proposition (some of what I say about different accounts of substantivity reflect this). I'll treat (c) as if it is a paradigm non-substantive and self-evident proposition, but the argument of this section goes through without this assumption.

How do advocates of the Substantivity Objection characterise the distinction between propositions like (a)-(c) and (d)-(f)? Proponents like Väyrynen appear to think of non-substantive propositions as analytic/conceptual truths and substantive propositions as synthetic/non-conceptual truths. Given Conceptualism, a non-substantive (conceptual) truth is thus one that is encoded in the implicit conception for a concept(s) figuring in the proposition. Put another way, a non-substantive true proposition is one which can be known simply by drawing on the informational content associated with possession of the concepts figuring in it. A substantive (non-conceptual) true proposition, on the other hand, is one which is not encoded in the implicit conception for a concept(s) figuring in the proposition, and one which requires engaging in thought over-and-above drawing on the informational content of the relevant concept(s). Plausibly, this distinguishes propositions (a)-(c) from (d)-(f).

Given this characterisation P2 also seems plausible: if knowing a substantive proposition *p* requires engaging in thought that draws on more than the informational content of the relevant concepts in *p* then conclusions reached about *p* aren't wholly based upon adequate understanding. Hence, substantive propositions cannot be self-evident. Indeed, proponents of the Substantivity Objection can be thought of as more-or-less identifying the non-substantive/substantive distinction with the self-evidence/non-self-evidence distinction, i.e., P2 is trivially true.

However, it is hopefully clear that, given this way of characterising substantivity/non-substantivity, RCIs deny P1 of the Substantivity Objection, i.e., they think that the Rossian Principles are non-substantive. This is because they believe that the implicit conception which individuates the concept MORAL REASON encodes the Principles.

This might, however, seem odd. As was noted, Rossians themselves have claimed that the Rossian Principles are substantive. Indeed, Intuitionism is typically defined in terms of the commitment to non-inferential substantive ethical knowledge. However, although RCI is somewhat revisionary, this needn't be a problem. So long as the Principles are encoded in the implicit conception for MORAL REASON then their being non-substantive is just a feature of their view (given the current characterisation of substantivity/non-substantivity).

Nevertheless, it might seem strange that the Rossian Principles are classed alongside propositions (a)-(c) rather than (d)-(f). It's therefore worth noting that, even given the current way of characterising the distinction, there remain differences between the Principles and (a)-(c).

First, although RCIs think that the Rossian Principles are non-substantive, they think that reflection is needed in order to know the Principles, and that coming to know them may be difficult. This contrasts with (a)-(b) and, to a lesser extent, with (c). Second, RCIs think that coming to know the Principles requires seriously considering and making genuine ethical judgments or forming intuitions about scenarios, i.e., ascribing ethical properties to actions, events, etc. This sort of thinking contrasts with, e.g., simply making stipulations about the ethical features of some action or event, or engaging in what Audi calls 'internal inferences', etc.⁴⁵ It is far from obvious that one needs to make genuine ethical judgments in order to know (a)-(b). Something similar might be said about (c). For example, in order to know (c) one might stipulate for a given scenario that it instantiates an ethical property, M, and then

⁴⁵ See Audi, "Self-Evidence," 218.

consider whether this property could change absent a change in the non-ethical properties.⁴⁶ Thus, although the Principles are non-substantive, there are still important differences between them and propositions (a)-(c). This should hopefully allay the concerns raised about denying P1.⁴⁷

Thus, RCIs can resist this version of the Substantivity Objection. Of course, fully responding depends upon showing that the Principles really are encoded in the implicit conception for MORAL REASON. I turn to that issue in §4.

Perhaps, though, there are other ways of characterising substantivity/non-substantivity which ground an alternative (sound) version of the objection. In the remainder of this section I briefly consider two common approaches to characterising the distinction – first in terms of content, and then in terms of disagreement/disbelief – and argue that these also fail to ground a sound Substantivity Objection.

Some might characterise the substantive/non-substantive distinction in terms of content. A well-known version that we ought to reject is that substantive propositions are *made true by the world*, while non-substantive propositions are merely *true in virtue of meaning*. First, we might agree that this distinction – deployed by linguistic theories of the a priori – was successfully debunked by Quine, yet arguably there is still a sensible substantive/non-substantive distinction to be made.⁴⁸ Second, this distinction doesn't obviously ground a

⁴⁶ But perhaps serious ethical judgments are required to know (c). If that's right, then that would show that they are in some respects similar to the Rossian Principles.

⁴⁷ Appealing to the property of *having to reflect on a proposition to know it*, or the property of *having to make genuine ethical judgments about a proposition to know it*, could potentially ground alternative conceptions of substantivity/non-substantivity, independently or in conjunction with Väyrynen's account. However, none of these accounts obviously grounds a sound Substantivity Objection: RCIs could reasonably deny P2.

⁴⁸ This is in line with what proponents of 'epistemic' accounts of analyticity – such as Boghossian – say about the truth-makers for analytic sentences.

plausible version of P2, i.e., it's unobvious why a proposition's being made true by the world precludes knowledge of it on the basis of understanding. Indeed, to endorse P2 on those grounds would involve a rejection of Conceptualism as a theory of a priori knowledge of the world (including non-substantive propositions). Thus it proves too much.

Another content proposal worth mentioning is the distinction that some ethicists posit between substantive and formal principles of morality, where substantive principles have a *distinctively moral content*, while formal (non-substantive) principles only specify a *method or way of deliberating* about practical issues from which substantive principles may be derived.⁴⁹ Others characterise formal (non-substantive) principles as those *which don't entail any ethical conclusions either themselves or in conjunction with purely non-ethical premises*.⁵⁰ Neither of these ground a plausible Substantivity Objection. Firstly, propositions (a) and (b) counterintuitively come out as substantive on both conceptions. Second, although both accounts render P1 true, P2 looks dubious since propositions (a) and (b) are very good candidates for self-evidence. More generally, it would be strange if a proposition having moral content debarred it from self-evidence.⁵¹

Instead of content, some philosophers cash out the substantive/non-substantive distinction in terms of disagreement. Perhaps a substantive proposition is one for which there is or can be disagreement among those who possess understanding, while no disagreement occurs or could occur for non-substantive propositions.⁵² There is clearly disagreement concerning (d)-

⁴⁹ Christine Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), 47.

⁵⁰ Nelson T. Potter and Mark Timmons, "Introduction," in their (eds.) (1985), *Morality and Universality*, D. Reidel Publishing Company.

⁵¹ Other examples of content accounts, e.g., Frege-Analyticity, fail to ground a sound Substantivity Objection.

⁵² Compare "if a proposition is such that just to count to as a proper participant in the discourse in question, just to count as someone who understands what is going on, you must accept the proposition or you reject it, then it is non-substantive." Philip Pettit, "Realism," in Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *A Companion To Epistemology*, (Blackwell, 2003), 423.

(f). Further, there is disagreement concerning the Rossian Principles, e.g., Moral Particularists and Act Consequentialists reject them, so P1 of the Substantivity Objection comes out as true. Regarding P2, perhaps disagreement serves as a defeater for justification and (crucially) knowledge. Given that beliefs formed on the basis of adequate understanding of self-evident propositions are supposed to constitute knowledge, this undermines the claim that substantive propositions are self-evident.

In response, it seems doubtful that this delivers a plausible substantive/non-substantive distinction because there is or could be disagreement on (a)-(c). Williamson⁵³ presents plausible arguments to the effect that individuals can comprehendingly deny apparently luminous propositions like *all vixens are female foxes*. We might regard this as reason to think that there is, or could be, disagreement about (a)-(c).⁵⁴ Hence, characterising substantivity/non-substantivity in terms of disagreement renders too many propositions substantive (given P2, this would debar too many propositions – perhaps all of them – from self-evidence).⁵⁵ Independently of this, it's doubtful that this characterisation of substantivity/non-substantivity grounds a plausible P2. Even if disagreement (actual or possible) serves as a defeater for justification (and note that it involves adopting an epistemology of disagreement that Intuitionists might be minded to reject) Intuitionists like Audi think that knowledge detaches from justification⁵⁶, such that there can be knowledge of self-evident propositions despite defeated justification. Thus, substantive propositions could be self-evident.

⁵³ Timothy Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, (Blackwell, 2007), Ch. 4.

⁵⁴ See Sturgeon, "Doubts", 53-92, regarding (c).

⁵⁵ A similar problem befalls attempts to distinguish substantive propositions on the basis of Sidgwick's *Consensus Condition*, i.e., we should suspend belief on propositions for which there is lacking consensus among reflective epistemic peers. See Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, (Hackett, (1981 [1907])), and Roger Crisp, "Reasonable Disagreement: Sidgwick's Principle and Audi's Intuitionism," in Graper Hernandez (ed.), *New Intuitionism*.

⁵⁶ Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, (Routledge, 2003), 217, thinks that some beliefs of savants are examples. See also footnote 11.

It might still be thought that substantivity/non-substantivity has something to do with disagreement or belief. Here, then, is one last suggested feature of true non-substantive propositions:

NS: a denial of p – or a failure to manifest belief that p – by an agent, S, who has entertained p, itself constitutes prima facie evidence that S fails to understand p.

NS allows that failure to believe non-substantive propositions need not constitute conclusive evidence of lack of understanding. The evidence can be overridden and cancelled. The notion of *evidence* is tied to an agent, U, who adequately possesses the concepts in p and appreciates their mode of combination, i.e., a denial of a non-substantive proposition, p, by an agent, S, who has entertained p will constitute evidence for a U that S fails to grasp the concepts or their mode of combination in p. Finally, denial of p *itself* is constitutive of such evidence. This contrasts with the denial of perceptually obvious propositions, e.g., *the tennis ball is round*, which seems to require more, e.g., perceptual evidence that the tennis ball *is* round, for denial to constitute evidence of lack of understanding.⁵⁷

If NS is correct, then the following characterises true substantive propositions:

SUB: a denial of p – or a failure to manifest belief that p – by an agent, S, who has entertained p, does not itself constitute prima facie evidence that S fails to understand p.

⁵⁷ NS may appear implausible in cases where (i) U and S are the same subject, and, (ii) S believes a theory entailing the rejection of a non-substantive proposition, p, prior to considering it. In such a case, it's difficult to see how denial of p itself constitutes *any* evidence to S that they fail to understand p. However, perhaps there *is* evidence but it's immediately overridden for the subject given their awareness of their background theory.

Plausibly, possessing the concepts in (d)-(f) and appreciating their mode of combination is compatible with withholding belief or disbelieving them without this constituting evidence of lack of understanding. The same may hold for Rossian Principles. Thus P1 is true.

Does SUB ground a plausible P2, i.e., substantive propositions cannot be self-evident? In order to do so, something like the following assumption is required: disagreement with an interlocutor about a proposition, *p*, who appears to be an epistemic peer of yours with respect to *p*, constitutes a defeater for knowledge that *p*. The justification for P2 then proceeds as follows: NS claims that denial of a non-substantive proposition, *p*, by an *S* constitutes prima facie evidence that *S* lacks understanding of *p*. Possessing prima facie evidence that your interlocutor lacks understanding of *p* could prevent the disagreement from defeating one's knowledge that *p*. Since only non-substantive propositions possess that feature, only non-substantive propositions are self-evident.

There are (at least) two problems with this final proposal. Firstly, it's unclear that NS/SUB delivers a plausible substantive/non-substantive distinction. For example, for (c) it's plausible that an agent, *U*, who grasps the concepts and appreciates their mode of combination, mightn't gain evidence that someone who denies (c) lacks understanding. Perhaps *U* needs to reflect on the proposition in order to get this evidence. Thus, (c) would be substantive. Given, P2, it couldn't be self-evident. More generally, a Substantivity Objection grounded in NS/SUB may debar too many propositions from self-evidence. For example, if one discovers that one's interlocutor does comprehendingly deny a non-substantive proposition (perhaps due to commitment to a coherent philosophical theory that doesn't undermine understanding) then this would (on the current proposal) undermine the prima facie evidence that they fail to

understand the proposition, and hence the disagreement *would* constitute a defeater for knowledge. Thus, this proposal also fails.⁵⁸

I doubt that there are other plausible ways of distinguishing substantive/non-substantive propositions that ground a sound Substantivity Objection. In the absence of such an account, I conclude that RCIs can resist the objection (although recall that we still require positive reason to think that the Rossian Principles are encoded in the implicit conception for MORAL REASON – I address this in §4).

3. Three Further Objections

I now consider three putative conditions on self-evidence⁵⁹ that have appeared in the Intuitionist literature, and which could be used to object to the self-evidence of the Rossian Principles. I argue that they fail. Discussion of these is important in its own right, but will also be relevant to the arguments in §4.

The first condition is that only propositions with *Clarity* are self-evident,⁶⁰ i.e., not only must sentences expressing a self-evident proposition be unambiguous, but concepts in *p* must be such that the proposition isn't vague or otherwise semantically fuzzy. Furthermore, the Rossian Principles are insufficiently clear, e.g., Ross thought it was hard to grasp the concept of PROMISE. Indeed, there seem to be significant problem cases, e.g., is a 'promise' made under duress, or in a depressed state, genuine? What counts as 'duress'? Perhaps it's

⁵⁸ Things don't improve if we amend NS and SUB by tying 'evidence' to that of an agent, U who either has attained adequate understanding (Strong) or has adequate understanding and has undergone further reflection (Weak), and further stipulate that denial of *p* by an *S* provides U with evidence that *S* fails to adequately understand *p*.

⁵⁹ These could be understood as further 'substantivity' objections if one takes the relevant features to be constitutive of the substantive/non-substantive distinction.

⁶⁰ See Sidgwick, *Methods*, 215.

impossible to give a strict account of promising that clearly deals with all such cases. Similar points could be made for other Rossian Principles, e.g., non-injury.

This objection fails because most ethical terms are vague in the sense that there are borderline cases where matters are indeterminate. Note also that the problem isn't just with ethical terms: non-ethical candidates for self-evidence also seem to involve vague terms, e.g., *nothing can be red and green all over* (the colour terms have borderline cases). So Clarity isn't a good condition on self-evidence generally.

The second condition is that only explanatorily *Basic* propositions are self-evident⁶¹, i.e., no further propositions can explain their truth when appealed to (note that Audi refers to the self-evident as the 'base'⁶² of the a priori). Further, the Rossian Principles are not explanatorily basic: the truth of the Principles must be explained by or be derivable from a deeper principle, e.g., Kant's Humanity Formula. Otherwise they are an 'unconnected heap' of duties.⁶³

If Basicity were a condition on self-evidence, then one might deny that the Rossian Principles are explanatorily non-basic.⁶⁴ However, there is a compelling reason for rejecting the Basicity condition. Consider an excellent candidate for self-evidence: *all vixens are vixens*. If we apply the Basicity condition then this proposition isn't self-evident, since its truth is partially explained by (or is derivable from) the logical truth that *all Fs are Fs*. One might, however, worry that the connection between the logical truth and the self-evident proposition is too tenuous. Here, then, is another example: on some models the truth of the

⁶¹ See Ross, *Right and the Good*, 30.

⁶² See Audi, "Self-Evidence," 221.

⁶³ See David McNaughton, "An Unconnected Heap of Duties?" in Stratton-Lake, P. (eds.), *Re-Evaluations*.

⁶⁴ According to Audi's Kantian Intuitionism, neither the Humanity Formula nor the Rossian Principles are more basic than the other. They are mutually supporting. See Audi, *Good in the Right*, 111.

Law of Excluded Middle ($\neg P \vee P$) is explained by (and is derivable from) the Law of Non-Contradiction ($\neg(P \wedge \neg P)$) and De Morgan's Contraction principle ($\neg(P \wedge Q) \leftrightarrow \neg P \vee \neg Q$). Given the Basicity condition, the Law of Excluded Middle would – counterintuitively – fail to be self-evident. Against this, one might object that these logical theorems are mutually supporting and that none is more basic than the others. If so, then consider the proposition $2+2=4$. Its truth seems to be explainable by (or is derivable from) the Peano axioms (but not vice versa). Yet $2+2=4$ seems self-evident.

The final condition is that there must be a *Disposition-To-Believe* self-evident propositions, given adequate understanding.⁶⁵ However, there are some agents for whom there is adequate understanding of Rossian Principles but no disposition. Hence the Principles are not self-evident.

What is a disposition-to-believe? There are several theories one could develop,⁶⁶ but for now I'll assume a simple view according to which S (who adequately understands p) has a disposition-to-believe p iff S would come to believe that p were they to consider and reflect (perhaps extensively) upon p, drawing on their adequate understanding.

The Disposition condition may appear plausible because one thinks that the informational content of a concept couldn't be the way required, e.g., encoding the Rossian Principles, if there wasn't a disposition-to-believe the Principles. Another possibility is that a disposition-to-believe given understanding (as opposed to a disposition-to-disbelieve) is required for forming judgments on the basis of understanding to be a reliable process (which may be a condition on knowledge), i.e., if there were no disposition then the process of forming

⁶⁵ See Audi, "Intuition and Rational Disagreement," 488.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Michael Fara, "Dispositions and Habituals," *Noûs* 39 (1) (2005): 43-82.

judgments on the basis of understanding wouldn't be productive of a sufficiently high ratio of true:false beliefs for reliability.

Regarding the claim that there are some with adequate understanding who lack a disposition-to-believe the Rossian Principles, the thought is that some philosophical ethicists – Moral Particularists, Act Consequentialists – clearly possess adequate understanding of the Principles but lack a disposition-to-believe, i.e., they don't believe them upon considering them, even given prolonged reflection. This threatens the self-evidence of the Rossian Principles.

In response RCIs could deny that a disposition-to-believe a self-evident proposition is entailed by adequate understanding. On Weak an adequate understanding simply involves possessing a correct implicit conception for MORAL REASON. Perhaps uncovering its content is difficult. This might explain why there are many individuals who lack belief in the principles despite having adequate understanding. On Strong, it's less plausible that adequate understanding doesn't entail a disposition, given that adequate understanding requires that one has articulated the content of the implicit conception underlying MORAL REASON.

However, a problem with this general approach is that, without a disposition-to-believe the principles given understanding, it becomes harder to see how forming beliefs in this way could be reliable. This is important if reliability is a necessary condition on knowledge (even if reliability isn't what explains knowledge of self-evident propositions).

That brings us to another possibility: grant that all individuals who lack a disposition-to-believe the Principles lack adequate understanding.

If one endorses Weak then adequate understanding just consists in possession of the correct implicit conception. Recall that this needn't require that one be completely correct in one's application of the concept, although it does require correctness in a core range of cases. Given this, however, it's hard to deny that, e.g., Moral Particularists, lack adequate understanding. On Strong, however, it's more plausible that anti-Rossians lack an adequate understanding, since it may be doubted that they have articulated the content of the implicit conception. Admittedly this depends upon what precisely is involved when one articulates one's implicit conception, e.g., if it involved the relevant Rossian Principle *intellectually seeming true* to the agent then denying that anti-Rossians have adequate understanding seems plausible.⁶⁷

If that's unattractive there is another plausible response open to both Weak and Strong views: deny that anti-Rossians lack a disposition. This involves claiming that such individuals have a disposition – because they have adequate understanding – but this is masked by their commitment to an anti-Rossian theory (cf. a vase in bubble-wrap retains a disposition to shatter-if-dropped – the bubble-wrap is a *mask*). Note that this involves jettisoning the simple view of dispositions that I've been assuming.

It might be replied that there could be non-theoretical cases of denial of the Rossian Principles. However, RCIs can plausibly claim that in these cases there must be *some* distorting factor that masks the disposition. Admittedly, this last response is indicative of the difficulty of grounding conclusions on the basis of dispositional claims.

⁶⁷ Adopting this approach doesn't commit us to claiming that anti-Rossians don't possess the concepts.

A more troubling objection is that masking makes the process of forming beliefs on the basis of conceptual reflection unreliable, since individuals can possess adequate understanding but it fail to be the case that this tends to result in belief in the Rossian Principle, and may often lead to disbelief. In response, RCIs should claim that anti-Rossians do not engage in the same process as Rossians when they reflect on the principles, i.e., they do not simply draw on the informational content of their conceptual grasp, but also draw on content from their theory. This doesn't undermine the claims that understanding is linked with true belief and that anti-Rossians possess a disposition-to-believe the principles.

This suggestion strikes me as plausible on independent grounds. If RCIs are right, then anti-Rossians who possess understanding are unlikely to be making inexplicable errors by denying the Rossian Principles. A natural explanation is that they are allowing their judgment to be coloured by theoretical commitments. In any case, given the difficulty of establishing dispositional claims, RCIs simply face an impasse with their opponents. In lieu of further argument, the Disposition-to-Believe objection is unsuccessful.

4. Are the Rossian Principles Self-Evident?

Although there are plausible ways in which RCIs can resist these objections, we need to be provided with sufficient reason for thinking that the Rossian Principles *are* self-evident, i.e., encoded in the implicit conception for MORAL REASON. It is to this issue that I now turn.

One might, however, think that there isn't a question about showing that a proposition is self-evident. Self-evidence should be manifest. Someone might say: 'if the self-evidence of a proposition is not 'worn on its surface' then self-evidence can't do epistemological work.

Compare with the notion of being *provable from axioms*. That isn't worn on the surface, and for that reason doesn't do epistemological work.'⁶⁸

The first thing to say in response is that Intuitionists like Audi deny that the self-evidence of a proposition is manifest to those with adequate understanding. Only their truth is (allegedly) manifest. This seems even more plausible in cases of mediate self-evidence (such as the Rossian Principles) where reflection is required to see the proposition's truth.

Second, self-evidence can surely still do epistemological work even if that property isn't worn on the surface. Rather than focusing on the case of being provable from axioms, a more appropriate comparison can be found by considering debates in philosophy of perception about the admissible contents of experience. Some philosophers think that perception represents natural kind properties such as pine trees.⁶⁹ Others deny this. But both parties tend to agree that whether or not these properties figure in the content of experience isn't worn on the surface. That's partly why the issue is controversial. Yet whether or not perception represents kind properties would make an epistemological difference vis-à-vis the sort of beliefs perception justifies.

Given the theory of self-evidence we are working with – Conceptualism – the question about the self-evidence of the Rossian Principles is similar to this. What we are trying to do is determine what the content is of the implicit conception constitutive of possessing the concept MORAL REASON. The answer to that question will plausibly make an epistemic difference even if it's unobvious.

⁶⁸ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this.

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Susanna Siegel, *The Contents of Experience*, (Oxford University Press, 2010).

In what follows, I argue that we lack sufficient reason to believe that the Rossian Principles are self-evident.⁷⁰ Specifically, I argue that there is a paucity of data, and that the data we do possess could be adequately explained in alternative ways.

How might one go about arguing that the Rossian Principles are self-evident? One way which seems foreclosed is to appeal to agreement on the truth of the principles (what Audi calls “agreement on reasons”⁷¹). As has already been pointed out, there is quite extensive disagreement about the principles among philosophical ethicists. We also lack adequate data from ordinary argents – read: non-philosophers – regarding agreement on reasons. Similar things could be said about the claim that the Rossian Principles seem true to those with adequate understanding. It is highly doubtful that this is a datum.⁷² Further, given the difficulty of establishing dispositional claims (noted in the previous section), it’s doubtful that RCIs can appeal to there being a disposition-to-believe the Principles to support the claim that they are self-evident.

In recent writings Audi makes what he calls a “phenomenological” claim: when subjects entertain (presumably prior to engaging in reflection) the concept MORAL REASON, *paradigms* of moral reasons come to mind. Audi thinks that the act-types that Rossian principles pick out, e.g., promise-keeping, non-injury etc., are such paradigms. He also suggests that in order to (non-formally) explain to someone the concept of MORAL REASON, one must appeal to such paradigms.

But this doesn’t provide us with sufficient reason for thinking that the Rossian Principles are self-evident. This datum is compatible with a host of underlying general principles linking

⁷⁰ ‘We’ refers to those who are willing to countenance self-evident propositions.

⁷¹ Audi, “Intuition and Rational Disagreement,” 480.

⁷² For agreement, see *Ibid*, 478.

promise-keeping and moral reasons, e.g., *there is usually a moral reason to keep promises one has made*. Indeed, Moral Particularists can agree with all that Audi says about paradigms. Just because an act-type is a paradigm of the sort of thing that grounds moral reasons doesn't get us close to the claim that the Rossian Principles are self-evident.

Audi doesn't think, however, that the phenomenological data is adequate by itself. It should be taken in conjunction with evidence regarding what he calls "agreement in reasons".⁷³ This has two components: first, although there is disagreement *on* reasons "it is at best difficult to find anyone who, in everyday practice, does not accept the act of promising to do a deed as providing a reason to do that deed."⁷⁴ I understand Audi to mean that, in making moral assessments of particular cases, people seem to regard, e.g., the fact that I have promised to do something, as constituting a moral reason for doing it. No further justification is required. Second, according to Audi, if someone were to ask for justification as to why promise-keeping constituted a moral reason in this case, it would require an explanation, e.g., we might inquire whether the person was committed to a moral theory calling for the rejection of promise-keeping as a moral reason.

Putting this together, the RCI proposal is this: that the Rossian Principles are self-evident, i.e., are at least partially constitutive of the content of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON, best explains the phenomenological evidence and agreement in reasons.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid, 480

⁷⁴ Ibid, 480-1

⁷⁵ Cf. Peacocke, *Truly Understood*, 122: "The attribution of a content to an implicit conception is fundamentally answerable to its role in explaining the thinker's ordinary applications of the concept in question. Classifications of examples by the thinker provide the primary data to which the correctness of an attribution of a particular content to his underlying implicit conception is answerable."

Is the RCI's positive argument successful? One initial problem is that we lack adequate data concerning whether ordinary agents – non-philosophers – really do judge in this sort of way. This concerns two things: firstly, concerning problem cases where the Rossian view would appear to be threatened, e.g., a case where one promises to return a borrowed item but discovers that the item is stolen – is there an overridable but ineradicable reason to keep the promise, or is the reason cancelled?⁷⁶ Secondly, and relatedly, for all Audi says, it's unclear whether the agreement in reasons involves agents deploying the concept MORAL REASON or whether they sometimes have something weaker in mind, e.g., an overridable and cancellable reason. More troublingly, the only adequate data concerning judgments about cases that we do have is of those working in philosophical ethics, and among them there is not adequate agreement *in* reasons, e.g., it's easy to find people who deny that the act of promising to do something grounds an overridable but ineradicable reason to do it. Further, when it comes to considering problem cases for the Rossian, people's seemingly intuitive reactions can diverge, i.e., they aren't obviously cases of 'theoretical' disagreement. In sum: whether and to what extent there is agreement in reasons, and what it really amounts to, is generally unclear.

Thus the data that might be used to support Rossian self-evidence isn't particularly robust. In any case, I now suggest that, given the data that we do possess – alleged phenomenological evidence, supposed agreement in reasons among ordinary agents, and disagreement in and on reasons among ethicists – there are alternative hypotheses about the content of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON that are at least as good at explaining the data as RCI.

⁷⁶ When I present such cases to students they tend to be unsure.

Recall, RCIs think that the Rossian Principles (at least partially) constitute the content of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON, e.g., *there is always an overridable but ineradicable moral reason to keep promises that one has made.*

An alternative hypothesis is that, encoded in the content of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON, are Hedged Principles⁷⁷ whose content is of the following sort: *An act's being one of promise-keeping is always an ineradicable but overridable reason to do it, provided that it instantiates the designated normative basis for this fact's status as a reason to keep promises* (mutatis mutandis for other act-types on the Rossian list). These Principles are hedged relative to the “designated normative basis”. Roughly, the designated normative basis is the feature in virtue of which a fact, e.g., an act's being one of promise-keeping, is a reason for performing an action, and which thereby explains why it is a reason in a given instance. It is a feature which makes the relevant fact a reason, but needn't itself be a reason, and needn't be conceptually or metaphysically distinct from the fact. For example, the designated normative basis in the case of promise-keeping could be that the action *promotes welfare*, or simply that the action *is an instance of promise-keeping* (it is a moral reason in virtue of its intrinsic features).

Crucially, on this hypothesis the content of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON doesn't specify what the designated normative basis is. Because of this, possessing the concept MORAL REASON doesn't itself entail ethical conclusions about particular cases. Instead, it only does so in conjunction with an ethical theory or what we might call a ‘substantive conception’, e.g., a Kantian view about respect for persons.

⁷⁷ See Pekka Väyrynen, “A Theory of Hedged Moral Principles”, *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 4, ed. R. Shafer-Landau, (Oxford University Press, 2009), 91-132

This brings us to an additional part of the Hedged Principles hypothesis: the content of the substantive conception for many (though not necessarily all) ordinary moral agents is that the designated normative basis for, e.g., promise-keeping's status as a moral reason, is simply that a promise has been made (note that possessing a substantive conception doesn't require the capacity to articulate its content). Why might this be the case? It is plausible that when we are first exposed to cases of promise-keeping, e.g., by having paradigm cases explained to us and being told 'keep your promises', agents internalise a view according to which promises have a status as a moral reason simply *in virtue of being promises*. This substantive conception is, however, susceptible to revision on the basis of further reflection and experience. It is compatible with coming to a different view about the designated normative basis, e.g., a Kantian or Consequentialist one. Some of these might be consistent with the truth of the Rossian Principles, but others will not. Indeed, on the Hedged view the content of the implicit conception is compatible with there being acts of promise-keeping which we lack a moral reason to do, as Particularists claim.

Importantly, the Hedged Principles hypothesis can easily explain why paradigms of, e.g., promise-keeping, come to mind when we think of moral reasons, and why we might appeal to these in explaining the concept of MORAL REASON. This will be because of the content of the implicit conception, but also because of the typical substantive conception. Due to the hypothesis about the substantive conception it can also explain the limited data regarding agreement in reasons, i.e., why people in everyday practice might think that promising grounds a reason to keep it, and why they might puzzle about someone who denied this in a particular case. Most importantly, it coheres very well with the quite extensive disagreement on and in reasons found in philosophical ethics.

A second alternative hypothesis – what we might call the ‘Paradigms’ view – is that, encoded in the content of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON, is a principle which specifies non-exhaustive sufficient conditions, f, g, h, etc., for cases of (e.g.) promise-keeping to ground an overridable but ineradicable moral reason (mutatis mutandis for other act-types on the Rossian list, e.g., non-injury). How extensive the list is, and what the content precisely is, may be difficult to specify (one suggestion is that the content identifies relevant features of ‘paradigmatic’ or ‘prototypical’ cases).⁷⁸ But that’s consistent with (i) the content being articulable, and (crucially), (ii) it underlying our judgments concerning particular cases of promise-keeping.

Although I’ve not fully specified this proposal it’s hopefully clear that a version of it could explain the phenomenological data that paradigms of, e.g., promise-keeping, come to mind when we think of moral reasons, and why we might appeal to such act-types to explain the concept of MORAL REASON. It could also explain the limited data regarding agreement in reasons. Crucially, it could explain the disagreement in reasons that we observe in philosophical ethics, and may observe among non-philosophers. For example, it could potentially explain why agents in possession of the concept MORAL REASON might be hesitant about Rossian problem cases: these are cases which don’t clearly meet the non-exhaustive list of sufficient conditions for promise-keeping to ground a moral reason.

To constitute serious competitors to RCI, more would need to be said. It’s not my purpose here to defend a specific account, but simply to highlight that proposals along these lines are live alternatives. Further, I expect that the proposals would (with adequate detail) at least

⁷⁸ For related discussion see Tropman, ‘Renewing Intuitionism’, 440- 463. The Paradigms proposal is in some (limited) respects similar to what Lance and Little say about a grasp of the features of “privileged conditions”. See Mark Lance and Margaret Little “Particularism and Anti-Theory.” In D. Copp (ed.), *Essays in Ethics*. (Oxford University Press, 2005).

compare favourably – vis-à-vis the standard theoretical virtues of explanatory power, simplicity, unity etc. – to RCI. Against this, it might be thought that RCI is a simpler view, e.g., unlike the Hedged account, RCI doesn't require a hypothesis about substantive conceptions. However, RCIs require additional hypotheses in order to explain disagreement in and on reasons, namely, that anti-Rossians have erroneous ethical theories or substantive conceptions that distort their judgment. Furthermore, disagreement in and on reasons (among agents with understanding) coheres better with the alternatives compared with RCI.

Both alternative proposals are consistent with the Rossian Principles being true. However, they're incompatible with their being the content of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON. Also, note that a similar sort of line of thought couldn't obviously be developed for the mathematical propositions that Intuitionists have been keen to analogise with the moral case, i.e., there aren't similar reasons for thinking that the implicit conception for the concept NUMBER is such that we have grounds for doubting that $2+2=4$ is self-evident.

Thus, given the lack of adequate data, and given the clear potential for developing plausible alternative hypotheses, we currently lack sufficient reason to believe that the Rossian Principles are self-evident. Further, if one of the alternative hypotheses is fully developed, then this could undermine the claim that the Rossian Principles are self-evident.

Resolution of this matter awaits, inter alia, adequate empirical data on agreement in reasons. In the meantime it may be argued that even if the Rossian Principles aren't strictly-speaking self-evident, this doesn't preclude adequate understanding-based non-inferential knowledge of them. Perhaps the principles can be non-inferentially known on the "basis" of adequate-understanding in a weakened sense, involving reflection over-and-above the articulation of

the implicit conception underlying MORAL REASON, i.e., they are ‘self-evident’ in an attenuated sense.

However, Rossians who make this move need to revisit their response to the initial version of the Substantivity Objection, i.e., how a proposition can be self-evident if knowledge of it requires more than drawing on/articulating the content of the implicit conception for the relevant concepts.

On a Hedged account, this would require altering what we mean by ‘adequate understanding’ so that this comes to refer to something much more expansive than concept possession, e.g., it could include things like moral theorising, non-conceptually guided reflection, etc.⁷⁹ However, this arguably involves jettisoning Conceptualism and stretches the meaning of self-evidence beyond plausibility.

On a Paradigms view things are perhaps more promising for RCIs. On this view, it might be thought that subjects can know the Rossian Principles by engaging in reflection which, although not merely drawing on the content of the implicit conception, is in a looser sense *guided* by the content of implicit conception for MORAL REASON. This process could be thought of as a *deepening* of understanding of the concept. The beliefs produced by such reflection would be – in an important sense – ‘based’ upon adequate understanding, and could still be produced by a reliable process (and thus could be candidates for knowledge). They would thereby qualify as attenuated (and, on the initial way of understanding the distinction, *substantive*) self-evident propositions.

⁷⁹ Cf. Chapter 5 of Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge, *Principled Ethics: Generalism as a Regulative Ideal*, (Oxford University Press, 2006), and Simon Kirchin, “What is Intuitionism and Why be an Intuitionist?,” *Social Theory and Practice* 31 (4) (2005):581-606.

To support this move, Rossians could point out that, although the Rossian Principles aren't encoded in the implicit conception for MORAL REASON, content that's relevant to them *is*, i.e., content specifying sufficient conditions for cases of (e.g.) promise-keeping to ground moral reasons. They may go further by claiming that we can think of the implicit conception underlying MORAL REASON as being in some sense *incomplete*, and that the Rossian Principles constitute the correct 'completion' of it. To help understand this, consider the role that a posteriori investigation allegedly fills with respect to the concept WATER. It's perhaps plausible that the implicit conception for WATER is something like *whatever chemical compound that composes (or whatever entity that best explains the surface features of) the stuff actually found in our lakes and rivers is necessarily water*⁸⁰, and that we can 'complete' this by empirical investigation into the chemical composition of the watery stuff. Although this may help in understanding what is meant by 'completion', the details in the case of MORAL REASON will be quite different. First, the sort of investigation would presumably involve (non-inferential) reflection⁸¹ rather than empirical investigation. Second, the relation between the content of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON and reflection on the Rossian Principles mightn't be best described as 'completion'. A better description might be 'sharpening' of the content, i.e., a coarser content in the implicit conception gets 'sharpened' on the basis of further reflection. On this view, reflection that is guided by the implicit conception for MORAL REASON can lead to 'understanding-based' non-inferential knowledge of the Rossian Principles.

Suppose for the sake of argument that this move is plausible. RCI now runs into what I call the 'Scope Problem'.⁸² For if we allow that propositions can be self-evident in this attenuated

⁸⁰ See Thurow, "Implicit Conception," 74, for this suggestion.

⁸¹ See Audi, *Good In the Right*, 45-8, on *conclusions of reflection*.

⁸² It's worth relating the argument which follows to that in Chudnoff, *Intuition*, Ch. 4. Chudnoff presents two mathematical cases where he thinks Conceptualism fails to account for a priori knowledge. One way of

sense, then it becomes unclear why the following propositions aren't similarly non-inferentially knowable (suppose for the sake of example that they are true – the reader is invited to substitute or supplement with other propositions about pro tanto moral reasons):

- i. All acts of euthanasia performed towards, and at the uncoerced request of, an adult in order to end terrible and debilitating suffering, are pro tanto right.
- ii. All acts of abortion that prevent the birth of an otherwise healthy infant human being are pro tanto morally wrong.

Indeed, it's difficult to see why RCIs aren't committed to radically widening the scope of self-evidence.⁸³ This is because it's unclear what epistemologically-relevant property the Rossian Principles are supposed to possess that i-ii lack. I now briefly consider a series of (now familiar) candidate features, arguing that they fail to distinguish the Rossian Principles from i-ii.

First, and most obviously, we can't appeal to the fact that the Rossian Principles are encoded in the implicit conception for MORAL REASON to distinguish them (since we're assuming this is false).

Second, it is doubtful that we can appeal to the notion of 'relevance' of content (sketched above). This is because information contained in the implicit conception of MORAL REASON

responding that he considers is to bolster what's involved in 'understanding'. However, he thinks this makes Conceptualism mysterious. My argument differs in at least two ways: first, it doesn't involve claiming that Conceptualism fails to account for putative cases of a priori knowledge. Instead, I argue that RCI may involve a commitment to radically widening the scope of self-evidence. Second, although my argument involves considering an attenuated account of understanding-based knowledge, the attenuation is substantially different from Chudnoff's.

⁸³ This point is even more easily made if 'adequate understanding' involves non-conceptually guided thought (see discussion of Hedged view above). Note that I'm open to the possibility that the Scope Problem may encompass propositions of what Ross called 'final duty' where there are competing moral considerations.

does seem relevant to i-ii., e.g., information about beneficence and respect for persons are related to proposition i, while information about respect for persons or non-injury may be relevant to ii.⁸⁴ Third, a similar point can be made, regarding the suggestion that i-ii don't constitute sharpenings of the implicit conception of MORAL REASON. Even if it could be shown that reflection on the Rossian Principles can be thought of as sharpening of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON, it's unobvious why exactly we should deny that reflection on i-ii aren't also sharpenings. Admittedly, more would need to be said, but I think that the burden of proof lies with RCIs. In any case, even if there is a disanalogy, it's far from obvious that this has the relevant *epistemic* consequence, i.e., it doesn't clearly establish that i-ii aren't self-evident in an attenuated sense.

Fourth, appeals to Basicity and Clarity won't help either. As was shown in §3, even if i-ii are not explanatorily basic, or are somewhat imprecise, this doesn't preclude self-evidence (attenuated or not). Fifth, as should hopefully be clear from previous sections, an appeal to absence of disagreement or to the presence of belief vis-à-vis the Principles won't help. It is doubtful that they constitute conditions on self-evidence, and would in any case fail to distinguish the Rossian Principles from i-ii. Finally, as was mentioned previously, given the difficulty of establishing claims about dispositions-to-believe, e.g., telling apart cases of the absence of a disposition from cases of masking, RCIs will be hard-pressed to show that there *is* a disposition-to-believe the Rossian Principles that is lacking in the case of i-ii.

Thus, if RCIs claim that the Rossian Principles could be self-evident in an attenuated sense, they will find it difficult to avoid radically expanding the scope of propositions that are non-inferentially knowable on the basis of understanding. Actually, it's tempting to conclude that

⁸⁴ Making these connections might be thought of as involving what Audi calls internal inferences.

RCIs face the Scope Problem even if the Rossian Principles *are* self-evident, i.e., encoded in the implicit conception for MORAL REASON. Indeed, given that standard RCI attributes *more* content to the implicit conception for MORAL REASON than, e.g., the Paradigm view, the Scope Problem is in some respects more pressing. The only unambiguous difference between the Rossian Principles and propositions like i and ii is that the former (but not the latter) are encoded in the implicit conception. But it's not entirely obvious that this makes an epistemic difference vis-à-vis non-inferential understanding-based knowledge. If the content of the implicit conception for MORAL REASON encodes the Rossian Principles, and if we think the Principles can be known non-inferentially, then it is hard to see why we should deny that reflective conceptually-guided consideration of particular cases relevant to propositions i and ii could lead to non-inferential knowledge of those propositions too.

So whether the RCIs are self-evident in a 'standard' or 'attenuated' sense, they may struggle to avoid radically expanding the scope of self-evidence.⁸⁵ Is this a problem for RCIs? On the one hand, extending self-evidence (even in an attenuated sense) to propositions like i and ii might seem an absurd consequence. The alternative is that RCIs accept this conclusion. Indeed, it's a view with some historical pedigree. For example, some have interpreted Thomas Reid as thinking that all true ethical propositions can be non-inferentially known.⁸⁶ Perhaps this is simply what results once we attribute significant content to the implicit conception for moral concepts like MORAL REASON. In any case, RCIs either need to deny that their view entails radically expanding the scope of self-evidence or else face up to the conclusion and explain in detail why it isn't implausible.

⁸⁵ The expansion will be even greater if we adopt an account of self-evidence that drops the truth requirement. See, e.g., Tropman, "Renewing Intuitionism", 440- 463

⁸⁶ See Keith Lehrer, *Thomas Reid*, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 238. Audi, "Intuition and Rational Disagreement", 486, says something similar (not about Reid) but is referring to *memory* and *testimony* as sources of non-inferential justification. The point about Reid involves setting aside these 'derivative' sources of justification.

5. Conclusion

I've been assessing Rossian Intuitionism. After providing reasons for favouring Rossian Conceptual Intuitionism and defending it against objections, I argued that we lack sufficient reason for believing that the Rossian Principles are self-evident. Further, if RCIs maintain that the Principles are self-evident (perhaps in an attenuated sense), they may be committed to radically expanding the scope of self-evidence. This might make it tempting to explore the prospects for an alternative, like Perceptualism. But, as shown, Perceptualism has heavy costs. Thus Rossian Intuitionists have much work to do to make their theory acceptable.

As a brief coda, it's worth noting that my argument doesn't imply any comparative thesis about the epistemic status of other leading ethical theories, e.g., that Kantian theory is in a better or worse position. However, it should also be borne in mind that everything I've said is consistent with there being no self-evident propositions (ethical or otherwise) and with scepticism about all leading ethical theories.